

How Is (Constitutive) Primitive Russellian Monism Better Than Dualism?

I'm going to address what Luke says, in his excellent comments, about *primitive* Russellian monism – which is the option he favors anyway.

In particular, consider *primitive representationalism* (Chalmers, myself, etc.). For me, an important “detail” about consciousness is that it involves the *phenomenal representation of qualities*. Contrary to *reductive representationalists* like Tye and Dretske, *primitive representationalists* think that there is no interesting identity of the following form:

The dyadic phenomenal representation relation = super complex relation *R* built up from the *base properties and relations*, which for Russellian monists include the micro-quiddities as well as causal relations.

In addition, primitive representationalists say that there aren't any interesting identities of this kind:

The macro-level sensible quality *red* = super complex property *R* built up from the base properties (such as a quiddity-involving *reflectance*).¹

Now, if instead *reductive* Russellian monism were true, so that macro-level phenomenal properties *were* nothing but super-complex logical constructions of the base properties *A, B, C*, then conditionals going from arrangements of those base properties *A, B, C*, to macro-level phenomenal properties would obtain **as a matter of logic**.

By contrast, somewhat like Dualists, Russellian monists who accept primitive representationalism need to complicate their picture of the world by accepting **extra-logical bridge principles** of the following kind:

[Bridge] If the base properties *A, B, C* (micro-quiddities) are instantiated in so and so pattern, then someone stands in the irreducible phenomenal representation relation to Edenic red.

I think that neuroscience gives us some idea of what *some* of these bridge principles will look like. For instance, one bridge principle might be:

[1] If the base properties are so arranged that someone has V4 neural state *N*, then she stands in the primitive phenomenal representation relation to Edenic quality $f(N)$, where f is a structure-preserving mapping from V4 neural similarity-space onto Edenic color similarity-space (Brouwer & Heeger, 2009).

Another extra-logical bridge principle might concern the relationship between S1 neural firing rates and the perception of Edenic pain qualities:

[2] If the base properties are arranged so that someone is undergoing increasing S1 neural activity, then they bear the primitive phenomenal representation relation to Edenic pain qualities of increasing intensity (Coghill, 1999).

¹ Once we accept representationalism, a solution to the problem of consciousness requires a theory of qualities and a theory of the phenomenal representation relation (Pautz, “A Simple View of Consciousness”). Chalmers (“The Combination Problem for Panpsychism”) makes essentially the same point when he speaks of the “quality-awareness gap”.

Call these the **special neuroscientific bridge principles**.

At this point, primitive Russellian monists face an interesting question that we might call the "**basic principles question**":

Are the neuroscientific bridge principles the *basic* bridge principles? Or are they derivable from some set of *more basic* bridge principles?²

We can imagine different forms of PRM, differing in their answers. First there is:

"Messy primitive Russellian monism". On this view, if we only knew what the base quiddities were like, we would "see" *a priori* that the special neuroscientific bridge principles hold with metaphysical necessity. But we would also see that they aren't derivable from any more basic *a priori* bridge principles. Each is *basic*, lacking any further explanation.

Another option, which Luke favors, is

"T-shirt-style primitive Russellian monism". In one version, the idea is this. The micro-quiddities of mass and charge and spin in fact are little experiences which *themselves* consist in phenomenally representing a small handful of alien Edenic qualities we can't imagine! There are a few basic *a priori* bridge principles, *inheritance principles* and *phenomenal blending principles*, which could be written on a T-shirt. The special neuroscientific bridge principles (1&2) are *derivative*: they somehow are logical consequences of these totally general basic blending principles, together with the totally general fundamental physical laws, although we cannot at present see how this derivation goes.

Now, primitive Russellian monism, as I understand it, is a blanket approach that's neutral btw these options - on what the basic bridge principles are. (After all, don't know.) Instead, it just refers to the basic bridge principles "by description", and it says that

(PRM) The basic extra-logical bridge principles for phenomenal representation, which we don't at present know, are *a priori and metaphysically necessary*.

Now, of course, if we accept primitive representationalism, PRM is not the only game in town. We can also accept an exactly parallel form of *property dualism*. As I understand property dualism, it is exactly like PRM, except for one tiny thing: it differs from PRM on the *epistemic and modal status* of the ultimate extra-logical bridge principles for phenomenal representation. In particular, it says:

(Dualism) The basic extra-logical bridge principles for phenomenal representation, which we don't at present know, are *a posteriori and contingent*.

Now, notice that I understand "Dualism" so that, like (PRM), it is entirely neutral on the *form* extra-logical bridge principles. For instance, just as it is compatible with (PRM)

² Here is an analogy. Suppose like G. E. Moore you are a primitive about normativity. So you must believe in some extra-logical bridge principles like: if A is an action of saving 1000 lives with no downside, A has the primitive OUGHT-TO-DO-IT-NESS property. You then face the question: what are the *most basic* extra-logical bridge principles going from normative facts about what is the case to normative facts about what ought to be the case?

that the basic bridge principles are *pansychist combining rules that could be written on a T-shirt*, so that is also compatible with Dualism as I understand it. Dualism is entirely neutral here. The *only* difference between (Dualism) and (PRM) concerns *the epistemic and modal status* of the basic bridge principles, *whatever they may turn out to be*.

Now here's the question I ask in my paper: if primitive representationalism is true, so that we all must *complicate* our picture of the world by supposing that there are some or other basic extra-logical principles for phenomenal representation, why should our credence in the Russellian monist speculation that they are *a priori* exceed our credence in the dualist speculation that they are *a posteriori*?

One possible argument is the *argument from actual demonstration*. For instance, *if* we actually knew what the quiddities were like, and we could actually formulate a few clearly *a priori*, T-shirt-style bridge principles, *and* demonstrate that they entail *all the special neuroscientific bridge principles* (like 1 & 2), *then* we would have an argument for PRM over dualism. In particular, we'd have an argument for Luke's version. But our current situation is *nothing like* this. What argument can we *now* give?

