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Panpsychism and the First-Person Perspective: The Case for Panpsychist Idealism

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Abstract

In this paper I argue for a version of panpsychist idealism on first-person experiential grounds. As things always appear in my field of consciousness, there is *prima facie* empirical support for idealism. Furthermore, by assuming that all things correspond to a conscious perspective or perspectives (i.e., panpsychism), realism about the world is safeguarded without the need to appeal to God (as per Berkeley's idealism). Panpsychist idealism also has a phenomenological advantage over traditional panpsychist views as it does not commit perceptual experience to massive error by denying that perceived colors are properties of things. Finally, I argue that the subject combination problem for panpsychism has been motivated by the problematic assumption that consciousness is in things. Thinking about subject combination from the first-person perspective is fruitful for reframing the subject combination problem and for seeing how subjects could potentially combine for the idealist.

1. Introduction

Panpsychism has been gaining ground in recent times as an alternative to physicalism (Chalmers 2015, Goff 2017a, Mørch 2014, Strawson 2006). The main motivation for panpsychism has been that it provides an answer to the hard problem of consciousness. There is nothing in neuroscience that predicts the arising of conscious experience. Any particular brain function it seems could be performed equally well without any consciousness: So why should consciousness be needed at all?

David Chalmers (1996, 2010) formalized this intuition in the conceivability argument. We can conceive of physical and functional duplicates of ourselves who are phenomenal zombies. They act just as we do, have the same physical constitution, and their physical states perform all of the same functions, and yet there is nothing it is like to be them. This argument aims to demonstrate that there is no necessary connection between

standard physical properties and phenomenal qualities, hence phenomenal qualities cannot be reduced to physical properties, but must instead be fundamental.[1]

The hard problem of consciousness motivates dualism about consciousness in which both physical and mental properties are fundamental, but not identical (Chalmers 1996). However, dualism suffers from the problem of causal exclusion. It is highly intuitive that mental states have causal effects. For instance, the feeling of scorching pain causes my arm to move away from the fire. However, the reactions of my nervous system to the heat seem to be all that it needed to explain why I moved my arm, which apparently makes non-physical properties redundant to the causal explanation (Kim 1998). The background assumption is that an effect cannot have two sufficient causes except in rare cases such as a window being broken by being hit by a rock and a cricket ball at exactly the same time. However, dualism seems to entail either systematic causal overdetermination or that mental states are epiphenomenal. The promise of avoiding both the hard problem and causal overdetermination is a strong motivation for panpsychism (Chalmers 2015).

In many versions of panpsychism, at least some fundamental matter has phenomenal properties. We can call this family of views "panpsychist materialism". Russellian panpsychism falls in this category. Russellian panpsychism, for example, attempts to solve the hard problem of consciousness by proposing that phenomenal properties are the intrinsic properties of fundamental matter. Since phenomenal properties are fundamental, there is no question of how they arise from non-experiential phenomena.[2] Furthermore, since phenomenal properties are the intrinsic nature of matter it arguably does not suffer from the problem of the causal exclusion faced by dualism (Chalmers 2015).

Unfortunately, this apparently promising approach has its own "hard problem" of explaining how the micro-experiences of my fundamental components constitute my macro-experience. This is the combination problem for panpsychism (Chalmers 2016).

Given this stumbling block for traditional versions of panpsychism, it is worthwhile investigating an alternative that has been rather neglected

[1] "Physicalism" which I use interchangeably with "materialism" is the view that fundamental reality is wholly physical (e.g., Goff 2017a, p. 23). Galen Strawson (2006a) refers to Russellian panpsychism as a type of physicalism ("Real Physicalism"), as physicalism technically remains true. This, however, is a controversial move, as physicalists usually assume that fundamental matter is non-mental. I will be assuming here that materialism is the view that fundamental reality is wholly physical and wholly non-mental. By contrast, idealism is the view that fundamental reality is wholly mental. I clarify the differences between idealist and materialist versions of panpsychism in Section 2.

[2] See Bolender (2001) for an argument that this Russellian move itself already implies idealism.

in contemporary philosophy – panpsychist idealism.[3] While panpsychist materialism begins with the bold hypothesis that phenomenal properties are the intrinsic nature of matter, panpsychist idealism begins with the phenomenological observation that, on the contrary, things are always presented in the field of consciousness. There is no observational evidence that consciousness is actually a hidden "inner" property of things. No one has ever opened up a brain, or cut open a cell, or broken apart a molecule and found consciousness in there. For the idealist, the reason for this is rather obvious. Brains and other material objects are appearances in the field of consciousness and so cannot themselves be the bearers of that consciousness. Materialism, and common sense for that matter, invert the way that we experience the world.

Both materialism and panpsychist materialism hold that human consciousness is in brains, which are objects in physical space. By contrast, idealism reverses this view, holding that brains and spatial properties are in the field of consciousness. This key difference leads to phenomenological and epistemological divergences between the views. The materialist assumption that phenomenal properties are in things creates a separation between the experiences of objects and the objects themselves. This assumption seems to strip physical objects of their sensible qualities, which I hold leads to phenomenological and epistemological disadvantages for panpsychist materialism that do not affect idealism.

Furthermore, the unquestioned notion that consciousness is in things, I will claim, is also at the heart of the combination problem for panpsychism. It is difficult to see how subjects could combine when they are imagined as hidden ghostly presences trapped inside things. However, from the first-person perspective my field of consciousness does not seem to be bounded by a thing, or so I claim. Approaching the subject of experience from the first-person perspective, as idealists do, has the potential to shift our understanding on this issue.

The motivation of this article is hence to provide phenomenological arguments for idealism. The approach uses phenomenology as a guide to metaphysics in combination with taking seriously the findings of the

[3]For recent versions of panpsychist idealism see Albahari (2019, 2020), Harding (1998), Sprigge (1983). Hoffman (2008) presents a close relative of panpsychist idealism in which reality is composed of a network of interacting conscious agents, but he denies that this is panpsychism because not all things correspond to a conscious perspective. However, this is also the case for most panpsychists in that tables and chairs are not conscious (Griffin 1998). The main difference seems to be that Hoffman takes objects to be icons for conscious agents that are often very different to the underlying reality. Hence the network of conscious agents does not necessarily correspond to the way things are presented. Atoms, molecules and cells, may or may not correspond to conscious agents. This being said, as reality is ultimately a network of conscious subjects (many of them not corresponding to organisms), this view could count as a version of panpsychist idealism as I understand it.

sciences. Such an approach, which can be referred to as "analytic phenomenology", is beginning to be defended and taken up by some philosophers (Goff 2017a, Chap. 10, Ramm 2017, Siewert 2016, Strawson 2009, Velmans 2000).[4] In my view, this science-inspired approach which takes seriously our phenomenological data is one of the surest methods for avoiding the possibility that, when we do metaphysics, we are merely playing games with words.[5]

Why use phenomenology as a guide to metaphysics? Since first-person experience is a basic form of evidence (Goldman 2004), we do not need to justify the assumption that experience can show the nature of the world. Beginning with the way things are given, is simply more scientific than ignoring this evidence or dismissing it. The assumption is not that this evidence is infallible, but that it provides *prima facie* defeasible justification for metaphysical claims. The burden of proof, I claim, is on the objector who wants to disregard the first-person evidence.

