Does Panpsychism Mean That "We Are All One"?

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Abstract: Panpsychism is the view that all things are associated with consciousness. Panpsychism has a number of significant theoretical implications, with respect to the mind–body problem and other problems in metaphysics. Here I will consider one of its potential practical or ethical implications; specifically, whether, if panpsychism is true, it follows that "we are all one", in a sense that implies that egoism (understood as bias towards what we normally take to constitute the self or ego) is not only immoral but fundamentally irrational (or imprudent).

1 Introduction

Panpsychism is the view that all things, or at least all fundamental or otherwise properly unified things (where elementary particles may be an example of the former, and the correlate of human consciousness in the brain an example of the latter), possess at least some degree of consciousness.

Panpsychism—of the specific sort known as Russellian[1] panpsychism—has a number of significant theoretical implications, which form the basis for the most influential arguments for the view. Russellian panpsychism claims that consciousness is the intrinsic nature of all physical properties, which science reveals as purely structural. This allows for a solution to the mind–body problem that arguably avoids the main problems of both physicalism and dualism at once (Alter and Nagasawa 2012; Chalmers 2013). It also offers an answer to the riddle of what constitutes the intrinsic nature of the physical world (Strawson 2006; Seager 2006) and perhaps also the nature of causation (Mørch 2018, 2019).

On the other hand, panpsychism may also have important practical or ethical implications. While these may not form the basis for any further arguments for the view,[2] they are worth exploring to the extent that panpsychism is theoretically plausible.

Some have argued that panpsychism may form a foundation for environmental ethics, according to which the environment has intrinsic value (or moral status) for the same fundamental reason as human beings do, on a fairly common conception, namely in virtue of also possessing a form of consciousness (Mathews 2003; Skrbina 2013; Goff 2019).

It has also been suggested that panpsychism may connect us more strongly or deeply to the consciousness of other entities, including other people, animals and possibly plants, as well as the inanimate environment. In particular, panpsychism may support the idea, familiar from various mystical traditions, that we are *one* with every other form of consciousness, in a sense that renders egoism—understood as bias toward some subject or set of experiences that we usually take to constitute our ego or self—not only *immoral* but fundamentally *irrational* (or

[1] After Bertrand Russell, who defended some (though not all) of its central claims.
[2] Insofar as accepting a view based on its having desirable ethical implications could be dismissed as mere wishful thinking.

imprudent). One elaborate defense of this line of thought can be found with Schopenhauer (1840/1903). More recently, it has been tentatively explored by Goff (2019). [3]

This paper will examine whether and how panpsychism may support such an idea. I will first consider different versions of what I will call the Unity Thesis, according to which there is a strong unity or connectedness between all conscious beings, that have been, or could be, linked to panpsychism. These include: (1) that we are all a part or aspect of the *same whole*, (2) that we all have the *same nature*, (3) that we all have the *same transcendental self*, or—most strongly—(4) that we are all the very *same person.*

For each Unity Thesis, I will consider, firstly, whether it *makes sense*, and secondly, whether it *clearly supports that egoism is irrational* (as opposed to merely immoral). I will show (drawing largely on Zuboff (1990) and Kolak (2007)) that only one of them, the fourth and strongest, satisfies both criteria.

I will then consider whether and how this version of the Unity Thesis, and hence the irrationality of egoism, can be supported by panpsychism. I will conclude that it does not seem implied by it: one may coherently accept panpsychism, while rejecting the strongest, most clearly egoism-undermining, Unity Thesis. Nevertheless, the main argument for this Unity Thesis, though itself independent of panpsychism, is far more difficult to resist given panpsychism than given physicalism and dualism. In this way, panpsychism can still be considered to support it.

2 Panpsychism, the Unity Thesis and the Irrationality of Egoism

Panpsychism, as noted, can be defined as the view that all fundamental or properly unified things are conscious. Fundamental things are typically assumed to include particles such as quarks and electrons, but they could also, on the cosmopsychist version of panpsychism (Shani 2015; Goff 2017), be taken to include the whole universe. Non-fundamental but properly unified things may include the correlate of human consciousness in the brain, but according to most panpsychists, likely not include artifacts such as tables and chairs, or arbitrary aggregates. Such improperly unified (or altogether disunified) things will be conscious only in virtue of being made of individually conscious particles, or given cosmopsychism, in virtue of being part of a conscious cosmos.[4]

[3] This second idea (that we are all one), may be considered a prerequisite for the first (that panpsychism provides a foundation for environmental ethics) (Mørch 2022), because even if we accept that things in the environment are all conscious (and in addition, that their consciousness is of the right sort arguably required for moral status—for example, that the consciousness we find in the environment is also valenced, or above a certain level of complexity), the question remains of why we should really care about this consciousness, or how this could be expected to have any motivational force in practice. After all, we already know that both other humans and many animals are conscious, but this does not prevent us from treating either with very little moral consideration, at least in certain contexts. To suppose that inanimate things are conscious as well would therefore likely make even less of a difference. If the second idea holds, however, and each of us is somehow one or unified with every other mind, it would provide a very clear motivation.

[4] The question of what constitutes a properly unified thing, and how such unity leads to the combination of fundamental, simple microconsciousness into a complex macroconsciousness such as our own (or alternatively, the formation of non-cosmic consciousness out of some part of the cosmic consciousness), is known as *the*

Consciousness should here be understood as *phenomenal* consciousness, i.e., *there being something that it's like* to be that entity (*for* that entity, it could be added). It should also be understood as *unified* consciousness.[5] An entity has unified consciousness if its consciousness is associated with a single point of view—from which different individual qualities or contents (such as colors, sounds, emotions and thoughts, in the case of typical human consciousness) are experienced *together*, and from outside of which they cannot be directly experienced. In other words, unified consciousness has a *border* around it, that not only internally unifies all the experiences of its subject, but also separates and makes them inaccessible to any other subjects,[6] securing what is known as the privacy of consciousness.

