Shieva Kleinschmidt
University of Southern California

Current Projects

Overview

Book Projects In Progress:
- *Parts Across Space and Time*
  (under contract with OUP, anticipated submission to publisher: July 2025)
- *Decompositional Multitude*
- *Atheistic Prayer*
  (supported by a grant for 2025-2027)
- *Abuse: A Philosophical Perspective*

Individual Papers In Progress:
- "Decompositional Plenitude"
- "Tensed Mereology Without Non-Existent Parts" (with Paul Hovda and Michael Nelson)
- "Against 'You Made Me Do It': Causation and Abuse"
- "Hylomorphic Change" (with Maegan Fairchild)

Parts Across Space and Time

Status:
  Nearly fully drafted, under contract with OUP

Table of Contents (noting contributing papers):
  Introduction
1. Theories of Parthood
2. Logics of Location
3. Extended Regions and Logics of Location
4. Problems for Multilocation from Mereology
5. Additional Problems for Multilocation
6. Problems for Spanners
7. Applications to Persistence

Overview
  I argue that anything extended in space or time has smaller, proper parts. Metaphysicians have, especially recently, been enamored with exotic entities like spanning extended simples, multilocators, and extended simple regions. I argue that each of these is impossible, in space as well as in time. This has immediate implications for our theories of decomposition, persistence, and metametaphysics.
  This book will bring together a number of my papers, which have collectively been pushing to a common conclusion. My argument for liberal decomposition involves three steps: (i) Arguing that extended, simple regions are impossible, (ii) Arguing that entities cannot multilocate across distinct regions, and (iii) Arguing that entities cannot span across distinct regions. Together, these entail that any entity extended in any dimension has proper parts contained within that extended (and therefore composite) region.

The Central Argument
1. Extended, simple regions are impossible; in fact, necessarily, any extended entity extends by being present in more than one disjoint region. [I also discuss arguments arguing against gunk's possibility.]
2. Necessarily, if an entity is present in more than one disjoint region, then either (a) it is present in some region without having a part contained in that region (i.e., it "spans" that region), (b) it has the same part contained in multiple disjoint regions (which requires multilocation, broadly construed), or (c) it has distinct parts contained in multiple disjoint regions.
3. Multilocation (both broadly and narrowly construed) is impossible.
4. Spanning regions is impossible.
5. So, any extended entity extends by having distinct parts contained in multiple disjoint regions.

Against Extended, Simple Regions
The argument against extended, simple regions is roughly:
1. If extended, simple regions are possible, then it is possible for an object to be contained in a region larger than it.
2. If it is possible for an object to be contained in a region larger than it, then we cannot endorse a parsimonious logic of location.
3. A parsimonious logic of location is true.
4. So, extended, simple regions are impossible.

Against Multilocators
The central argument against multilocated objects is roughly:
1. If multilocation of objects is possible, then mediated multilocation (where x is within y which is with x) is possible.
2. If mediated multilocation is possible, then Minimal Mereology is false.
3. Minimal Mereology, or a relativized form of it, is true.
4. Relativized Minimal Mereology is false.
5. So, multilocation of objects is not possible.

Against Spanners
The argument against spanning, extended simples is roughly:
7. If spanning, extended simples are possible, then it is possible for spanning, extended simples to partially spatially overlap in two ways: with overcrowding and without overcrowding.
8. We cannot distinguish between the possibility of overcrowded, partially spatially overlapping spanning, extended simples and the possibility of uncrowded, partially spatially overlapping spanning, extended simples, without adding a new category to our ontology or adding problematic properties or relations to our theory.
9. We should not add a new category to our ontology or problematic properties or relations to our theory.
10. If (2) and (3), then it is not possible for spanning, extended simples to partially spatially overlap in two distinct ways: with overcrowding and without overcrowding.
11. So, spanning, extended simples are not possible.

Implications
• If perduring is extending through time with smaller, proper parts contained in each extended temporal interval, perdurance follows directly from the book's thesis about extension.
• Deflationist positions often posit liberally decomposable "matter" spread through spacetime, and say that debates about composition facts and identity facts are due to different, equally

good ways of describing that matter. My project, though not deflationist, provides arguments for that initial assumption about how matter is spread through spacetime.