In this paper, I will present phenomenological arguments for panpsychist idealism which draw upon the work of Douglas Harding (1998).[6] Harding was a non-academic philosopher and mystic whose central philosophical work *The Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth* was first published in the 1950s (Harding 1952). His work anticipates some of the contemporary arguments for panpsychism and idealism, but has so far received little attention from philosophers. As panpsychist idealism is a relatively unexplored view in contemporary philosophy, here I can only provide an initial sketch of some of its features and how it relates to other views.[7]

The plan for the paper is as follows. In Sec. 2, I outline Harding's version of panpsychist idealism and contrast it with panpsychist materialism. In Sec. 3, I provide a phenomenological argument for panpsychist idealism. I will also argue that the panpsychist component of the theory is consistent with scientific realism, and hence it avoids the main problems

[4]The use of first-person methods is controversial in philosophy and psychology. Critiques of the reliability of first-person methods have been made by Dennett (1991), Irvine (2012), Piccinini (2010), Schwitzgebel (2011). For defences against common objections see Ramm (2016, 2018).

[5]On the apparent lack of progress of contemporary analytic metaphysics see Bennett (2009), Goff (2017a, Chap. 10), Mulligan *et al.* (2006), Schneider (2013), Unger (2014), Van Inwagen (2009).

[6]I will provide citations whenever I am directly using Harding's arguments. The rest of the paper represents my own endeavours to apply these ideas to contemporary problems and to flesh out his arguments in more detail. For instance, the phenomenological argument for panpsychist idealism in Sec. 2 is my own argument inspired by his first-person observations and empiricist principles.

[7]In the West, historical proponents of versions of panpsychist idealism (usually though not always combined with a cosmic subject or "absolute") tentatively include Leibniz (1714), Schopenhauer (1844), Royce (1899-1901), Bradley (1893), and Ward (1911), who has been almost entirely forgotten by philosophers. See Skrbina (2005) for a historical overview.

of subjective idealism. In Sec. 4, I discuss the advantages of idealism when it comes to accounting for colors and in knowing the world. In Sec. 5, I aim to show how approaching the subject combination problem from the first-person perspective reframes the problem and provides a new way of conceiving how subjects could potentially combine.

2. Panpsychist Idealism

In this section, I outline a system of panpsychist idealism developed by Douglas Harding (1998). I then identify three key metaphysical differences between panpsychist idealism and panpsychist materialism. In the rest of the paper, I will provide a motivation for this metaphysics and contrast it with opposing views, particularly Berkeleyan idealism, materialism and panpsychist materialism.

2.1 Outline of a System of Panpsychist Idealism

The current approach to panpsychist idealism draws upon Douglas Harding's *Hierarchy of Heaven and Earth* (Harding 1998) which was originally published as an abridged version in 1952 (Harding 1952). In this work, Harding presents a systematic integration of the Perennial Philosophy and the scientific world view.[8] This is a sophisticated system that I cannot do justice to here. However, some key elements of this system include:

1. Reality consists of a network of interacting observers that exist only by reflecting each other's appearances.
2. Observers are not atomistic, rather they overlap.
3. How a thing manifests itself depends upon the range from which it is observed.
4. There is a central "Nothingness" which is the origin and ground of all things.
5. This "Nothingness" is the inside story of all beings and is directly experienceable.[9]

[8]The "Perennial Philosophy" was coined by Huxley (1946) to refer to the mysticism common to many religious traditions. It holds (a) that the innermost Reality of all beings transcends space, time and causation and (b) that this fundamental reality is directly experienceable by humans. Albahari (2019, 2020) refers to this reality as an aperspectival unconditioned consciousness that grounds all things.

[9]By "Nothingness" Harding is not referring to mere non-existence, but to a qualityless, spaceless, timeless ground of the universe (e.g., Harding 1998, p. 108). In later work, he uses "Nothingness" interchangeably with "Awareness" and "Consciousness" (e.g., Harding 1992, p. 44).

This version of panpsychism is like Leibniz's monadology, except that there is genuine causal interaction between subjects. Other differences from Leibniz include that subjects are not atomistic, rather they are co-dependent (they cannot exist without one another) (point 1) and unlike Leibniz, perspectives also overlap (point 2). I will focus on points 1 and 2 in this paper.

Douglas Harding proposes that we take experience exactly as it is given; that is, his methodology is in the tradition of William James' "radical empiricism" (James 1912). He observes that from my first-person perspective I cannot see my head. What I am looking out of is gap-like rather than thing-like. Furthermore, unlike ordinary gaps like the gap of an open doorway, this "gap" or "nothingness" from which I am looking is not in anything (it has no frame), that is, it is unbounded (Ramm 2021, p. 7). However, this opening is not a mere nothing because it is filled with the visual scene (Harding 1986, p. 2). These phenomenological observations will become important in Sec. 5 when I discuss how subjects could conceivably combine for the idealist.

What am I like for others? Once again taking a phenomenological approach, Harding (1998) observed that how I manifest myself to others depends upon the range of the observer. For example, I appear as a human from a few meters away and at closer ranges as cells, molecules, atoms, particles, to virtually nothing at center (zero distance).[10] From further ranges, I appear as a city (such as when viewed from an airplane), a planet (such as when viewed from the moon), a star (such as when viewed from Alpha Centauri), a galaxy (when viewed from another galaxy).[11] A thing then is the totality of its appearances to other observers at all ranges. Furthermore, all things are two-sided.[12] There is no view into a

[10]Here "appear" is used in a broad sense to include the cognitive and imaginative experience, since we don't actually see or feel atoms and particles.

