

# PREDICATES, PARTS, AND IMPERMANENCE: A CONTEMPORARY VERSION OF SOME CENTRAL BUDDHIST TENETS.

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penultimate, final version to appear in *Religious  
Studies*

## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue that recent work in analytic philosophy on the semantics of names and the metaphysics of persistence supports two theses in Buddhist philosophy, namely the impermanence of objects and a corollary about how referential language works. According to this latter package of views, the various parts of what we call one object (say, King Milinda) possess no unity in and of themselves. Unity comes rather from language, in that we have terms (say, 'King Milinda') which stand for all the parts taken together. Objects are mind- (or rather language-) generated fictions. I think this package can be cashed out in terms of two central contemporary views. The first is that there are temporal parts: just as an object is spatially extended by having spatial parts at different spatial locations, so it is temporally extended by having temporal parts at different temporal locations. The second is that names are predicates: rather than standing for any one thing, a name stands for a range of things. The natural language term 'Milinda' is not akin to a logical constant, but akin to a predicate.

Putting this together, I'll argue that names are predicates with temporal parts in their extension, which parts have no unity apart from falling under the same predicate. 'Milinda' is a predicate which has in its extension all Milinda's parts. The result is an interesting and original synthesis of plausible positions in semantics and metaphysics, which makes good sense of a central Buddhist doctrine.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Familiarly, advances in analytic philosophy have been used in the philosophy of religion: we may think—among much else—of the new versions of the ontological argument which make use of developments in modal logic (see, for example, [Oppy \(2016\)](#), sections 6 and 7 and references therein) or discussions of testimony and miracles appealing to Bayesianism ([Ahmed \(2015\)](#)). The same holds, perhaps slightly less familiarly, for Buddhist philosophy. Thus, and perhaps most famously, people have argued that Buddhist logic anticipates and indeed can advance contemporary discussions of dialetheism ([Priest \(2010\)](#), [Garfield and Priest \(2003\)](#)). One could also point to, for example, the relation between Parfit-inspired views of personal identity and the Buddhist idea of no self ([Siderits \(1997\)](#), *inter alia*), or again the metaphysical, or perhaps metametaphysical, distinction between absolute and conventional reality as found, for example, in the commentary in [Garfield \(1995\)](#).

It's within this tradition that this paper lies. I will attempt to show the relevance for Buddhist thought of the combination of two important contemporary views in metaphysics and semantics, namely *perdurantism*, the view that objects are made up of temporal parts, and *predicativism*, the view that names are predicates. I will explain these views and present some reasons for thinking that they are true. I will not attempt, here, to argue for either view: that would be much too ambitious. Rather, what I want to do is show that their synthesis is both independently interesting, and that it is recognisably Buddhist.

Before getting to this, however, a note about the scope of the present paper. The questions I am considering have been the subject of much attention in the many and vast schools of Buddhist philosophy. For example, as I'll note briefly, the view I present appears to have some interesting similarities to the position of Dharmakīrti. Properly to do justice to even a fraction of even the primary literature here would require a much longer paper and a different author. Accordingly, I propose to follow the lead of Mark Siderits in concentrating on a text which 'is useful...for it is recognised as authoritative by a number of Abhidharma schools...its views represent a consensus position among a wide variety of commentarial traditions on the teaching of the Buddha' ([Siderits \(2007\)](#), 50), namely *The Questions Of King Milinda*. I leave considering parallels to other Buddhist philosophical traditions for other work or other scholars.

That said, in this introduction I want to present the Buddhist views in question which represent the 'consensus position'. I am concerned with two, which I'll call colourlessly the metaphysical view and the semantic view:

**Metaphysical View.** Objects do not persist through time—they are impermanent.

**Semantic View.** Words which seem to stand for persisting objects (such as names) nevertheless have a semantic function.

That there's at least a *prima facie* tension between these views should be clear: if the point of a name is to stand for a persisting object, and there are no persisting objects, then it seems that names fail in their semantic function. The point is well put by Garfield:

[...]we find ostensibly referring terms, terms, which, if they fail to refer, would render a sentence false, or truth-valueless. The

assertion of any sentence then implicates the existence of its subject, and its endurance over time. But composite enduring things, on a Buddhist account, do not really exist. (Garfield (2015),249)

We can find the tension between the two views, and a Buddhist resolution of it, in the Questions of King Milinda. King Milinda and Nagesena meet for a discussion. When the former asks the latter's name, Nagasena replies (all of the below from the start of chapter one, in the translation of Pesala):

"I am known as Nagasena but that is only a designation in common use, for no permanent individual can be found"

Milinda is understandably confused. But Nagesena uses an analogy to help him:

"You, sir, have been reared in great luxury as becomes your noble birth. How did you come here, by foot or in a chariot?"