Now, the Unity Thesis, that is the focus of this paper, is *not* (in any of its versions) the thesis that our minds are all unified in this sense, i.e., that we all share a single point of view and the borders that seem to separate the contents of one mind from those of another are somehow illusory. It seems obvious that different conscious beings have their own distinct and private points of view—otherwise, we should be able to telepathically access the experiences of others as our own, which we clearly cannot.[7]

The Unity Thesis (or a thesis that counts as a version of it) rather claims that that, *despite* conscious beings having our own, distinct and private points of view, we are nevertheless all unified in a different, important and potentially morally significant, way. Panpsychists need not assume anything like the Unity Thesis, but some have endorsed or at least suggested it.

One of the clearest examples is Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer can be interpreted as a panpsychist (but also as more of a panprotopsychist, see Mørch (2019)). Briefly, he claims that all things have two aspects: as *phenomena*, or to others, they are representations (of physical properties or forms), whereas as *noumena*, or in (or to) themselves, they are *Will*, understood as a mental (or at least protomental) property or substance. He also claims that the Will is

combination problem (or *decombination problem*, in the case of cosmopsychism). The combination problem will not be addressed in this paper.

[5] This is not to say that consciousness is *necessarily* unified (or that subjects can only have unified, never disunified, consciousness), only that when panpsychism attributes or denies consciousness to an entity (e.g., attributes it to a particles but denies it to a table), what is typically meant is unified consciousness.

[6] Except for any wholly or partially overlapping subjects, as posited by some forms of panpsychism (such as cosmopsychism).

[7] This claim assumes a connection between what Roelofs (this volume) calls *informational* unity (roughly, a set of phenomenal contents all being directly *accessible* or *knowable* from the same point of view) and *phenomenal* unity (a set of phenomenal contents being simply *experienced* from the same point of view). Roelofs argues that phenomenal unity does not imply informational unity; hence, it is possible that all minds are phenomenally unified despite the fact that we are not informationally unified (which Roelofs also acknowledges as obvious). Here I assume that phenomenal unity does imply informational unity, mainly because I find it hard to picture what phenomenal unity would amount to if informational unity is not implied by it. In principle, however, Roelofs' view that we are all phenomenally, but not informationally, unified could be counted as yet another version of the Unity Thesis, which I would argue that this thesis should be rejected because (to rephrase my aforementioned reservation) its separation between phenomenal and informational unity does not clearly makes sense. Otherwise, however, this thesis may have the same egoism-undermining implications as the SAME PERSON view, discussed below, because phenomenal unity (which is primarily a synchronic kind of unity) would seem to have similar ethical significance as the diachronic unity asserted by the SAME PERSON view. I also argue that the ethical significance of diachronic unity does not depend on any sort of informational connectedness, which can also support that phenomenal unity is ethically relevant also in the absence of informational unity.

fundamentally *one*: the multiplicity of and division between conscious beings only exists in representation. He thereby endorses a version of the Unity Thesis.

Furthermore, he argues that compassion is the fundamental basis for morality. In a memorable passage:

> There is nothing that revolts our moral sense so much as cruelty. Every other offence we can pardon, but not cruelty. The reason is found in the fact that cruelty is the exact opposite of Compassion. When we hear of intensely cruel conduct, as, for instance, the act, which has just been recorded in the papers, of a mother, who murdered her little son of five years, by pouring boiling oil into his throat, and her younger child, by burying it alive; or what was recently reported from Algiers: how a casual dispute between a Spaniard and an Algerine ended in a fight; and how the latter, having vanquished the other, tore out the whole of his lower jaw bone, and carried it off as a trophy, leaving his adversary still alive;—when we hear of cruelty like this, we are seized with horror, and exclaim: "How is it possible to do such a thing?" Now, let me ask what this question signifies. Does it mean: "How is it possible to fear so little the punishments of the future life?" It is difficult to admit this interpretation. Then perhaps it intends to say: "How is it possible to act according to a principle which is so absolutely unfitted to become a general law for all rational beings?" Certainly not. Or, once more: "How is it possible to neglect so utterly one's own perfection as well as that of another?" This is equally unimaginable. The sense of the question is assuredly nothing but this: "How is it possible to be so utterly bereft of compassion?" The conclusion is that when an action is characterised by an extraordinary absence of compassion, it bears the certain stamp of the deepest depravity and loathsomeness. Hence Compassion is the true moral incentive. (Schopenhauer 1840/1903: 208-9)

Compassion, Schopenhauer goes on to elaborate, consists in conceiving of the pain and suffering of others not only as *no less real than* one's own, but in a sense *literally as* one's own as well. He argues that having compassion in this sense is not only moral but fully rational, since all suffering is a modification of the Will, and the Will is the fundamental nature of not just oneself but of everyone else as well. Hence, the suffering of others truly *is* one's own. Knowing this, egoism—understood as bias towards what we usually but falsely regard as our fundamental self—therefore becomes irrational.

Schopenhauer traces the fundamentals of this view back to Hinduism and Buddhism, as well as mystical traditions such as Sufism. Recently, Goff has considered a similar view which he also attributes to similar sources:

> ... mystics claim that […] formless consciousness is the backdrop to all individual conscious experiences and hence that in a significant sense formless consciousness is the ultimate nature of each and every conscious mind. This realization allegedly undermines ordinary understanding of the distinctions between different people and leads to a conviction that in some deep sense "we are all one." (Goff 2019: 206)

Goff also takes this oneness to provide a potential foundation of ethics:

> The view of the mystics … provide[s] a satisfying account of the objectivity of ethics. Selfish conduct is rooted in the belief that we are wholly separate and distinct individuals. The sadist enjoys another's pain only if she is not suffering *herself*. But according to the mystics, this belief in the total separateness of people is false. There are distinct conscious minds, but they are not *wholly* distinct ... Indeed, the most basic element of *my* mind—the formless consciousness

> which forms the backdrop of each experience—is identical with the most basic element of *your* mind. (Goff 2019: 213)

Goff explicitly does not endorse this view, though he does endorse panpsychism, so he does not take the Unity Thesis to be implied by panpsychism. But, for reasons discussed later, he still takes panpsychism to support it.