Why It Matters
   A. It is relevant to which options we have in solving metaphysical puzzles.
   B. It is relevant to questions of how we persist, and about whether these debates are substantive.
   C. There are three options for which sorts of objects and regions are possible: they can be pointy, they can be gunky, and they can be extended and simple. Frequently, we attempt to present our metaphysical and physical theories as being, at least in principle or with translation, compatible with all three of these. I am attempting to show that (at least, with assumptions) one of these three alternatives is incompatible with our logics of parthood and location.

Decompositional Multitude

Status:
   Very early stages; 80 pages drafted

Rough Table of Contents:
   1. Overview and Stage Setting
   2. Fusion First ("Fusion First")
   3. Introduction to Decompositional Multitude
      - The Mereological Formulation
      - Starter Cases
      - Connections to Compositional Plenitude
      - General Motivation
   4. The Accompanying Mereology
      - Addressing the Work the 2nd Condition Did for Us
      - Issues with Transitivity and Fusion-Containment (and broader issues with multilocation)
      - Issues with Weak Supplementation
      - Issues with the Remainder Principle and Uniqueness
   5. Motivation from Material Objects
      - The Problem of the Many
      - The Problem of Change, across Time and Space
      - The Problem of Too Many Thinkers
      - Gunk and Extended Simples
      - Comparing Decompositional Multitude to other Multilocation Options and Alternatives
   6. Motivation from Russell's Paradoxes
      - Set Theory
      - Russell's Paradox of Propositions
      - Hylomorphic Objects
      - Applications to Worlds, Etc.
   7. Social Categories and Social Objects
   8. A Material Basis for Analysis
   9. Grounding and Innocence

Overview
   I argue that it is possible for an object to have multiple, disjoint decompositions. This revolutionary view solves a number of puzzles, relating to the metaphysics of material objects, the metaphysics of properties, debates about analyticity, paradoxes in set theory and for propositions and worlds, and the metaphysics of social objects and categories. It also settles questions about which kind of mereology we ought to endorse.

Why It Matters
   A. The assumption that if *x* fuses the *y*s, *x* has no part disjoint from the *y*s, is widespread but not supported by argument.
   B. Decompositional Multitude comes cost-free if we do so within a fusion-first mereology.
   C. Decompositional Multitude gives us the ability to solve a wide range of philosophical puzzles. [This is largely in progress: I'm only beginning to think of the implications across philosophy.]
   D. Positing multiple decompositions allows us to capture a sense in which, when people disagree about decomposition, they can both be right. Decompositional Multitude allows us to do this without needing to claim that there is any sense in which the debates are not substantive.
   E. Decompositional Multitude opens up a range of new possibilities for the sort of metaphysical picture we may have of the world. For instance, one needn't but may go "all in" with Decompositional Multitude, positing reality as fundamentally multitudinous.

The Central Argument
   1. If we accept a Fusion First mereology, accepting Decompositional Plenitude is cost-free.
   2. A Fusion-First mereology is independently motivated.
   3. If we endorse Decompositional Multitude, we should accept a Fusion-First mereology.
   4. Decompositional Multitude is independently motivated.
   5. So, we should accept Decompositional Multitude and a Fusion-First mereology.

Atheistic Prayer

Status:
   Planning stages only, intended primarily for a general audience

Rough Table of Contents:
   1. Introduction
      - Overview of my aims, personal experience
      - Distinction between belief-atheism/action-atheism
      - Distinction between reluctant atheists and adamant atheists, and friendly atheism
   2. What does it mean to pray to God?
      - Different sorts of prayer
      - Analyzing prayer to God
      - The puzzles
      - The role of prayer
   3. Sentiments Against Atheistic Prayer
      - Foxhole prayers
      - Insincere or foolish prayers
      - Inappropriate requests to pray
   4. Is atheistic prayer even possible?
      - The argument from the analysis
      - The model of atheistic prayer – lots of examples
   5. Can atheistic prayer be rational?
      - The might argument, maybe others
   6. The content of atheistic prayers
      - What are we really saying when we pray?
      - Similarity to conditional assertions
   7. The benefits of atheistic prayer

- Motivation for atheistic prayer – to be closer to God, open to God, just in case, etc.
- Benefits – just as with theists, at least to some extent
8. The implications of atheistic prayer
   - Should atheists be allowed in church?
   - To what extent can they be like theists?
   - The foolishness problem.
9. Other sorts of communication/outreach without belief
10. Other sorts of atheistic religious experiences