[11]How observers can be understood to be located at different ranges or distances from each other is potentially problematic on an idealist account, since subjects/perspectives themselves are not located "in" an objective physical space. My interpretation of Harding is that space is intersubjectively constituted. As all observers are two-sided, they will appear as objects that are positioned at a particular distance from each other for other observers. From the third-person perspective, observers are also standard objects that appear to move through space. However, from the first-person perspective, me moving closer or further away from an object is partly recognized by changes in the appearance of the object itself (e.g., Harding 1998, p. 13). For example, it looks bigger or smaller, and more or less detail can be distinguished etc. To say then that how things manifest themselves depends upon the range of observation can be cashed out as a systematic correspondence between (1) how far two observers A and B appear or can be measured from each other for observers C, D, E, ... and (2) how observers A and B appear to each other. I cannot give a fully-fledged account of intersubjective space for idealism here nor assess how compatible it is with current physical theories of space.

[12]The notion that all things are two-sided is similar to that of Russell (1927) that all things have an extrinsic physical nature and an intrinsic mental nature.

center without a view out (or views out), hence the system is thoroughly panpsychist.

That for an approaching observer, I seem to become less and less thing-like, until I am mostly empty space, Harding takes as confirmation that the "nothingness" that I am looking out of is my fundamental reality (Harding 1998). In fact, this is the innermost nature of all beings. As this central nothingness is directly experienceable, his system is a version of the Perennial Philosophy. I set aside investigating his arguments for this mystical hypothesis for another time. Here I focus on the relevance of his approach to contemporary theories of panpsychism.

In this system, subjects cannot exist independently of each other. Rather subjects exist in networks in which they reflect the appearances of other subjects. They do not exist when there is nothing to reflect (they are nothing in themselves). He refers to my capacity to reflect the world with the term "reflection". However, perception is not an entirely passive process, since what is reflected here at my center is projected as over there. For example, I see how another subject appears at three meters away, such as a human appearance. However, I project them as being over there (not as residing here where I am).

Furthermore, imagery is regularly projected which does not correspond to others' perspectives such as hallucinations, illusions and dreams. All perception is in fact creative. The difference between phantoms (dreams, hallucinations, illusions) and everyday perceptual experiences is a difference in degree rather than kind. The latter are projected by fewer subjects in the network and are less systematic and coherent and hence "less real" while the latter are projected by more subjects and are more systematic and coherent and hence "more real" (Harding 1998, Chap. 3).[13]

This theory in its broad outline echoes that of the ancient Buddhist metaphor of Indra's net (Cook 1977, p. 2):

> Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net which has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in dimension, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars in the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover

[13] Albahari (2019) presents a very similar view of panpsychist idealism. Rather than "reflection" and "projection" she refers to the disposition for a subject to appear to other subjects as particular cognisensory object imagery (outer dispositions) and the disposition of a subject to experience other subjects based upon its own particular nature (inner dispositions). In this sense, the dispositions are co-dependent and how subjects manifest themselves to each other will depend upon the particular "disposition partners" (Albahari 2019, pp. 38-40). See also Albahari (2020).

> that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring

Indra's net provides an illustration of the Buddhist theory of the interdependence of all phenomena. Things are "empty" in that they do not have a separate self-existence. Thich Naht Hanh (1998) explains the Buddhist notion of emptiness in terms of "inter-being". This avoids the nihilist interpretation that the emptiness of the self simply means that the self does not exist. The Buddha sought a middle way between separate substantial selves and nihilism or the non-existence of the self. The notion of inter-being is a useful way of understanding emptiness, while avoiding the mistake of taking the doctrine of non-self to be eliminativism about the self.

If we further stipulate that the jewels in the story are conscious observers, then the result is a version of thorough-going panpsychism. However, the subjects are not substances or souls in the traditional sense because they cannot exist independently of each other. Rather, they are nodes in a network. There are no nodes without the network in which they are embedded. Take away the network and there are no nodes. Neither is there a network without nodes.

2.2 Distinguishing Idealist and Materialist Versions of Panpsychism

Having provided an outline of a system of panpsychist idealism, we are now in a position to contrast it with panpsychist materialism as follows:

1. For idealism things are observer-dependent, while for materialism they are observer-independent.
2. For idealism experiences are properties of subjects, while for materialism experiences are properties of matter.
3. Idealism is subject-centered, while materialism is object-centered.

As both reductive materialism and traditional panpsychism are on the same side for all three points and against idealism on these same points, this provides a motivation for distinguishing between idealist and materialist versions of panpsychism.

I will now outline these points in more detail. The key difference between the views lie in whether or not things are observer-independent. Traditional Western idealism, from Berkeley onwards, holds that to be is to be perceived (*esse est percipi*). Panpsychist idealism adds the further proviso that to be perceived is also to be a perceiver or perceivers (Harding 1998, p. 55). In another sense of the term"idealism", however, both

versions of panpsychism can be considered idealist because all things are broadly mind-dependent. For panpsychist idealism things depend upon consciousness because they are observer-dependent, while for panpsychist materialism (particularly Russellian panpsychism) things are dependent upon consciousness because phenomenal properties are the intrinsic nature of things. I will reserve the label "idealist" only for views in which things are observer-dependent.

The second key difference is the location of phenomenal properties. For idealism, phenomenal properties belong to fields of consciousness (subjects), while for materialist versions of panpsychism, phenomenal properties are the hidden inner nature of things. Loosely speaking, for the former things are in consciousness, while for the latter consciousness is in things.

The third key difference is what entities figure predominantly in the ontology of the theories. Panpsychist idealism is subject-centered. In particular, reality consists of interacting networks of subjects. Space, time and physical processes all reduce to the properties and activities of these intersubjective networks. Panpsychist materialism is centered on objects, processes and causal structures. On a macro-scale, reality consists of interacting objects existing in objective space. On a micro-scale, reality consists in whatever current physics tells us, whether this be objects, fields, waves, or causal structures. The main difference of panpsychism from reductive materialism, then, is that at least some of the physical fundaments have phenomenal properties. Some versions of panpsychist materialism will deny that subjects exist at all (Coleman 2012, 2014).

These key differences mean that the theories diverge significantly on some epistemic and metaphysical issues. In Secs. 4 and 5, I will argue that idealist versions of panpsychism generally fair better than materialist versions, particularly in accounting for colors and in dealing with the combination problem. Before this, in the next section, I will motivate the view using an argument from phenomenology and outline its advantages over Berkeleyan idealism and materialism. I will also respond to the objection that first-person centered approaches inevitably lead to solipsism.