Specifically, Goff is here talking about Russellian (or dual-aspect; see Mørch (2023)) panpsychism. Russellian panpsychism claims that physical properties—understood roughly as properties exhaustively described by the science of physics—are all structural, i.e., they only characterize the relations between things but leave out any intrinsic properties of the relata of these relations. Furthermore, physical relations are thought to require relata with intrinsic properties, and the phenomenal properties of consciousness seem to be the only intrinsic properties we know. The relata of basic physical relations are therefore inferred to consist in very simple phenomenal properties, so-called microphenomenal properties.

The complex, macrophenomenal properties of our own consciousness are thought to derive from these microphenomenal properties, at least according to *standard*, non-cosmic (or bottom-up) Russellian panpsychism. Cosmic Russellian panpsychism (i.e., cosmopsychism), in contrast, claims that physical relations fundamentally hold between parts or aspects of a cosmic consciousness. Human and other non-cosmic forms of consciousness thereby derive from the cosmic mind.

The main advantage of Russellian panpsychism, in either its standard or cosmic version, is that it allows us to avoid the main problems of both physicalism and dualism. Very briefly (for details, see Alter and Nagasawa (2012), Chalmers (2013) or Mørch (2023)), unlike physicalism, Russellian panpsychism regards phenomenal properties as irreducible to physical properties. It is therefore fully compatible with the main arguments against physicalism, such as the knowledge and conceivability argument, which aim to demonstrate precisely such irreducibility. But unlike dualism, it does not regard phenomenal properties as distinct causes or effects of physical events, but rather as the intrinsic nature of physical causes themselves. It thereby offers phenomenal properties an explanatory role that avoids dualism's exclusion problem, according to which phenomenal properties, if irreducible to the physical, must either be epiphenomenal, overdeterminers, or in conflict with physical causal closure.

Since only Russellian panpsychism enjoys these advantages, I will, like Goff, mainly focus on whether this particular type of panpsychism—as opposed to any other kind, according to which consciousness is ubiquitous but not in virtue of being the intrinsic nature of the physical—supports any version of the Unity Thesis.

3 Versions of the Unity Thesis

In what ways could different conscious beings, each with their own private unity of consciousness or border separating their experiences from those of others, nevertheless be strongly unified—in a way that satisfy the aforementioned criteria of (1) making sense, and (2) supporting the irrationality of egoism?

By making sense, I mean that a thesis has to account for how all conscious beings can be, or at least appear, both *separate* (in the sense of having an individual, private perspective) and *one* (or deeply connected) without either paradox or major appeal to ignorance or mystery. By supporting the irrationality of egoism, I mean that it has to imply it in a straightforward way by virtue of weakening or collapsing the distinction between self and other.

3.1 Same Whole

The first version of the Unity Thesis I will consider depends on cosmopsychism, and is incompatible with non-cosmic panpsychism. But it could be regarded as supported by panpsychism generally speaking to the extent that there are strong arguments in favor of cosmopsychism over the non-cosmic version (though there is currently little consensus on this).[8]

As already mentioned, according to cosmopsychism, the whole universe has its own unified mind, and the minds of humans and other non-cosmic conscious beings are parts of this cosmic mind, or alternatively, aspects of it—similarly to how hue, brightness and saturation are aspects, but not parts, of colors (Goff 2017). All conscious beings would be thereby be unified in the sense of being either a part or an aspect of the same whole.[9] Call this the SAME WHOLE view.

This version of the Unity Thesis seems intelligible and non-paradoxical enough.[10] But it does not clearly support the irrationality of egoism. This is because parts or aspects of the same whole can still, and would mostly, be completely distinct and non-identical. The reasons you have to care about yourself would therefore not, given this view, rationally (as opposed to morally, it bears repeating) compel you to care about others in the same way or to the same degree. That is, there is nothing clearly irrational about prioritizing one part or aspect of a whole, i.e., the part or aspect you take to exclusively constitute yourself, over all other parts or aspects.

3.2 Same Nature

Another version of the Unity Thesis claims that conscious beings are unified in virtue of being made of the same kind of stuff or substance (in the "mass" rather than "thing" sense of the latter). More specifically, all particular experiences have the same nature in virtue of being forms or modifications (or determinates) of consciousness *as such.* By "consciousness as such" is meant, roughly, "what it is like"-ness as a general property (or determinable), or *experientiality* (Strawson 2006) entirely generally conceived, i.e., conceived independently of or in abstraction from any particular experience.

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[8] For some of the main arguments for cosmopsychism, see Shani (2015) and Goff (2017).

[9] Or more specifically, the same *strongly unified and fundamentally mental* whole. There are other views according to which all conscious beings are part of the same whole, but a more weakly unified or non-mental one, such as the set of all (non-cosmic) minds, or the same physical universe. But these views seem to have no (even *prima facie*) egoism-undermining implications, nor (in the case of non-mental wholes) any connection to panpsychism, and will therefore not be considered.

[10] At least if we set aside objections to the idea that consciousness can overlap (Basile 2010; Mørch ms), since cosmopsychism requires that our minds overlap with that of the cosmos.