"In a chariot, venerable sir." [said Milinda]

"Then, explain sir, what that is. Is it the axle? Or the wheels, or the chassis, or reins, or yoke that is the chariot? Is it all of these combined, or is it something apart from them?"

"It is none of these things, venerable sir."

"Then, sir, this chariot is an empty sound. You spoke falsely when you said that you came here in a chariot. You are a great king of India. Who are you afraid of that you don't speak the truth?... King Milinda has said that he came here in a chariot but when asked what it is, he is unable to show it. Is it possible to approve of that?"

But Milinda is not confused here, and offers the following:

"Venerable sir, I have spoken the truth. It is because it has all these parts that it comes under the term 'chariot'."

And Nagasena agrees, and tells him the same thing holds here:

"Very good, sir, your majesty has rightly grasped the meaning. Even so it is because of the thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body and the five aggregates of being that I come under the term 'Nāgasena'. As it was said by Sister Vajāra in the presence of the Blessed One, 'Just as it is by the existence of the various parts that the word "Chariot" is used, just so is it that when the aggregates of being are there we talk of a being'."

My claim is that Nagasena's resolution of the inconsistency between **Meta-physics** and **Semantics** can be understood as the conjunction of two plausible contemporary views in analytic philosophy. I make sense of the idea of impermanence by holding that all there is to an object is a congeries of un-unified parts. This seems to be what the above passage says. The twist I put on this is to hold that the parts in question are *temporal* parts, the existence of which, as we'll see, is a central component of perdurance theory.

What we call 'Milinda' isn't any one persisting entity, but a collection of these temporal parts: Milinda now, Milinda one second from now, two seconds from now, and so on. The semantic problem then however becomes acute: after all, isn't it the function of a name to stand for *one* thing?

But consider the last quoted passage above: when the aggregates of being are there, we talk of a being. A reasonable gloss of this, I think, is that rather than talking of a unified thing, when we talk about Nagasena, we talk about his ununified parts. But how can this be—is it not the case that a name stands for some one particular object? Here’s where the second view comes to help us. According to *predicativism* names are predicates: general terms with extensions rather than referents. I will use this, but add a twist: on my view, the extension of the predicate ‘Milinda’ is the set of Milinda’s temporal parts. We thus manage to keep impermanence—all there is are fleeting ununified temporal parts, but also semantic success, because names stand for all these parts taken together. Surprisingly, these central and venerable Buddhist views can be analysed in terms of plausible contemporary positions in semantics and metaphysics.

That’s the argument. Here’s the plan for the remainder of the paper. In the next section, I’ll introduce the metaphysical background, and show that Buddhism fits well with a view which posits temporal parts. Then I’ll introduce the semantics, and show that a combination of the postulation of temporal parts with predicativism makes sense of how language works even in an impermanent world. After that, I add a bit of detail, partly by comparing my view to the extant theories, and then in the conclusion I review what we’ve seen. The big picture conclusion is that some Buddhist central doctrines fit with contemporary metaphysics and semantics in a surprising and interesting fashion.

## 2 METAPHYSICS

Let me start with the idea that there are temporal parts. Pretheoretically, objects seem to persist through time: I existed yesterday, and I exist now. Now we noted that Buddhism tends to disagree with this (I’m not so much concerned, here, as to *why* this is so, but see e.g. [Siderits \(2015\)](#) and references therein), but even so, the idea surely has something going for it, and we should seek an explanation for it (or perhaps for why we are attracted to the idea). What is going on when an object persists (or seems to persist) through time?