3. The Phenomenological Argument for Panpsychist Idealism

A major point of difference between panpsychist idealism and panpsychist materialism is that the former holds that things are observer-dependent, while the latter rejects this. In this section, I will provide a motivation for the observer-dependence of things and provide reasons why panpsychism could in principle be considered to provide a better explanation than its competitors for the regularity of the world.

3.1 The Observer-Dependence of Objects

In idealism things are observer-dependent. To understand this claim we need to have an understanding of what an "observer" is. By an observer, or a subject, I will mean a field of awareness.[14] The reason for thinking that objects are observer-dependent is that things always appear in a field of awareness. By "in", I mean that things are subsumed by a field of awareness (a subject). Things are always a part of or an element of a field of awareness.

As an illustration, consider visually experienced objects. Visually observed things, including my own body, always appear in my visual field. I have never encountered colors outside of my visual field. In fact, no one has ever observed colors outside of a visual field. For example, consider Figure 1. This figure visually depicts what it was like for me to see the Grand Canyon. As can be seen, the vast expanse of the canyon and my visually experienced body both appear in my visual field. At the edges the field fades out, until there is visually nothing. Again, there is nothing sensorily outside of one's field of experience, and hence it is unbounded from the first-person perspective.

Figure 1: Visual experience at the Grand Canyon

Of course, my first-person experience is not just visual, it is multimodal. We investigate other senses in the following first-person experiment.

[14] Many contemporary philosophers are deflationists or even eliminativists about subjects (Coleman 2014, Dainton 2008, Metzinger 2003, Zahavi 2011). For arguments against the deflation of subjects see Albahari (2006), Morris (2017), Nešić (2017), Nida-Rümelin (2014), Ramm (2017). Strawson (2009) holds an intermediate view in which the subject only exists synchronically but not diachronically, such that each moment is a new subject. For readers that hold that subjects are an illusion (or perhaps deny that there are multiple subjects), the term "perspectives" can be used in place of "subjects" and a version of panpsychism (or panperspectivism) will still follow. To deny that there are multiple perspectives is, of course, solipsism which presumably most will want to avoid.

The Closed Eye Experiment[15]

> Please close your eyes and attend to your bodily sensations. How many toes do you have in your present experience? Are the feelings of a static, precisely shaped body that is felt all at once? Or are the sensations ever-changing and shapeless? Attend to your facial sensations, including its regions of warmth and tension. Do you feel a well-defined shape? Would you even know the contours of your face if you had never seen or touched it? Are you in a body on present evidence, or are these sensations in your awareness? Listen to the sounds of the room. Are your thoughts currently occurring in a head-box that separates it from these sounds? Or is there no dividing line between thoughts and sounds? Now try touching your head. Notice that you now feel the precise shape of your nose, cheeks and forehead. Notice also that you don't feel your head all at once. As you touch your ears the feeling of your nose has faded. Are you in these touch sensations? Do they box you in? Or are they also in your awareness? Do bodily sensations, thoughts and sounds occur in separate fields of experience, or are they occurring in a single awareness?

Whenever I encounter a thing it is in my field of experience, it is in awareness. Albahari (2009) calls this a "mode neutral awareness", since it encompasses all sensory modalities. There is no empirical evidence that things can exist outside of a subject's awareness.[16]

All of the observational evidence that we have is that things always appear in a field of awareness. As an empiricist, Douglas Harding takes this setup as a model of the structure of reality in general.[17] He holds that as a principle we should infer from the known to the unknown, rather than from the unknown to the unknown (Harding 1998, pp. 210f, 264). Since we know of no other manner in which things manifest themselves, we can infer that things always manifest themselves in consciousness. This inference is the safest bet because it does not involve any speculative metaphysical leaps.

The strongest reason for holding that there are observer-independent objects, as suggested above, is that this provides the best explanation for the regularity of the world. Answering this reply is the second step of the argument for a panpsychist version of idealism.

Suppose that I have a vase on the shelf of my study by the window. I leave the room and when I come back the vase is shattered on the floor. What happened? I know that it is a windy day, so it seems likely that a strong gust of wind blew the curtain into the vase which knocked it

[15] For examples of the closed eye experiment see Harding (2000, pp. 56-60), Lang (2003, pp. 35-38, 2016, pp. 41-48), Ramm (2017, pp. 157–158).

[16] Strawson (2006, p. 20) makes similar remarks about the lack of evidence of any non-experiential reality.

[17] A similar phenomenological approach is taken by Mach (1890).

off of the shelf. This seems to be the best explanation, however, as no other observers were present this explanation is not available to subjective forms of idealism. For phenomenalists such as Mill (1865), the continuity of objects is based upon a permanent possibility of experience. Since there was no one to observe this to happen, all that can be said is that there is now a disposition for the vase to appear broken on the floor. But this is a description of the new experience, not an explanation of it. The best explanation for the regularity of the world seems to be (at least on the macro-level) that it operates in much the same fashion whether I am there to observe it or not. Hence there are mind-independent things.[18]

This is a strong reason for rejecting subjective forms of idealism such as phenomenalism. However, the argument from regularity only provides a reason for holding that things continue to exist independently of my own mind, not that they exist independently of all minds. Hence, objective forms of idealism remain in play, such as Berkeleyan idealism in which God safeguards the regularity of the world by observing it when we are not.

That God needs to exist to maintain the regularity and continuity of the world will already be enough for most philosophers to abandon idealism at this point. However, we do not need that the further subject be God. Rather it can be assumed that there are other subjects which are experiencing the events that led to the vase being shattered. In fact, for panpsychism the situation is redescribed as the evolving interaction of subjects which correspond to the wind particles, the curtain molecules, the vase molecules and the floor molecules. How the vase was shattered can then (at least in principle) be explained using entities from science, with the difference that the entities in the story are interacting conscious observers rather than mind-independent things.

This theory is consistent with current scientific theories on cosmological and biological evolution. These processes do indeed occur without human observers; however, so-called matter and its physical interactions are replaced by interacting conscious subjects.

[18]Russell (1912, Chap. II) argues for the existence of mind-independent matter as the best explanation of the regularity of the world He uses the example of a cat that gets hungry between meals. If it only exists when I am perceiving it, but not in the intervening interval (setting aside the cat's experience of itself), there seems to be no reason why it would be hungry. Some of the many arguments against phenomenalism have been presented by Armstrong (1961, Chaps. 5 and 6, 2004, pp. 1f). An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the existence of mind-independent things doesn't explain the regularity of the world in as much as to provide a background condition for there to be an explanation at all. In any case, as phenomenalism rejects mind-independent things, there doesn't seem to be an explanation available to it for the regularity of the world.