Overview

I argue that atheistic prayer is not only possible, it can be rational. This is a significant expansion of my 2017 "Atheistic Prayer", intended for a general audience. I examine puzzles about what prayer consists of, and arguments against the possibility and rationality of atheistic prayer. discuss models of rational atheistic prayer and how we may respond to the arguments against it. I argue that such prayer can produce benefits for atheists that are strikingly similar to those it can produce for theists. Finally, I examine similar forms of atheistic religious experience, and the reasons for and extent to which theists and religious groups may be welcoming of this or not.

Why It Matters

A. The divide between theists and atheists is often taken to be a large one, and this has a polarizing effect. In reality, I think there's less a gap and more a spectrum; people with a wide range of beliefs can engage in and benefit from religious practice. And this applies to prayer.
B. This project should be of interest to theists who have a crisis of faith, to seeking agnostics, and even to adamant atheists who attend religious services with family members, etc.
C. This book seeks to counteract accusations of irrationality or inconsistency facing occupants of the middle of the spectrum, when otherwise they may feel distress or alienation when pursuing religious experience or may simply avoid it altogether.
D. Though for a general audience, the book will also contribute to contemporary Philosophy of Religion, on issues of what prayer consists in, the sorts of benefits it can have, other sorts of communication without belief, and norms of religious practice.

Funding Note

In 2019 I made it to the 2nd round for a Templeton Foundation Small Project Grant to support the writing of this book, but because of the pandemic I chose to put my submission on hold. In 2024 I became involved in the *Beliefless Spirituality* project led by Ryan Byerly, funded by the John Templeton Foundation, and running from 2025-2027. I'll be writing a paper for that grant, and will hope to use that as a foundation for returning to the book project.

Abuse: A Philosophical Perspective

Status:

Planning stages only, currently drafting some chapters, intended primarily for a general audience.

Rough Table of Contents:
1. Introduction
   - Overview of my aims, personal experience
   - Theory as Therapy: What Philosophy has to offer
2. What is Abuse?
   - Perspectives from Social Work, Psychology, and Law
   - Accounts in terms of abusers: shifting the focus

- Accounts in terms of harms
- Accounts in terms of dispositions
- Accounts in terms of relationships
- My own account
3. Middle Abuse
   - Common descriptions of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, and neglect
   - Cases of "middle abuse"
   - Implications of broadening our categories: intervention vs. healing
4. Against "You made me do it": Causation and Abuse
   - The blame argument
   - The causal responsibility argument
   - Accounts of background conditions
   - Implications of some accounts for claims about abuse
   - Implications of claims about abuse for some accounts
5. Abuse Without Abusers
   - A case study: abuse at the border
   - Broader implications: systemic racism, sexism, transphobia, etc, as literal abuse
6. Abuse and Personal Identity
   - Accounts of personhood and of the self
   - Spencer's account of poverty, divorce, and the self
   - Self-definition and abuse: being a victim, a survivor, etc.
7. Resisting Rip Current Resources
   - A case study: mal-treatment in the workplace
   - Analogies with abuse
   - Rip Current Resources
   - Similar resources in cases of abuse
   - How we can do better

Overview

Our common conceptions of abuse carry some similar features: they developed out of an attempt to intervene and protect, refined in social work and in law. They focus on harms that are identifiable and to some extent measurable by outside observers. Psychology's take on abuse is broader, focusing on harms done and ways to prevent abuse and help with healing from abuse. But even here, significant focus is put on abusers and their motivations. And socially we strongly condemn abusers, and take having committed abuse to have significant implications for the intention and character of abusers.

In this book I offer a philosophical perspective to compliment the perspectives from Law, Social Work, and Psychology. This philosophical perspective on abuse is intended to capture what's distinctive about the particular kind of harm of abuse. It is also intended to be helpful for survivors of abuse (rather than something that primarily can be used for identifying and intervening with abuse from an outside perspective, where more evidence may need to be present). My hope is that by working out theory about to several topics related to abuse, it will put survivors in a better position to resist negative thoughts and fears, as well as problematic assumptions and arguments from abusers and from outsiders.