This is a question which has been the subject of a lot of recent and sophisticated work in analytic metaphysics. The discussion normally starts with the following classical formulation of the problem, and the space of solutions, from David Lewis:

Let us say that something *persists* iff, somehow or other, it exists at various times; this is the neutral word. Something *perdures* iff it persists by having different temporal parts, or stages, at different times, though no one part of it is wholly present at more than one time; whereas it *endures* iff it persists by being wholly present at more than one time. ([Lewis \(1986\)](#), 204)

It will be helpful, before considering the two views, to follow Lewis and introduce an analogy which lies at the heart of the debate: the analogy between being temporally extended and being spatially extended.

It’s uncontroversial that things are extended in space. My feet are there, my legs there, my head here. Consider the portion of space surrounding my feet. I occupy it, although I don’t exactly occupy it, because I occupy other portions of space as well. What is it for me to occupy the space around

my feet? Here's a plausible answer: I occupy it because parts of me *exactly* occupy it. My occupying it is derivative of having parts, my feet, that exactly occupy it. I also occupy the space surrounding my head, my torso, and so on, in the same way.

Not all occupation, arguably, is like that. Consider universals: blueness, for example. We might want to say that there's a decent sense in which blueness occupies a location: it occupies the location where the shirt I'm currently wearing is at, perhaps. It also occupies the location on my desk where my bottle is. But it doesn't do so, we might think, by having *parts* at these places: rather, it exists *entirely* at each location. It is, we might say, multiply located in space. Again, it's not so much the truth of these views that is important, as the fact that they are metaphysically coherent ways of describing the world. And that they surely are.

Now return to the question of persistence through time. I exist now, I existed yesterday, and I existed at each time in between. That is, there's a series of times  $t_1, t_2, \dots, t_n$  such that I exist at them. What's going on? Well, here's a way to describe what's going on: just as I occupy different spatial locations, so I occupy different temporal locations. This requires treating different times as ontologically on a par with different spaces, which is of course a vexed and important metaphysical question. It is to be taken as a premise in all that follows (some discussion is [Markosian \(1994\)](#), [Zimmerman \(1996\)](#)).

Once we've redescribed our question like that, we can recognise two different accounts of persistence: we can say that an object occupies a series of times like I occupy space: by having different parts existing at the different times of the series. But these won't be spatial parts, these will be *temporal* parts. Alternatively, we can say that an object occupies a series of times in the same way a universal occupies space, by being multiply located at each of the times in the series.

These are the two main metaphysical positions, called perdurantism and endurantism respectively. For the perdurantist, an object exists through a series of times by having temporal parts which exist at that time; for the endurantist, it does by so completely existing at those times.<sup>1</sup>

How are we to decide between these views? My aim here is certainly not to try to do so. Rather, my aim is to show how one of them, when combined with a view in semantics, can make good sense of the Buddhist position sketched above. However, it will be useful to consider, if briefly, the sort of considerations typically brought forth in favour of these views, if only to help the reader get a greater sense of them, and what's at stake between them.

So let's consider perhaps the most famous dispute between the endurantist and the perdurantist, that concerning overlapping objects ([Gibbard \(1975\)](#)). Lump1 is a lump of clay, which existed from  $t_0$  to  $t_{10}$ . At  $t_3$ , it was formed into a statue, Goliath. At  $t_6$ , the statue was flattened, and the clay persisted lumpily until it went out of existence at  $t_{10}$ . Are Goliath and Lump1 the same? It seems not. After all, we don't tend to think of two objects as the same if they have different properties. But Lump1 and Goliath have differ-

<sup>1</sup> There is an important variant or neighbour of the perdurantist view called stage theory ([Sider \(2001\)](#), [Hawley \(2001\)](#)). According to this view, objects, strictly speaking, don't exist through time *at all*. Rather, objects are the instantaneous temporal parts (or better: stages). These stages stand in relations to each other, and for an object to persist through time is for there to be a series of these stages suitably related occupying each of the times in question. Since my purposes here aren't an exhaustive survey of the field, and it's not relevant for my positive view, I omit discussion.

ent properties: Goliath is Rubenesque (Fine (2003)) and couldn't survive squashing, for example, while Lump1 is not and could. So are there then two objects before us at  $t_4$ ?

Here the endurantist and the perdurantist differ. The endurantist will say yes, and that two objects can be located at exactly the same place in space. Although there's only one bit of space before us, the two objects nevertheless both manage to occupy it. The perdurantist, however, will say there's only one object before us: a temporal part shared by both Goliath and Lump1.