3.2 Advantages over Berkeleyan Idealism

In this section, I will argue that panpsychist idealism should be preferred to Berkeleyan versions of idealism. In Bishop Berkeley's objective idealism things continue to exist because God is always observing them (Berkeley 1969, second dialogue, p. 75):[19]

> Sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind or spirit. Whence I conclude, not that they have no real existence, but that, seeing they depend not on my thought, and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me, there must be some other Mind wherein they exist. As sure, therefore, as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite omnipresent Spirit who contains and supports it.

Berkeley held that only God could play the role of the subject that safeguards the regularity of the world. Some might prefer the God hypothesis to panpsychism because panpsychism introduces numerous subjects in contrast to one infinite subject. However, panpsychism is superior to the God hypothesis for explaining the regularity of the world because I already know that at least one finite conscious perspective exists (my own), and have good reasons to think that there are many finite conscious perspectives (see my comments on solipsism in Sec. 3.4 below), whereas we have no independent evidence or strong reasons for thinking that an infinite subject exists. Occam's razor applies to not multiplying types of entities without good cause, not to entities that are already known. Panpsychism is hence metaphysically simpler because it employs a type of subject that we already know exists to explain the world's continuity. The God hypothesis is more metaphysically complex because it introduces a new type of entity, a transcendent infinite subject, to explain the continued existence of the world.[20]

Berkeley's argument that God needs to exist to explain the continuity of the world, is an inference to the best explanation and hence it is vulnerable to better explanations such as panpsychism. An alternative explanation to God is that things continue to exist without humans to experience them (or any other animals for that matter) because every concrete thing corresponds to a conscious perspective, or an aggregation of conscious perspectives.[21] In this way, the regularity of the world can arguably be explained using entities which we already know to exist, without the need to appeal to God.

[19] Foster (2008) provides a recent defense of Berkeleyan idealism. Yetter-Chappell (2017) argues for a version of Berkeley's idealism with a stripped-down notion of God.

[20] Goff (2017a, pp. 169f) has also put forward a simplicity argument for panpsychism.

[21] Tables and rocks are usually assumed by the panpsychist to be associated with an aggregation of conscious perspectives, rather than having their own fully-fledged conscious perspectives (e.g., Harding 1998, pp. 119f).

3.3 The Simplicity Argument Against Materialism

The simplicity argument against Berkeleyan idealism can also be run against materialism. On the face of it, traditional materialism is metaphysically simpler than panpsychism. Inferring that cells, molecules and atoms are conscious just seems extravagant. Why are not non-conscious non-mental objects the best explanation for the regularity of the world?

The short answer is that we do not have any observational evidence for the existence of mind-independent matter. How could we? All observations involve things appearing in a field of experience. As Kastrup (2019, p. 22) puts it:

> physically objective matter is not an observable fact, but a conceptual explanatory device abstracted from the patterns and regularities of observable facts – that is, an explanatory abstraction.

Still, one may ask: if can we infer the existence of numerous experiencing subjects, why isn't it equally legitimate to infer the existence of non-mental objects? In answering this question, we can again draw upon the epistemic principle that inferring from the known to the unknown should be preferred over inferring from the unknown to the unknown (Harding 1998). We know that at least one subject exists (ourselves), whereas we don't know that any non-mental objects exist. The former inference is a case of empirical induction, while the latter is a case of metaphysical speculation. Panpsychism uses entities that we already know to exist to explain the world, while both Berkeleyan idealism and materialism posit empirically unknowable entities. Assuming, then, that we do not need non-mental objects to explain the regularity of the world, panpsychist idealism is explanatorily simpler and more empirically-based, and hence is a better explanation.

The limitation of this argument is that it relies upon the conditional "if panpsychist idealism has equal explanatory power to materialism, then it is a better explanation". The argument from simplicity is hence tempered by the fact that it is still an open question whether all regularities described by physics can be explained by panpsychist idealism (i.e., at least as well as materialism), including space-time, causation, physical fields, quantum physics, and relativistic effects (Chalmers 2019).

3.4 The Threat of Solipsism

The simplicity argument which I wielded against Berkeleyan idealism and materialism turns out to be a double-edged sword. If one should reject matter on the grounds of simplicity, then it seems that one should also reject the existence of others' minds since these are also unobservable. This problem can be thought of as perhaps an almost inevitable outcome of using phenomenology as the primary guide to metaphysics.

For example, both Descartes and Berkeley began from the first-person perspective and both were plagued by the problem of how to avoid solipsism (e.g., Henkel 2012). Perhaps, this is one reason among many why Cartesian-like approaches are so actively avoided and treated with suspicion by contemporary thinkers.

However, this dismissal of first-person centered approaches is too quick. Phenomenological approaches have come a long way since Descartes and the British empiricists. In particular, more recent first-person approaches hold that experience is far richer in content than admitted by Descartes, Berkeley or Hume. According to the phenomenological and Gestalt traditions our experience of the world is not composed of atomic impressions, but rather of things and their properties (Köhler 1947, Merleau-Ponty 1945). Moreover, the lived world is infused with meaning and value (e.g., Köhler 1939).

In particular, according to the phenomenological tradition the primary reason we believe in other minds is not inferential, but based upon pretheoretical experience. We read the emotions in others' faces, hear the distress in someone's voice, see the intention in others' actions (Gallagher and Zahavi 2013, Chap. 9, Merleau-Ponty 1945, p. 214) and experience objects as public (Husserl 1960). This primordial experience, which the later Husserl refers to as the life-world, already includes the perspectives of others implicit within it and our shared social and historical meanings (Husserl 1970).

Hence, rather than thinking that an approach based upon first-person experience inevitably slides into solipsism, I believe that the opposite is true. Solipsism seems so perverse because it radically contradicts our first-person experience. Just as the fact that things always appear in consciousness provides *prima facie* evidence for idealism, the meaning that infuses conscious experience that others have perspectives provides *prima facie* evidence for their minds.

This response is not meant as a solution to the problem of other minds, but rather the goal is the more modest one of defending the phenomenological/simplicity argument for panpsychist idealism. There are also other motivations for holding this position, as we will see. The metaphysical theory considered in itself, however, is decidedly anti-solipsistic. In this theory, a subject's experience is composed of an array of the "outer" side of numerous subjects impinging upon its consciousness.[22] Subjects do not exist except by reflecting each other. That is, subjects are intersubjectively constituted and so solipsism is false by definition on this view.

[22] I am drawing on Albahari (2019, pp. 38f) for this way of articulating the position.