On one more specific version of this view, consciousness as such should be understood as a kind of *prime matter* (Mørch 2014). Prime matter is Aristotle's term for what all things (as well as the fundamental elements, which he took to include earth, air, fire, and water) are forms of, and therefore made of, but which cannot exist without form. When prime matter has form, it will always constitute some particular thing (or element). Prime matter, in itself, hence only exists potentially or as an abstraction from actual things.[11]

Consciousness as such can be understood as that which all particular experiences are forms of, but which cannot (*pace* some interpretations of mystical/meditative testimony, to be discussed later) exist without form, i.e., except as some particular experience. It could therefore be regarded as the prime matter of the mental world. Given Russellian panpsychism, consciousness can also be regarded as the intrinsic nature of all physical mass-energy, which is the closest physical equivalent of prime matter (see Oderberg 2023) (arguably being what all physical things are forms of, or made of, yet unable to exist outside a particular form[12]), and therefore as the prime matter of the entire world.

This view, call it the SAME NATURE view, is compatible with both non-cosmic and cosmic panpsychism, unlike the SAME WHOLE view. It also seems fairly intelligible and non-paradoxical. But like the SAME WHOLE view, it does not clearly imply the irrationality of egoism, because even if I have the same nature, or am a form of the same matter, as you, that does not by make me identical with you or otherwise blur the distinction between us.

3.3 Same Transcendental Self

A third version of the Unity Thesis captures roughly the mystical view described by Goff. The essence of this view is that we all have a *true self*, which is *transcendental* in that its nature and identity lies beyond anything present in ordinary experience or graspable by ordinary reflection (it may also be transcendental in other ways such as abiding outside space and time). But the true self can still be revealed by meditative or mystical experiences. What they reveal is that the true self is not only different from what we identify as the self or ego in everyday life, it is also *the same* for all conscious beings: we all have the same transcendental self.

What is the nature of this transcendental self? Goff, as discussed, identifies it as "formless consciousness". Formless consciousness could be understood as roughly equivalent to consciousness as such, as construed by the SAME NATURE view, except that it can exist without form after all, in advanced meditative states or during mystical experience (as well as, perhaps, in other situations, such as before the creation of the universe).

Goff also draws on a view developed and defended by Albahari (2019a, 2019b), and intended to reflect central claims of the Hinduistic Advaita Vedanta tradition in particular. On this view,

[11] In addition, prime matter is subject to neither generation nor annihilation, i.e. it is a conserved quantity. According to Strawson's influential argument for panpsychism from non-emergence (2006), consciousness as such cannot "radically" emerge from non-consciousness, i.e., be subject to generation (nor, one might think, by the same token, annihilation). If this is correct, consciousness as such may share this feature of prime matter as well (in contrast to any particular conscious experiences, which obviously come and go, but this should be understood as consciousness as such transforming from one form to another rather than absolute generation or annihilation).

[12] As well as being a conserved quantity; see previous footnote.

consciousness is essentially *non-dual*, in that it requires neither a subject nor an object (it thereby also lacks form, since form involves a subject and a particular object). The dual, i.e., subject- and object-involving, consciousness of our everyday lives "will *emanate* from the non-dual conscious ground" (Albahari 2019a: 126).

By Albahari's own account, this view is not a version of Russellian panpsychism (Albahari 2019b: 22). Goff, however, suggests that it may be integrated with Russellian panpsychism by regarding formless or non-dual consciousness as the intrinsic nature of all physical structure (instead of consciousness of the usual, dual kind), from which it follows that we can posit formless consciousness without positing any extra structure beyond that described by physics.

Like cosmopsychism, this non-dual view, and thereby the SAME TRANSCENDENTAL SELF view, is not implied by panpsychism in general, but can be regarded as supported by it to the extent that there are strong arguments supporting this version over other versions (such as arguments from mystical testimony, which Albahari and Goff mention, but there may also be others). But how does it fare with respect to the criteria of undermining egoism while also making sense?

If everyone has the same transcendental self, it clearly supports the irrationality of egoism. Assuming one has reason to care about one's own true self—more so than one's everyday "false" self—then if everyone has the same true self as you, you should care equally about others (or *apparent* others) as you should about yourself.

However, almost by hypothesis, the view does not make complete sense, at least not to non-mystics and non-meditators who have not had the profound experiences that seem to reveal the true self and are necessary for fully grasping it (or grasping it at all). Furthermore, to non-mystics and non-meditators, the view may also seem to involve not only mystery but paradox. According to the mystical view, consciousness is essentially formless or non-dual, but in everyday life, it is clearly formed and dual. How can consciousness have both, logically contradictory, sets of properties at once?

One answer would be that everyday consciousness is only *potentially* formless and non-dual while actually or usually formed and dual, i.e., that dual everyday consciousness was originally transformed from the original "background" non-dual consciousness, but can also transform back again during meditation or mystical experience, rather than being constituted by a simultaneously co-existing non-dual consciousness. But in that case, it seems the true self will also only exist potentially (except during meditation or mystical experience), which makes it less obvious why it should be prioritized over the actual, everyday self, and how it can constitute our actual self.

Another answer is that formless or non-dual consciousness *grounds* formed or dual consciousness, and that grounds may have different properties than the grounded.[13] However, by grounding something that has form, it seems the ground would itself acquire form, in the same way a piece of clay would acquire the form of a statue by grounding a statue (the clay may of course remain formless in the sense that it *could* acquire any other form or shape as well, but this corresponds more closely to the potential formlessness of the SAME NATURE view

[13] Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this.

than the *actual* formlessness intended by the non-dual view, insofar as the clay (or consciousness) *cannot* actually exist without any form, or the previous answer insofar as one thinks it *can*).

To non-mystics and non-meditators then, the SAME TRANSCENDENTAL SELF view, and its implications for egoism, would have to be accepted in large part on the basis of mystical testimony, according to which the paradox is resolvable but in a way not yet graspable by us, rather than rational (to us) argument alone.