To explain this, the spatial analogy is again helpful. We are familiar with the idea that two things can spatially overlap. Thus, to use the stock example, two roads can merge into one for a while, before again diverging. At the time they've merged, there's two roads, but only one stretch of concrete. For the perdurantist, the same thing happens here: Lump and Goliath temporally overlap—they share a temporal part— from  $t_3$ - $t_6$ , and this is how there can be two things before us even if there's only one bit of matter.

Who is right here? The perdurantist argues that the endurantist's claim that there's two objects before us at  $t_4$  departs from common sense. She can say: no, what we have before us is one temporal part shared by two perduring entities. Because the perdurantist works, in essence, with two different notions of object—the parts, and the wholes composed of those parts—she can account for both the sense that Lump1 and Goliath are different, but also the sense that there's just one object before us.

It might seem that the perdurantist comes out on top of this debate. But the endurantist has moves to make. He can note that the response just offered is of no use in cases of *permanent* coincidence. Imagine Lump1 and Goliath came into, and went out of, existence at exactly the same time. Then they share all their temporal parts. So, for the perdurantist, that means that they are one and the same. (Again, consider the roads: we can't make a lot of the sense of two roads beginning in the same place, following the same path, and ending in the same place. Two roads sharing all their spatial parts aren't, in fact, two roads after all.) But that seems wrong: after all, as before, Goliath is Rubenesque but Lump1 isn't.

Here is just one other central bone of contention, the problem of temporary intrinsics. Consider the notion of a *property*, and in particular an intrinsic property. An intrinsic property, very roughly, is something possession of which turns on features only of the possessor, and not any other object. A stick's being bent, for example, is intrinsic to it, whereas its being owned by me is not intrinsic to it.

Now consider a stick that was bent in the morning, and straight in the afternoon. This might seem like a problem for the endurantist theory. After all, for the endurantist, it exists completely both in the morning and the afternoon. So in the morning, it possesses the property of being bent. And in the afternoon, it possesses the property of being straight. So it seems like it possesses the property of being bent and of not being bent, which is impossible (at least on standard assumptions).

The reader is liable to be non-plussed: to think that something crucial has been left out here, namely time. Property possession should be indexed to time: what's going on is that the stick is straight in the morning, and bent in the afternoon, and these are not incompatible properties.

Lewis, famously, thinks this reply is no good. He thinks it amounts to saying that being bent is a relation: it relates an object to a time provided the object is bent at that time. And that, he thinks is 'simply incredible...If

we know what shape is, we know that it is a property, not a relation' (Lewis (1986), p204).

By contrast, he thinks the perdurantist is well-placed to account for our stick: he says that bentness is indeed a property, but one possessed by temporal parts, and not the whole temporally extended entity. The stick is straight in the morning by virtue of having a part existing in the morning which possesses the property of straightness, and bent in the afternoon by having a part which possesses the property of bentness.

There are moves and countermoves available here: it's a large and lively debate, of which we have only here scratched the surface.<sup>2</sup> The relevant point for our purposes is that I think that the Buddhist views surveyed above can help us here. In particular, we saw the claim made that none of an object's parts are that object, and neither is the sum of its parts. Treating temporal parts on a par, we could then say that none of its temporal parts are the object, and nor again is the sum of them. That is, the Buddhist would deny the perdurantist position, which says that an object is the mereological sum of its parts. But nor would the Buddhist be particularly attracted to the endurantist position, which recognises one and the same object existing at more than one time, contra the claim of impermanence. So then what should we say? Well, the passage quoted from *The Questions Of King Milinda* recognises the existence of the parts, and that there's some sense to be made of the idea that all the parts taken together just are the object, at least in the weak sense that we can correctly speak of the object, and in so doing we speak of the congeries of parts. In the next section, I want to show how we can make sense of this idea in terms of contemporary semantic theory.

### 3 SEMANTICS

Names seem to stand for objects: 'Milinda' seems to stand for Milinda, 'Paris' for Paris, and so on. As with persistence, the Buddhist thinks that this is in some sense to be qualified. But again, it's intuitive and at least the fact that it *seems* like names behave thus is something that should be explained, even if it's not an ultimate truth about the world.