4. Phenomenological and Epistemological Drawbacks of Panpsychist Materialism

In the previous section, I argued that panpsychist idealism has theoretical advantages over Berkeleyan idealism and materialism. Here I will argue that there are significant phenomenological and epistemological disadvantages for panpsychist materialism that arise by it assuming that experiences are the hidden properties of matter. These disadvantages do not apply to idealism.

4.1 Phenomenological Disadvantages of Panpsychist Materialism

A major difference between idealist and materialist versions of panpsychism is in where the views locate phenomenal properties. Here I will focus on colors. For panpsychist idealism colors are the properties of observed objects just as they appear. For example, the redness of a rose's petals seems to qualify the rose's petals. For panpsychist materialism, however, colors merely seem to be properties of objects. Roses are not actually red – they merely seem that way. Rather phenomenal properties of red are actually the property of something else – e.g., brain states. This view has both phenomenological and epistemological drawbacks which do not apply to idealism.

Materialist forms of panpsychism hold that the sensory qualities of human consciousness are instantiated in brains, while perceived physical things are outside in the external world. It hence establishes a spatial duality between sensory qualities and things in the world. As this view conflicts with how we experience the world, it commits perceptual experience to massive systematic error. Things are not really colored, rather color is presumably projected "out there" onto physical things. This is a kind of anti-realism about color in that it eliminates it from the "external" physical world. Idealism on the other hand is realist about color, and like naive realism accepts that things are as they appear. This result gives idealism a phenomenological advantage over panpsychist materialism. While this is not a knockdown argument for idealism, it is a theoretical virtue that panpsychist idealism has over its materialist competitor.[23]

This argument can be extended by looking further at a point on which both idealist and non-idealist versions of panpsychism agree. My experience of the color red strongly suggests that I experience something of its essential nature just by having the experience. In particular, our experience seems to reveal the essential nature of colors as non-relational

[23] Maund (2006) defends an illusory theory of color and holds that, although physical objects aren't actually colored, it is sufficient for preserving our everyday linguistic practices that they systematically appear as if they were colored.

properties (Goff 2017a, Chap. 5, Nida-Rümelin 2007). Color is hence not really just a causal or functional property of the brain (or at least not apparently so). By making phenomenal properties the intrinsic properties of matter rather than reducing them to non-qualitative properties (e.g., functional states), panpsychism preserves our knowledge of our phenomenal experiences.

Goff turns the intuition that experience reveals its essential nature into an argument against materialism (the revelation argument; Goff 2011, 2015, 2017a, Chap. 5; see also Nida-Rümelin 2007). This argument is as follows:[24]

1. *Phenomenal red* provides an essential characterization of its referent, phenomenal red.
2. *Phenomenal red* doesn't provide a physical/functional characterization of phenomenal red.
3. If *phenomenal red* provides an essential but not a physical/functional characterization of phenomenal red then this property isn't a physical/functional property.
4. Hence, *phenomenal red* isn't a physical/functional property.

Whether or not this argument succeeds, one of the challenges for panpsychist materialism is this: if introspection reveals the essential nature of colors, then what justification is there for ignoring the experiential fact that colors also apparently qualify things? In seeing the leaf, its greenness is not experienced as being in my head, but as qualifying the leaf. Color is never presented as a sensory atom, but as spatially extended and located, in particular as a property of things.

By contrast, idealism combines the strengths of both revelation and color realism (Bryne and Hilbert 2007). Idealism allows that I know the nature of color and at the same time roses really are red. There is no need to revise the naive concept of color so that it means something else (e.g., surface reflectance, disjunctive properties). There is a complication for idealism, though, in that what we will mean by saying "the rose is red" is that it appears red to particular observers in specific conditions. Other creatures and some humans won't see the rose as red at all. In accepting color realism, the idealist is only committed to the rose being colored, not that it has a fixed context-independent color. For the idealist colors belong to things and hence there is no systematic error. Sensory qualities seem to be properties of things, and in fact they are. However, it also turns out that these things are mind-dependent.

[24]This version of the argument is taken from Trogdon (2017, p. 2349). Trogdon provides a critique of the argument, but holds that it is works mostly strongly as a counter-response to the phenomenal concepts strategy.

Although Bryne and Hilbert (2007) acknowledge the strengths of Berkeley's color realism, they go on to say that this unique combination of theoretical virtues is "purchased at the rather steep price of idealism" (p. 80). Usually, idealism about colors is reflexively discounted by philosophers because it is assumed that this requires giving up on scientific realism. However, as I have argued here, panpsychist idealism can preserve both scientific realism and color realism.[25]

4.2 Epistemological Disadvantages of Panpsychist Materialism

So far, I have outlined the phenomenological advantages of panpsychist idealism over panpsychist materialism. The view that colors (and all phenomenal qualities) are illusory also has epistemological drawbacks, particularly in conceiving of physical objects and knowing that they exist.

According to idealists such as Berkeley colors that do not qualify things are mere abstractions – the artificial invention of philosophers. Since panpsychists such as Goff (2017a) think that phenomenology should guide metaphysics, why not go the whole-hog to idealism and hold that colors are properties of observed objects and that things are always part of a field of consciousness?

In response to this objection, in the context of discussing nave realism, Goff (2017a, p. 114) argues that:

> When one goes through the process of Cartesian doubt – doubting the external world and then realizing that one cannot doubt the reality of one's own experience – one immediately realizes that the properties one is aware of in experience are possibly separable, or at the very least conceivably separable, from the properties of the objects of experience.

Of course, a panpsychist idealist will agree that the tree I see does indeed exist when I am not perceiving it, but deny that it can exist without any observers whatsoever. When you take away all of its appearances to all observers, and hence all of its sensible qualities, there is nothing tree-like left of it. Furthermore, there is nothing remaining or hardly anything remaining to the idea's content. The inconceivability of physical objects without their sensible properties is in fact one of the most important of

[25]There are similarities between an idealist account of colors and the relationist account (Cohen 2004) in that both hold that colors depend upon conscious observers and vary by context and species. However, for the idealist, colors are ultimately non-relational properties of minds (Maund 2006). At the same time idealism allows that color is a property of objects themselves (since objects manifest themselves in minds) and so has similarities to the naive realist, also called the "simple" or "primitivist", view of color (Campbell 1994, 2005, Gert 2008, McGinn 1996, Watkins 2005). Again, idealism presents an apparently promising hybrid of contemporary theories of color that has not so far been explored by philosophers (for a review see Maund 2019).