3.4 Same Person

The final—and as will be argued, most promising with respect to the criteria—version of the Unity Thesis is the SAME PERSON view, which claims that all conscious beings are literally the same person in a non-transcendental sense. This view can be motivated by the puzzle of accounting for personal identity over time: what, if anything, makes me the same person at this moment as the next, or as yesterday, tomorrow or in ten years?

Most of us have the intuition that personal identity is *absolute* and *determinate* rather than indeterminate or a matter of degree (Williams 1970; Swinburne 1973; Parfit 1984; Nagel 1986),[14] i.e., that we remain the same person in virtue of some property fully present throughout our lives—the property of "being me", or something that grounds it—and that there is always a fact of the matter as to whether some future or past being has this property and thereby counts as the same person as me. Or, put another way, it must always be determinate whether or not the property that grounds my identity is instantiated at all, and thereby whether or not I exist, or have survived some change.

We also have the intuition that personal identity is *not shared:* that at most one being at a given time can be the same person as me, or that multiple simultaneously existing beings—distinguished by having their own private unity of consciousness—cannot also share the property of "being me" (they will instead have their own "being them"-property).

On reflection, however, it is hard to see what this property could be or be grounded in, as there is no directly observable property, physical or mental, that stays exactly the same throughout our lifespan and is also unique to each of us. Physically speaking, our cells (and particles) are continually replaced, and our body also changes its higher-order features. Similarly, our phenomenal and other mental properties are always changing, and no such properties—from experiential contents to memories or personality traits—seem unchangeable. Or even if some are, they are not ones that seem essential for identity, i.e., we can imagine remaining identical even if they were to change, or losing our identity even when they remain. For example, we can perfectly well conceive of "reincarnation without memory" (Nagel 1986: 33) (i.e., continuing our existence in an entirely new body and mind), or conversely, a clone or doppelganger with an identical physical body and perfect copies of our memories who is still not the same person as us.

[14] These philosophers all take the ordinary concept of personal identity to include determinacy, though some (including Parfit, as will be discussed) still reject or doubt that the concept, and its determinacy component in particular, is satisfied.

Some philosophers, such as Parfit (1971, 1984), have therefore concluded that there is no personal identity over time. All we have is the relation of psychological connectedness consisting in memories of the past, intentional influence on future actions, and so on. This relation is a matter of degree—one can be more or less psychologically connected to a past or future being (by having more or less complete memories of past experiences, for example). There will often be no answer to the question of whether one is sufficiently psychologically connected to some past or future being for it count as the same person as you—unless one sets some arbitrary threshold, but personal identity should intuitively not be grounded in arbitrary stipulation either. One can also be equally psychologically connected to multiple past and future beings, as in fission and fusion cases, thus psychological connectedness is a sharable property. Psychological connectedness would therefore constitute an incomplete replacement rather than a real ground for personal identity.

Other philosophers have concluded that personal identity exists but is grounded in some entity or property that is neither physical nor mental, at least not any one standardly acknowledged to exist, such as an unchanging and unique subject distinct from one's experiences, typically understood as a mental substance (Swinburne 1984), or a primitive "being me"-property pertaining to each individual, i.e., a kind of *haecceity* or brutely individuating property. But no such properties or entities seem directly observed and positing them may seem *ad hoc*.

A third option, however, defended by Zuboff (1990, ms) and Kolak (2007),[15] is to abandon the requirement that personal identity cannot be shared. If we look for properties that stay exactly the same throughout a human lifespan, but can also be (and indeed *is*) shared by other individuals, there is a clear observable candidate.

As Zuboff puts it, any experience you have in the course of your life will be characterized by the property of *being mine*, understood simply as the kind of immediacy or first-person character—or *subjective presence*, as I will paraphrase it—with which all your experiences appear to you. But presumably, the experiences of all other people or conscious beings will be characterized in the same way: insofar as others have experiences at all, their experiences will be subjectively present.

One might object that subjective presence *for me* is not the same as subjective presence *for someone else*. But subjective presence can be understood, not as a relation between an experience and a person or subject, but rather as a monadic property or quality of experiences themselves. And it seems plausible that the subjective presence of my experiences is *qualitatively identical* to the subjective presence of anyone else's experiences.

Furthermore, subjective presence is precisely the kind of property that seems relevant for personal identity. Whenever there is an experience that is subjectively present—*for me*¸ we would ordinarily say, but if we understand presence as monadic then this would be redundant—it would seem like I exist, and whenever there isn't (or no longer potentially is, as in death as opposed to dreamless sleep or temporary coma), I am gone. In the imagined case of

[15] Zuboff refers to this view as *universalism* whereas Kolak refers to it as *open individualism*, in contrast to *closed individualism*, according to which there is personal identity which is not shared (i.e., our standard everyday view), and *empty individualism*, according to which there is no personal identity (i.e., Parfit's or similar views).

reincarnation without memory, it would seem to be all that remains (i.e., the only thing that the reincarnated version of you has in common with the original you, and the only reason you would have to identify with the reincarnated version, if we do not posit any shared mental substance or haecceity, would be that subjectively present experience would continue after reincarnation), supporting that, at least intuitively speaking, it seems sufficient for personal identity on reflection.

The idea then, is that any experience that has subjective presence (or mine-ness) is mine, everyone's experiences have subjective presence (or mine-ness, understood monadically and qualitatively), hence every experience is mine. In other words, all experiences as had by the same person, and this person is identical to me but also to everyone else. [16]

If this view were correct, it would undermine the distinction between self and other in the strongest possible way, and clearly imply the irrationality of egoism. The question is whether it makes sense.

On the surface, the view might seem straightforwardly paradoxical. As noted, it seems that the experiences of every conscious being are private in the sense of having a sharp border around them, which renders them directly accessible to that conscious being but not to others. That is, I am clearly not literally *having* the experiences of others in the way I am currently having my own. The SAME PERSON view, however, may seem to imply that I *am* literally having the experiences of every other conscious being.