For a long time, semanticists thought they had an explanation. Saul Kripke's pioneering work (Kripke (1980)) suggested that names are *Millian* expressions. The important idea here is that a name stands for a particular object in the world, and doing so exhausts its semantic function. A relatively neat way to think of this, for those familiar, is that names are like constants in first order logic, as opposed, say, to variables or predicates or quantifiers.<sup>3</sup>

Recent years, however, have seen that explanation called into question. There is a range of both English and cross-linguistic data which suggests that names might be more like predicates than constants. To be more lin-

<sup>2</sup> Some references: Lewis has an argument for perdurance in Lewis (1983), discussed in Wasserman et al. (2004). Sider has an argument from vagueness for the same conclusion in Sider (2001), and discussion in Koslicki (2003). Sider's book is also a nice compendium of arguments from the literature. Responses on behalf of the endurantist include, for example, Haslanger (1989), Lowe (1988), Wasserman (2003), Wasserman (2016). Hawley (2015) is a very helpful overview of the field.

<sup>3</sup> The view which Kripke famously attacked—Frege Russell descriptivism—is roughly speaking well-glossed as the view that they are quantifiers, in particular existential quantifiers with a uniqueness clause. Something like this view, given a categorematic, compositional treatment, can be found in Montague's thought that a name denotes the set of properties possessed by its bearer—a higher order property. It's thus—roughly—arguable that the semantics of names has been predicativist from its outset! I thank a reviewer for pointing this out.

guistically precise, there's data to suggest they might be like common count nouns. Here are some sentences with count nouns as subject:

- (1) No parrots are dull
- (2) Some book is interesting
- (3) All politicians are corrupt

The reason to think that names are count nouns is simply that they sometimes behave as such:

- (4) No Alberts are young
- (5) An Alfred joined the club today
- (6) All Delias are good at philosophy

In light of this, predicativists (such as [Burge \(1973\)](#), [Elbourne \(2005\)](#), [Matshansky \(2008\)](#), [Fara \(2015\)](#)), have argued that we should take sentences like 4-6 seriously, and say that names are predicates. In particular, 'Alfred' is a predicate which has as its extension all the people named 'Alfred'.

Of course, it's notable that the similarity between names and count nouns has its limits: there are environments where names occur where predicates cannot, as, for example, and importantly:

- (7) Carrie swam
- (8) \* Politician joined the club

But even here there are things to say. We can note that in some languages other than English one gets names occurring as the nominal in a definite determiner phrase and occurring in argument position:

- (9) La Maria dorme  
THE MARIA SLEEPS  
MARIA SLEEPS

In light of this, to account for 7, the standard move is to posit a covert, unpronounced definite determiner, giving a syntactic logical form like so:

- (10) [<sub>s</sub>[<sub>dp</sub>[<sub>d</sub>∅<sub>THE</sub>] [<sub>np</sub>Carrie]] [<sub>vp</sub>swam]]

This move is not without its perils (for which, see, for example, [Schoubye \(2016\)](#)). But if we accept it, then we can account for both the syntax and the semantics of 7. It's simply a definite description with a covert definite syntactically, and an incomplete domain semantically.<sup>4</sup>

Again, it's not my goal to argue for predicativism. I hope that this brief discussion, however, has shown that it has something to say for itself: the English and cross-linguistic data, at least, are worth talking seriously.

Now let's turn to Buddhism. The Buddhist doubts, as we have seen, that there is some unified object over and above what we call the parts of an object: there is just Milinda's skhandas and the different types of matter composing his body. I suggested we could understand that, taking our lead from the debate about persistence, as saying that all there was to Milinda was his temporal parts. Now if names were constants, which stood for just

<sup>4</sup> This is a ubiquitous phenomenon, and any theory must have something to say about it, so it's not a weakness of the predicativist that they must appeal to it. Just as when I utter 'the table is full of books' I somehow manage to talk about just one table, so when I utter '∅<sub>THE</sub> Carrie swam' I talk about just one Carrie.

one thing, it would be unclear how what the relation between 'Milinda' and the world was. But if names are predicates, which stand for multiple things, then there is something to say: we can say that a predicate like 'Milinda' has as its extension all Milinda's temporal parts. Predicativism lets us make sense of our referential practices even if there is no object out there for our terms to refer to, as the Buddhist says. This is, I take it, a welcome result, especially given the empirical plausibility of predicativism.