Luke's own answer to my question is that the primitive Russellian monist speculation that "**the basic bridge principles are knowable *a priori***" is *simpler* than the dualist speculation "**the basic bridge principles are knowable *a posteriori***".

I disagree with this. It goes against the following **parity principle**:

If two theories (such as PRM and Dualism) posit the VERY SAME basic extra-logical bridge principles, then they're equally complex, even if they differ on the epistemic and modal *status* of these principles.

The case for the parity principle is simple: it is supported by the truism that the complexity of a theory is only a function of *what it says about the world*. The issue of *how we could know that the theory is true* is just not relevant its complexity. Complexity is a matter of the *metaphysics* of a theory, *not* its epistemology.

Luke disagrees. He writes:

"I'm not convinced [that the *a priori* of the one's principles makes no difference to their offence against parsimony]: *a priori* principles are very **different beasts** than laws of nature."³

I have two points. First, it seems Luke is just *asserting* that my parity principle is unconvincing, without yet giving a reason to do so. Second, I think that his "different beasts" point misrepresents the current dialectical situation. The primitive Russellian monist and the parallel dualist view that I am imagining posit **the very same beasts** – the very same basic principles. They posit them *by description* as "the basic bridge principles". They only differ on their *epistemic status*. How then can they differ in how beastly they are?⁴

³ Other arguments for the parity principle: (I) The complexity of a theory is measured by its *length of its formulation in a fundamental language*. By this measure, primitive Russellian monist view and the parallel dualist view are equally complex. (II) Argument from cases. (a) Lewis vs Leibniz on laws of physics. (b) Fine/Rosen vs Parfit on the status of the extra-logical natural-normative principles. (c) Absurd to suppose we have simplicity-based reason to think that *the initial conditions of the universe are a priori and metaphysically necessary!!!!!!*

You might think that there is an argument from cases against the parity principle, e. g. that *all scarlet things are colored* doesn't add at all to the complexity of our theory. This rests on a misunderstanding.

⁴ *Explanatory argument (Hedda?)* -- "If the basic bridge principles are *a posteriori* (dualism), they have no explanation. If they are *a priori* (RM), they have an explanation – we avoid gaps." *Reply*: This rests on a misunderstanding. We are talking about the basic bridge principles. Even if they are

If, like me, you are convinced that simplicity considerations don't suffice, you might instead argue for primitive Russellian monism over the nearly identical dualist view on the grounds that dualists must accept *epiphenomenalism*, while Russellian monists can accept a kind of "*benign overdetermination*". But I think that this doesn't work either, for many reasons. First, dualists can accept overdetermination too.⁵ Second, since the world would *seem just the same to us* if epiphenomenalism were true, there is a sense in which epiphenomenalism and mental-to-physical causation are equally compatible with our evidence. Therefore, to decide the matter, we must fall back on extra-evidential considerations, such as simplicity.⁶ But I've already argued that the two theories don't differ in simplicity – they are equally complex. (Like J. C. Smart, I believe simplicity/economy supports only *reductive* views – like reductive RM - over dualism.)

The conclusion I draw is that, concerning the mind-body problem, we must rest content with a position of

HUMILITY: Once we give up on reductionism, we all must accept that there are some basic extra-logical principles for macro-level phenomenal representation. But we may never grasp them, and we should remain entirely neutral on their epistemic and modal status. We have no good reason – in particular, no simplicity-based reason – to prefer the primitive RM speculation on their status over the the dualist speculation. So, once we give up on reductionism, there is no good "Hegelian synthesis" (Chalmers) argument for primitive RM over dualism – it's just as complex.⁷

[A final point. I've remained neutral between the view that there are many basic special neuroscientific bridge principles lacking further explanation, and T-shirt style view that there are in fact a few basic bridge principles that explain everything. But, for the record, I (with Bourget) find the T-shirt view very implausible – whether we think of the principles as "constitutive" principles or as "principles of emergence". In order for this view to be true, there must be a few **general** principles – say inheritance principles and blending principles – which, together with the **general** laws of physics, logically entail *the whole raft of the super specific neuroscientific bridge principles*, like the ones about V4 activity and S1 firing rates mentioned above ("time for the details!"). But, in the absence of a derivation-sketch, this is no more plausible than the idea that *the Peano axioms logically entail all the laws of physics*. (I'm even more skeptical of Luke's stronger claim that the basic bridge principles could be a few inheritance and blending principles *that have an a priori status*. For instance, it is not *a priori* that, if I am in pain, the universe is in pain (Chalmers says the same: "Combination Problem", fn. 9).)]

a priori, this doesn't mean *they have an explanation*. Those are different. By definition, since they are the *basic* ones, they have no *explanation*, even if they are *a priori*.

⁵ Another point is that this is Russellian monists have their only problems with mental causation (Howell; cf. also Denis Robinson's similar *swapping argument*, "Epiphenomenalism, Properties and Laws", 1992, p. 17ff). My paper and Howell's paper can be seen as companions: I'm against the simplicity argument for RM over dualism, and he's against the mental causation argument for RM over dualism.

⁶ Interestingly, this point is implicit in Smart's seminal paper (last page). *Inductive argument? Replies*: (i) Different beasts (ii) Schaffer. (iii) Like laws. *Luck argument? Reply*: Russellian monism as well as dualism requires luck (see my paper). *Everything intelligible* (Goff). No!

⁷ Russellian monists themselves tend to emphasize humility – they say we don't know what masses and charges and etc. are like. I am saying that, if they are primitivists, they should extend their humility towards the issue of the *status* of the extra-logical bridge principles.