But this apparent paradox can be resolved by distinguishing two different senses in which an experience can be mine, or had by me. Firstly, there is *synchronic* mine-ness, which is the relation I (at the present time, and in the ordinary sense of referring to an individual human being or perspective) stand in to all my experiences *right now*, i.e., my occurrent and concurrent experiences of, e.g., color, sound, taste, emotions and thoughts. Importantly, synchronic mine-ness implies *co-consciousness*. Co-consciousness is the relation of being experienced together from the same point of view, and thereby forming part of the same total unified experience (Dainton 2010). Two experiences that are co-conscious will not be private relative to each other, but are rather immediately and directly accessible from the same perspective.

[16] This can be regarded as a further development of the SAME NATURE view, which claims that all experiences are forms of the same consciousness or experientiality. The SAME PERSON view adds (and provides reasons to support) that sharing this nature, or more precisely the subjective presence that can be regarded as an essential aspect of consciousness or experientiality as such, is necessary and sufficient for personal identity or shared selfhood. This avoids the objection that sameness of nature does not imply universal compassion, since on the SAME PERSON view, it is not sameness of nature by itself that has this implication, but rather the subjective presence that characterizes this nature and the connection between this and selfhood.[17] That is, the SAME PERSON view does not seem to require time and space to be symmetrical in every respect, as per the B-theory, i.e., four-dimensionalist or "block universe" view, of time. Both Zuboff and Kolak endorse the B-theory alongside the SAME PERSON view. However, the view may also be compatible with A-theoretic views, such as presentism, the "growing block" and the "moving spotlight" view, because even if time and space are asymmetric in some important ways, as these views imply, they can still be symmetric in others, and the particular kinds of asymmetries typically posited by A-theoretic views do not obviously exclude the kinds of symmetries required by the SAME PERSON view (in particular, they do not obviously imply that the (in familiar cases) diachronic mine-ness relation cannot also hold synchronically, just as they do not imply that other relations, such as the similarity relation, cannot hold both diachronically and synchronically, i.e., between both simultaneously and non-simultaneously existing things).

Secondly, there is *diachronic* mine-ness, which is the relation I (at the present time, and still in the ordinary sense) stand in to my experiences in the past and future. This relation does *not* imply co-consciousness: my past and future experiences are not subsumed under the same point of view as my current experiences, and therefore not immediately and directly accessible to me now. Instead, my past and future experiences are at best only indirectly accessible to me right now via some kind of psychological connectedness, such as representation in memory (for the past) and imagination (or prediction, anticipation, intention, or similar, for the future). And in many cases, my past and future experiences are not accessible to me at all, as they lack any psychological connectedness to my present experience. For example, just last night, I was most likely having dreams that I currently have no memory of at all—I am entirely psychologically disconnected from them. But these dream experiences are still diachronically mine.

The SAME PERSON view should be understood as the view that the experiences of every conscious being are mine, not in the synchronic sense, but only in the diachronic sense. Or more precisely, in the sense that is diachronic *in the most familiar cases*, but according to the SAME PERSON view is not diachronic *essentially* but can in fact also apply synchronically.

To say that all experiences are mine in the synchronic sense clearly leads to paradox, since it is obvious that the experiences of other people (and any other conscious beings) are not co-conscious with mine, and synchronic mine-ness implies co-consciousness. But to say that all experiences are mine in the diachronic sense implies neither co-consciousness nor any kind of psychological connectedness. Hence, this claim is compatible with the experiences of others being entirely inaccessible to me.

Also note that what egoism is primarily concerned with are experiences that are diachronically rather than synchronically mine. When acting or thinking egoistically, we are not concerned with improving our experience at the current instant, because this experience already exists and it is too late to change it. We are rather concerned with making sure our future experiences are as good as possible. If the experiences of others are mine in the same sense that (what I ordinarily regard as) my own future experiences are mine, the very same concern should extend to them, and egoism would be directly undermined.

One might object that the diachronic mine-ness relation cannot be extended to the experiences of other conscious beings because it is simply impossible for the same person to have different and disjoint experiences, i.e., experiences that are not co-conscious or psychologically connected and hence private relative to each other, at the same time—it is only possible for such experiences to occur at different times.

However, as indicated by Kolak (2007: 135), this objection presupposes an asymmetry between time and space, or time and location, that is not clearly justified. On the ordinary view, that most of us intuitively accept, we assume:

> SAME LOCATION IF DIFFERENT TIME: The same person can have different, non-co-conscious and psychologically disconnected experiences in the *same location* (i.e., the same brain or other entity) if they occur at *different times.*

For example, I can have the experience of my visual field being red all over at 2pm and blue all over at 3 pm, even though I cannot have both at 2pm. I can also have a dream at 2am that I have entirely forgotten at 3pm, even if I cannot have two experiences that are not co-conscious both at 3pm.

The SAME PERSON view can be understood as making the same claim only with the role of space and time reversed:

> SAME TIME IF DIFFERENT LOCATION: The same person can have different, non-co-conscious and psychologically disconnected experiences at the *same time* if they occur at *different locations* (i.e., in different brains or other entities).

According to this, I *can* have the experience of both red all over and blue all over at 2 pm, or both seeing and not seeing a particular scene outside a window at the same time, as long as one experience is had in one brain, or human being, and the other in another brain, or human being.

One might argue that there is no clear reason not to regard time and space as symmetric in this particular respect.[17] If this is correct, the SAME PERSON view avoids at least its most obvious apparent paradox. Unlike the SAME TRANSCENDENTAL SELF view, it also does so without major appeal to mystery or ignorance, as the view is stated in terms of relations and categories we are all acquainted with (or may become acquainted with given some phenomenological reflection) from ordinary experience.