Although I noted that it's not my aim here to consider how the central idea of impermanence has been treated in the many schools of Buddhist philosophy, it's worth pointing out one interesting parallel in the debate concerning universals and particulars found in Dharmakīrti (my source here is [Dunne \(2004\)](#) 91ff). Dharmakīrti is keenly aware of the tension between the impermanence of the world and the ability of language to function. In his terms, what exists must be momentary, but what is thought or spoken about must exist without changing. That is, what exists are particulars, while what is thought or spoken about are universals (indeed, for him, universals don't really exist, but we needn't get into that). This seems notably close to the predicativist thought which I'm appealing to that the contents of our referential devices are general and not particular.<sup>5</sup>

So that's my view. To repeat: names are predicates which have stages in their extension. In particular, a name like 'Milinda' stands for all of Milinda's stages. There is no object over and above these (no mereological fusion, as the perdurantist would say), just as the Buddhist claims. But nevertheless we can talk about Milinda using a name because names are general terms which stand for all the parts of an object.

#### 4 REFINEMENTS AND DISCUSSION

That's the basic view. Now let me put more flesh on the bones by sketching, albeit briefly, the semantics, and indicating some interesting and distinctive features of the view.

First, then, let's say a bit more about the semantics. Names are predicates which have stages in their extension. Let's consider what to say about the compositional semantics—how the truth value of the sentence is determined on the basis of its parts—of a simple sentence like this:

(11) Milinda laughed

Here is what we want: we want it to be true if there are *some* stages of Milinda such that together they laughed. For example, if Milinda laughed from 3.00pm to 3.01pm, all his stages from that period, taken together, would make true the sentence. But also, of course, if he laughed from 3.01pm to 3.02pm, then those stages taken together would also make the sentence true: provided there are some stages that are laughing stages, our sentence is true. So we want existentially quantificational truth conditions. But more than that: we want it to have *plurally* quantificational truth conditions: there are some stages which, taken together, laugh. But that's no problem: we can appeal to plural logic to help us (for plural logic see e.g. [Boolos \(1984\)](#), [Oliver and Smiley \(2013\)](#)). We can note that English, in addition to having singular quantification, also appears to have genuine plural quantification. Just as we have:

<sup>5</sup> I thank two reviewers for bringing Dharmakīrti's work in this connection to my attention.

(12) Some woman laughed

So we have:

(13) Some women surrounded the castle

Plural logic is well understood logically and on solid grounds philosophically (the above references show this). So we can use it here, and say that the quantifier is in fact a plural one. Following the literature in using 'xx' to stand for plural variables ranging over stages, we would have the following truth conditions:

- $\exists xx$ . Milinda(xx) and Laughed(xx).

Not only that, but we can note that this isn't even all that implausible as a matter of natural language semantics. There are a range of well understood and empirically sophisticated theories that make use of covert existential quantification, either as part of the syntactic logical form or as part of the interpretative procedure (for the former, I have in mind, a little roughly, Pietroski (2005), while for the latter Hans Kamp's DRT (Kamp and Reyle (1993))).

For example, Pietroski develops a conjunctivist semantic framework, according to which all expressions uniformly contribute predicates of, and free variables standing for, events to logical form, which variable is bound by an obligatory text-level existential quantifier. Without going too much into the details, such a view is familiarly helpful when it comes to making sense of certain inferences which seem good in virtue of form, such as the following:

(14) John buttered the toast slowly, so John buttered the toast

If we hold that the underlying logical form of our inference is:

(15)  $\exists e$ . Agent(John, e) and Action(buttered, e) and Patient(the toast, e) Manner(slowly, e) so  $\exists e$ . Agent(John, e) and Action(buttered, e) and Patient(the toast, e)

We can explain why the inference is good: it's just an instance of the valid in virtue of form argument going from (1)  $\exists x$ . F(x) and G(x) to  $\exists x$ . F(x).

I suggest that we follow Pietroski's conjunctivist lead, except we say that the variable is not a singular event variable, but a plural stage variable. In other work, I show how to develop such a theory in detail, extending it to cover natural language quantification and variable binding (Author (2016)). I omit those technicalities here.