Berkeley's arguments against materialism (Berkeley 1965, first dialogue, p. 157):

> *Philonous:* Try if you can frame the idea of any figure, abstracted from all particularities of size, or even from other sensible ideas.
> *Hylas:* Let me think a little – I do not find that I can ...
> *Philonous:* Since it is impossible even for the mind to disunite the ideas of extension and motion from all other sensible qualities, doth it not follow, that where the one exist there necessarily the other exist likewise?

Setting aside whether this shows that extension necessarily has sensible properties, let us try Berkeley's exercise. Try for example imagining an invisible tree. If you are like me and can't, then consider that matter without sensible properties is also like this. What is spatial extension, hardness or resistance without any visual or tactile experience? I have no idea.

Berkeley has been criticized for confusing imagining and conceiving (Gallois 1974). So perhaps I can conceive of the tree without any of its sensible qualities in a purely intellectual way. Suppose that I succeed in doing so; this purely abstract structure is surely not what we mean by concrete objects. If these possibilities are correct then either: (1) we cannot conceive of an object outside of experiencing it, or (2) if we can it is so vague that the concept is virtually empty, or (3) it is so abstract that it cannot count as what we mean by a concrete object. No doubt there are counter-responses to this argument, but I hope to have at least shown that conceiving of concrete objects outside of experience is not as straightforward as it first seems.[26]

A second epistemological drawback for panpsychist materialism is that if the colors that I see apparently qualifying things are illusory, then it is difficult to maintain that I see mind-independent things at all. Related to the points above, this is because color and shape are given together in experience as a single unity. Suppose I am looking at a green leaf. I see the shape in virtue of its spatially extended color. But if color is merely subjective then the shape that I see is also merely subjective (Fish 2009, p. 44, Smith 2010, p. 389, Millar 2015, pp. 612f). Hence, I arguably do not see a mind-independent leaf at all on this view.

If the leaf's color is subjective, then it seems that the perceived shape is also subjective. Hence there is now a veil of perception between myself and the mind-independent world. This puts panpsychist materialism in a position similar to sense data theories (Huemer 2019, Sec. 3.2). Responses

[26] For recent versions of the argument that matter is not positively conceivable see Foster (1982), Sprigge (1983), and Robinson (2009). Holden (2019) provides evidence that Berkeley held that the concept of physical objects apart from experience is either vacuous or contradictory.

have of course been be made to this problem. For instance, perceptual experiences may represent objects (Jackson 1977). Hence objects can be experienced indirectly, that it is via one's perceptual experiences. Idealism and naive realism, however, have the intuitive advantage of allowing that we directly perceive objects as they are without any intermediary representations.[27] For idealism, as objects are constituted by their appearances to subjects, there is no epistemic gap between experiencing the object and it actually existing, and between seeming to manipulate an object and actually manipulating it.

5. The Subject Combination Problem

The arguments I have given for panpsychist idealism are neutral as to what particular form this should take, in particular whether it should be a constitutive, emergent,[28] or cosmic idealism.[29] However, in the rest of the paper I will confine my comments to the subject combination problem for constitutive micro-panpsychism. This is the thesis that macro-experience is wholly or partially grounded in micro-experience (Chalmers 2016). In particular, our conscious experience is constituted from the experiences of numerous micro-subjects. There are many versions of the combination problem, though the subject combination problem is arguably the hardest (Chalmers 2016). This is the problem of explaining how micro-subjects combine together to constitute macro-subjects. If this cannot be explained, then panpsychism has its own explanatory gap, analogous to materialism.

I hold that taking a first-person approach to subjects can illuminate why the subject combination problem is so difficult for panpsychist materialism. Chalmers (2019) argues that because micro-idealism has less properties to work with than panpsychist materialism (i.e., fundamental physical properties), the combination problem is more difficult for the former than the latter. By contrast, I hold that the reverse is in fact true.

My claim is that the subject combination problem is intimately tied to a key assumption of materialism – phenomenal experiences are hidden properties of matter. As this assumption is not made by idealism, the

[27] For phenomenological arguments for naive realism against representationalism see Brewer (2011), Campbell and Cassam (2014), Kennedy (2009), Martin (2002). For arguments against the naive realist account of experience, particularly of illusions and hallucinations, see Millar (2015), Ramm (2020), Robinson (2013).

[28] Emergent micro-panpsychism is the thesis that macro-experiences strongly emerge from micro-experiences. That is, this theory denies that macro-experiences are wholly grounded in micro-experiences (Chalmers 2016). For emergentist versions of panpsychism see Brüntrup (2016), (Klinge, 2020), Mørch (2014), Rosenberg (2004).

[29] Cosmic idealism can be divided into whether individual subjects are grounded in a perspectival cosmic subject (Kastrup 2019) or an aperspectival universal consciousness (Albahari 2019, 2020, Shani and Keppler 2018).

combination problem, or least the intuitive case for it, does not seem to apply. The problem is not solved as such, rather it is arguably shown that it rests on a conceptual mistake.

In a well-known expression of the subject combination problem William James uses an analogy of the failure to combine macro-subjects (James 1890, Chap. 6, p. 160):

> Take a sentence of a dozen words, and take twelve men and tell to each one word. Then stand the men in a row or jam them in a bunch, and let each think of his word as intently as he will; nowhere will there be a consciousness of the whole sentence.

That no combination will occur in this case seems rather obvious. James' way of thinking about the combination problem is also illustrated by what Coleman (2012) calls the "Block/Stoljar problem". Coleman relates a story found in Block (1980, p. 280) and Stoljar (2006, p. 120) about tiny aliens which for their own mysterious reasons decide to exactly replicate fundamental particles with their ships. Their ships' activities even combine to produce physical substances exactly like carbon, oxygen and so forth. At some point humans colonize the aliens' area of the galaxy. After a number of years of ingesting the aliens through growing and eating crops and breathing them in, we become totally physically constituted by the alien pseudo-particles. It is obvious from the story that the micro-experiences of the aliens in the spaceships will not compose to form our macro-experiences. The story hence arguably shows that constitutive panpsychism is false.

There are at least two possible lessons to take from the examples by James and Block/Stoljar. Put in terms of James' example:

1. We can conceive of twelve men thinking a word combining together and there not being a consciousness of the sentence (a failure of subject combination).
2. We cannot conceive of twelve men thinking a word and for there to be consciousness of the sentence (subject combination is incoherent).

The first version of the problem denies that subject combination will necessarily occur. This is a negative argument. The second version denies that subject combination is possible at all, this is a positive argument against subject combination.