4 Panpsychism and the SAME PERSON View

The SAME WHOLE, SAME NATURE and SAME TRANSCENDENTAL SELF views are, as discussed, all closely connected to panpsychism or specific versions of it, but the SAME PERSON view *prima facie* does not seem to be. Not only can panpsychism be coherently accepted while rejecting the SAME PERSON view, it also seems fully compatible with both physicalism and dualism (as clear from the fact that neither Zuboff nor Kolak, its main contemporary proponents, endorse panpsychism).

However, if we look at what can be regarded as the main argument for the SAME PERSON view, it seems some of its premises can be fairly easily resisted, or even hard to accept, given dualism or physicalism, but much harder to resist given Russellian panpsychism.

The argument can be construed as follows:

1. There is no basis for an individual self.

[17] That is, the SAME PERSON view does not seem to require time and space to be symmetrical in every respect, as per the B-theory, i.e., four-dimensionalist or "block universe" view, of time. Both Zuboff and Kolak endorse the B-theory alongside the SAME PERSON view. However, the view may also be compatible with A-theoretic views, such as presentism, the "growing block" and the "moving spotlight" view, because even if time and space are asymmetric in some important ways, as these views imply, they can still be symmetric in others, and the particular kinds of asymmetries typically posited by A-theoretic views do not obviously exclude the kinds of symmetries required by the SAME PERSON view (in particular, they do not obviously imply that the (in familiar cases) diachronic mine-ness relation cannot also hold synchronically, just as they do not imply that other relations, such as the similarity relation, cannot hold both diachronically and synchronically, i.e., between both simultaneously and non-simultaneously existing things).

2. There is a basis for a shared self.
3. If there is a basis for a shared self and no basis for an individual self, then there is a shared self.

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4. There is a shared self.

This conclusion should be read as equivalent to the SAME PERSON view.

The first premise can be defended on the basis that no properties that we have good independent reason to posit, i.e., no observable physical or mental properties, are necessarily, as well as determinately and uniquely, present throughout the lifespan of a human being or other entity or process that we have reason to associate with a unique person.

The second premise refers to the mine-ness or subjective presence that the SAME PERSON view takes to characterize not only all my (in the ordinary sense) experiences but also the experiences any conscious being, resulting in there being only one rather than multiple individual selves.

The third premise is included simply as a concession to proponents of an individual self. It states that there being a basis for a shared self, such as universal subjective presence, is not sufficient for rejecting an individual self, it also requires the lack of a basis for an individual self (so if there is a basis for both an individual and a shared self, the former may trump the latter).

As we will see, dualism has strong resources to reject premise 1, i.e., to defend that there is an *individual self*.

Physicalism has little resources to reject premise 1, but also provides a very weak basis for asserting premise 2. It may therefore be regarded as most naturally supporting that there is fundamentally speaking *no self*. This may support the irrationality of egoism in a sense, but in a way more conducive to moral nihilism than universal compassion (at least in comparison to a shared self), since one's level of concern for what one typically regards as one's future self gets reduced to whatever level of concern one already has for others, instead of one's concern for others increasing to one's original level of concern for oneself. Concern for oneself is not only typically much stronger than concern for others; the ultimate warrant for this concern also tends to be regarded as obvious rather than as a deep philosophical problem, unlike the warrant for altruism.

Panpsychism, in contrast, has weak resources to reject premise 1, as well as strong basis for asserting premise 2 (and premise 3 will be taken for granted). It therefore most naturally supports a *shared self* and in turn a sense of universal compassion.

4.1 Dualism

Dualism takes phenomenal and perhaps other mental properties to be non-physical. It also takes phenomenal properties to be causally related to the physical world: they are effects and perhaps also causes of physical properties or events (depending on whether one accepts an epiphenomenalist or interactionist version of the view).

Dualism comes in two versions, substance dualism and property dualism. Substance dualism takes consciousness to inhere in a mental substance distinct from and irreducible to its experiences. This mental substance is an eminent basis for an individual self, as it may, and typically is, regarded as unique to each conscious being (though it could in principle, perhaps, be regarded as shared). Opponents of substance dualism will of course object that we have no good reason to accept the existence of mental substances, but assuming substance dualism itself is defensible, an individual self grounded in a mental substance would seem close to equally defensible.

Property dualism dispenses with mental substances, but in addition to non-physical phenomenal properties, it may posit haecceities, or fundamental individuating properties, as attributable to conscious beings that have no physical counterpart, that could also form a good basis for individual selves. It could be objected that unlike phenomenal properties, such non-physical properties are not observable (even in the first-person). But it could be responded that our strong intuition of there being an individual self, for example, gives a sufficient basis for positing them.

Another objection would be that non-physical haecceities or individuating properties would have no causal role with respect to the physical world. But dualism already faces this challenge with respect to phenomenal properties, and typical responses to it (such as accepting epiphenomenalism or abandoning the principle of physical causal closure) could be extended to non-physical individuating properties. An individual self therefore seems fairly defensible given either substance or property dualism.

4.2 Physicalism

Physicalism takes everything, including consciousness and its phenomenal properties, to be fully constituted by the physical.

No physical properties seem to form a good basis for an individual self, at least not on the standard assumption that personal identity is absolute and determinate. Fundamentally, this could be understood to be because all physical properties—or at least those plausibly associated with unique persons—exist on a continuum with no sharp and determinate borders between them. The physical border between two conscious beings or persons, or between a physical property essential to an individual person being instantiated or not, will therefore always be gradual and admit of indeterminate, borderline cases. It therefore seems that determinate, individual personal identity cannot be physically implemented.