Second, it's interesting to note that my view adds new spins both to predicativism and to perdurantist theory. On the standard predicativist view, names are general terms standing for each of the name's bearers: 'Milinda' stands for all things called 'Milinda', 'Paris' for all the things called 'Paris'. This is not so for me: for each bearer, there is a different predicate. Names are ambiguous in the way that, for example, 'bank' is ambiguous as between a river bank and a financial institution.<sup>6</sup> We could notate the disambiguations with subscripts, so there is 'Milinda<sub>1</sub>', which stands for one Milinda, 'Milinda<sub>2</sub>' which stands for a different Milinda, and so on. This view has advantages and disadvantages. For a disadvantage, it can't capture, out of the box, central predicative uses like:

<sup>6</sup> Such a view isn't unheard of in the semantics of names: it's a feature of the Millian view, for example.

(16) An Alfred joined the club today

The truth conditions of this are that *some* person named ‘Alfred’ joined the club, but I can’t get this. For me, each disambiguation stands for a different Alfred. It seems that my theory would predict (if anything) that, relative to some disambiguation ‘Alfred<sub>n</sub>’ of Alfred, 16 is true provided some stage of one of the Alfred<sub>n</sub> joined the club, which isn’t what we’re looking for.

This doesn’t worry me overmuch, however. I need to resort to some sort of ambiguity view: I’ll say that names have different uses. On one, ‘Milinda’ is ambiguous, and has different disambiguations for each Milinda. On the other, ‘Milinda’ stands for all the Milindas, which is to say that its extension contains the set containing all Milinda<sub>1</sub>’s parts, the set containing all Milinda<sub>2</sub>’s parts, and so on. It’s this latter use we appeal to for paradigm predicativist sentences like 16.

One might think that the fact that I am forced to resort to an ambiguity view puts me at a marked disadvantage. But I don’t think it actually does, because the standard predicatist seems to require an ambiguity view too. It’s been noted that the predicativist can’t account for all predicativist-like uses. In particular, consider something like:

(17) She’s a real Einstein

(18) He’s no Jack Kennedy

The predicativist can’t account for the truth of these sentences in terms of their theory. The second sentence here, for example, is saying something like the man in question doesn’t exemplify the qualities of one particular person called ‘Jack Kennedy’, namely JFK. But it would seem that the standard predicativist would predict that it’s true provided there’s no person called ‘Jack Kennedy’ such that the man in question is him. That’s the wrong prediction.

So even the standard predicativist can’t account for all predicative uses of names. Accordingly, I don’t think this feature of my view is a problem, and indeed it shows something that I think is well borne in mind: that predicativism should be considered primarily a syntactic view, that names belong to the same category as count nouns, and not a semantic view.

I think the view is also an interesting twist on standard perdurance theory. In order to see that, let me note briefly the typical perdurance theory of predication. According to it, an object possesses a property by virtue of having a (possibly, indeed normally, non-instantaneous) temporal part which possesses it. I was young by virtue of having a part—say the part of me extending from 1 to 13—-that possesses the property of youth. Note that these are existential truth conditions: that I was young is true provided *there is* a part of me that possesses the property of youth.

My view somewhat mimics this. The only difference is that instead of requiring that there be a part, I require that there be some parts, plural. What this means is that I don’t require that there be a lot of mereological fusions. Indeed, it seems that my view is an instance of a recognisably perdurantist theory that nevertheless need not appeal to the principle of unrestricted composition which says that for any objects, there’s an object which is their fusion. This should be of interest to those working in the debate, because it’s been noted that perdurantism often comes bundled up with certain other views which it is nevertheless distinct from, and one of those is unrestricted composition (Magidor (2015)). This view provides an independently attractive example of how one can be a perdurantist without accepting unrestricted composition.

## 5 CONCLUSION

I have shown that some central Buddhist doctrines in metaphysics and semantics can be translated into the idiom of contemporary analytic philosophy and that, having done so, an interesting new hybrid metaphysical-semantic theory emerges: we can make sense of the idea of impermanence by appealing to temporal parts, and holding that there is no object over and above those temporal parts, which aren't unified in any way. But we can, nevertheless, make sense of how referential semantics is possible in the absence of referents if we understand reference differently: reference is predicative, and names stand for several different things. The end result, I hope, shows that the combination of these views in Buddhist semantics and metaphysics should be considered a live option that warrants the attention of contemporary analytic philosophers.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> I thank two anonymous reviewers for *Religious Studies*, Malcolm Keating, and Josh Dever and Herman Cappelen for help either with this paper in particular or with the development of the ideas expressed in it.

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