This also precludes physicalism from offering a good basis for a shared self. If all conscious beings share a self, but there is no absolute and determinate border between a conscious being existing or not, the shared self—which, according the SAME PERSON view, will exist as long, and only as long, as any conscious experience with subjective presence is instantiated—will also be indeterminate. For example, one might think consciousness and hence the shared self is instantiated whenever there is a global neuronal workspace (as per one influential current theory of consciousness), but there will be a number of cases where it is indeterminate whether

a system constitutes a global workspace. The same would seem to hold for any other physical correlates (see Tye (2021) for further defense of this point).[18]

Physicalism thereby seems more supportive of there being no self than there being either an individual or a shared self. As discussed, this still blurs the distinction between self (or what one would otherwise regard as such) and other—as Parfit, for example, clearly emphasizes—but in a way that can be taken to support simply a decrease in self-interest without any increase in compassion for all.

4.3 Panpsychism

Russellian panpsychism, to repeat, takes phenomenal properties to be non-physical, just like dualism, but locates them as the intrinsic nature of physical structure. Because of this close relationship between the mental and the physical, Russellian panpsychism is in much of the same position as physicalism with respect to individual selves. If there are no determinate borders between physical properties or entities, then just as determinate, individual selves cannot be identified with any physical properties or entities, they cannot be posited as their intrinsic nature either. Given Russellian panpsychism, individual selves, or entities or properties that may form their basis, such as individual mental substances or haecceities, thus have a different status than phenomenal properties. According to the view, since the physical world is purely structural, there is a clear need for intrinsic properties to concretely realize it, and phenomenal properties—being intrinsic—can play this role. But if this structure contains no determinate, individuating features, there is no corresponding need for non-physical entities or individuating properties in addition to the phenomenal.

One might think Russellian panpsychists are still free to posit such entities or properties, not in order to account for any physical structure, but simply to account for our intuitions or arguments in favor of there being an individual self, i.e., on the same basis that dualists may posit them. But if individuating properties or substances play no role in realizing any physical structure, then unlike phenomenal properties, they would have no clear explanatory role relative to the physical world. Russellian panpsychists must therefore either invent some other type of explanatory role for them, or declare them epiphenomenal. Either option could be regarded as at worst incompatible with the Russellian picture and at best strongly disrupting its elegance.

The situation is thus disanalogous to that of dualism, which already faces a problem of finding a causal role for phenomenal properties, but any solution to it could seemingly be extended to

[18] With one potential exception: in principle, physicalism could be combined with panpsychism by reducing consciousness to a ubiquitous or ever-present physical property (such as being spatial, having energy, or simply being physical—or perhaps having maximal integrated information, which is the correlate of consciousness according to another influential current theory, and is in fact close to ubiquitous). If so, the border between conscious and non-conscious beings (and hence self and non-self) would be determinate, at least to the extent that the border between any physical properties being instantiated at all or not is determinate (as will be discussed in the next section). This sort of panpsychist physicalism is rarely if ever defended, mainly because it misses out on the advantages of Russellian panpsychism (which, again, unlike physicalism, takes phenomenal properties as the fundamental intrinsic nature of everything physical rather than reducible to anything physical) while still incurring its intuitive cost. However, insofar as panpsychist physicalism supports a shared self (while standard, non-panpsychist physicalism does not), this would still fit the conclusion that panpsychism supports the oneness or unity of all conscious beings.

a non-physical basis for individual selves. Russellian panpsychism, in contrast, already provides a causal role for phenomenal properties, but this role cannot be extended to a non-physical basis for individual selves.

With respect to a shared self, on the other hand, Russellian panpsychism is in a much better position than physicalism.[19] Given Russellian panpsychism, there is no obstacle to identifying consciousness as such, or the subjective presence that seems essential to it, with the shared self (at least not insofar as this view of the shared self makes sense in the first place). Firstly, consciousness as such, considered by itself, is arguably a completely determinate property (Simon 2017; Tye 2021), just as the self should be. And since everything physical is associated with consciousness, the physical border between consciousness and non-consciousness will not correspond to a border between any two specific physical properties, but rather to the border between anything physical existing at all or not (i.e., between something and nothing, physically speaking), which also seems sharp and determinate. In this way, Russellian panpsychism naturally supports both central premises of the argument for a shared self.

5 Conclusion

Does panpsychism imply that "we are all one", as is sometimes suggested or gestured towards? I have considered a number of ways in which this claim can be understood: (1) that we are all part of the SAME WHOLE, (2) that we all have the SAME NATURE, (2) that we all have the SAME TRANSCENDENTAL SELF—consisting in pure, non-dual consciousness present only during mystical experience—and (4) that we are all the SAME PERSON in the sense of having the same immediately present (and hence non-transcendental) self, consisting in consciousness as such or the subjective presence that characterizes every moment of even everyday experience.

Among these, the SAME PERSON view most clearly satisfies the two criteria of, firstly, making sense—including to people who are not mystics or expert meditators, and to the extent that we are willing to regard time and space as symmetrical in certain respects—and secondly, having clear moral significance, by straightforwardly implying the irrationality of egoism and rationality of compassion for all.

Russellian panpsychism does not strictly imply the SAME PERSON view, nor are its main rivals, dualism and physicalism, outright incompatible with it. But dualism has more resources than both physicalism and Russellian panpsychism to defend an individual self, or that we are all different persons, by positing individual mental substances or haecceities. Physicalism has little resources to defend either an individual or a shared self, since no physical properties seem determinate and non-gradual in the way the self (shared or not) should be; hence, it most naturally support the view that there is no self, or no enduring persons.

Russellian panpsychism has no obvious way of fitting individual mental substances or haecceities into its ontology, given that mental properties primarily figure as the intrinsic nature of physical properties, which have no structure that matches them, at least when considering any specific physical properties. A universal mental substance or property, however, in the

[19] Except perhaps for panpsychist physicalism, as discussed in the previous footnote.

form of consciousness in general, is something the view already posits as the intrinsic nature of physicality as such, and this, or the subjective presence that always comes along with it, is exactly the kind of basis needed for the shared self.

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