The first version of the combination problem has been endorsed by Goff (2009). He argues that we can conceive of micro-experiential zombies, that is, organisms composed of conscious fundamental particles, but in which there is no macro-experience. This shows that there is no *a priori* necessary link between the micro-experiential truths and the macro-experiential truths. This argument can be written out formally as follows:[30]

[30]The form of this argument is based upon Chalmers (2016) and Goff (2009).

1. Micro-experiential zombies are conceivable.
2. If micro-experiential zombies are conceivable, they are metaphysically possible.
3. If micro-experiential zombies are metaphysically possible, then constitutive panpsychism is false.
4. Therefore constitutive panpsychism is false.

The problem with the zombie thought experiment is that it makes two unwarranted assumptions: (1) that phenomenal properties are instantiated in things and (2) that subjects are a kind of object or thing in space. From an idealist perspective, the zombie argument fails because it is simply the wrong way to think about consciousness, that is, it commits a category error.

Zombies are inevitably entities as seen from the third-person perspective. Subjects, on the other hand, are essentially first-personal. The error lies in trying to imagine subjects merging (or failing to merge) from the third-person perspective as if consciousness was a ghostly presence inside people and other things. By rejecting the assumption that consciousness is a hidden property of things, one of the intuitive foundations of the subject combination problem is removed. First-person experience shows, I claim, that a subject is the field in which things manifest themselves, *not* one of the things in that field.

This reply doesn't answer the question of *how* subjects combine, but it does arguably block the conclusion that panpsychism is false by denying the premise that micro-experiential zombies are conceivable. This defense is of small consolation for the Russellian panpsychist and related materialist views as it only works by denying their central assumption that consciousness is a property of matter. What it does arguably show, however, is that subject combination is not ruled out for idealism.

The second version of the subject combination problem is the claim that subject combination is just plainly incoherent. This objection is forcibly argued by Coleman (2014). Coleman analyzes the problematic assumption of panpsychists as being that experiences belong to subjects. Subjects' experiences are necessarily private and closed off from one another. Their experiences cannot mix with that of other subjects, and so combining them to create a further subject is simply incoherent.

Like James, Coleman seems to be treating subjects as though they can be understood from the third-person perspective, and hence combined as though they were objects in space, like bricks being put together to build a wall. Coleman makes this assumption vivid when he asks us to imagine the lives of separate subjects (Coleman 2014, p. 30):

> Imagine a hundred qualitatively identical subjects at the "starting line" of existence – their only difference is that they occupy distinct positions in space-time. They are about to set out on their lives.

> As time winds on, each takes a unique path through the environment, and is impinged upon differently. These different impingings result in different modifications of each sensory field. Thus each subjectival perspective has access to a qualitatively different array of qualia, as compared with other subjects, over its lifetime.

This understanding of subjects reinforces the notion that subjects' experiences are necessarily private (Coleman 2014, p. 35). However, if what I have argued here is correct, then this is the wrong way to think about consciousness. For the idealist, subjects are not trapped in things, and so their experiences are not private in virtue of being physically bounded. Neither are subjects in space and so there is no reason to think of them as individuated by occupying different spatial locations. This at least suggests that the principle that subjects' experiences are necessarily private need not be a feature of idealism.

Another way to resist the conclusion that subject combination is incoherent is to provide a positive example of combination. What does subject combination look like for an idealist? Illuminating suggestions can be found in Harding's *Hierarchy of Heaven* in a chapter entitled "The Compounding of Consciousness" (Harding 1998, Chap. 14.9).

Harding's approach suggests that we should give up on trying to imagine subjects from the third-person perspective. From the first-person perspective, I am not an object in the world, but rather the unbounded space in which the world is currently being presented.[31] This space has no personally identifying characteristics, hence the only difference between my friend and me are the objects we are conscious of. Harding takes this to imply that when we experience the same object, our minds overlap. When we are in the same room, we see the same walls and the same chair. He argues that this provides a clue to conceiving of the fusion of subjects (Harding 1952, p. 154):

> The means of this compounding are ready to hand: you and I are the same in so far as we make way for the same object. Our two heads are better than one because when we put them together they *are* one – one no-head, one room – and the emptiness in our heads is infinitely fusible. For when I see what you see ... I am you: since (so far as I can discover) neither of us has anything of his own with which to keep out the other.

One problem with this example is that we see things from different angles and so our experience of them will differ slightly. However, if we think of the experience in term of objects rather than phenomenal properties, it is conceivable that we overlap in consciousness *in virtue of* having the *same* object in consciousness. There will be differences

[31] By "space" I do not mean the space of physics, but rather a capacity for things to appear in.

in perspective between subjects (lighting, distance, angle, etc.) but the object of consciousness itself will be numerically identical (at least on the face of it). The contents of consciousness need not be, at least arguably, exactly the same for subjects to overlap.

Still it may be held that there is at least a strong *prima facie* case for the privacy of mental states and hence for holding that subjects cannot combine or overlap. I cannot directly know others' thoughts or feelings and they cannot know mine. This is especially vivid for pain states. Whilst, this is highly intuitive, it does not follow that none of our experiences overlap, especially perceptual experiences. When we are both viewing the sky from the same spot why not say that the very same blue expanse is present in both of our perspectives? In fact, some of our experiences may well overlap without us knowing that this is the case, hence giving rise to an illusion of absolute privacy. A further example in support of the possibility of overlap is conjoint twins that share parts of their brains. There seems to be no reason why my conjoint twin could not experience very the same token of pain as me. Hence my twin could be a distinct subject (they have experiences and cognitive states that I don't have), without being a discrete subject (Roelofs 2016).[32]

It is illustrative to contrast James' example of failed fusion with Harding's positive example of fusion. James is correct in observing that heads and their contents cannot be combined by jamming them together. If thoughts are in heads then there is no reason to think that they can be combined, in fact, it seems obvious that they cannot. By contrast, from the first-person perspective, as a kind of unbounded non-personal gap, there seems to be no reason why I could not combine with other unbounded non-personal gaps. Once we stop thinking of subjects as analogous to things in space, then there is little (or at least even less) reason for assuming that they are atomic substances that cannot combine.

The space from which I am looking is like a hole and this suggests that the combination of subjects, if it does happen, should be thought of along the lines of the combination of holes. Imagine two circular holes in a piece of fabric side by side. Now imagine these holes growing larger and larger until their boundaries merge. They instantly become a single hole as soon as their boundaries are breached. Holes have no intrinsic particularities and hence when they are brought together, they merge perfectly. In fact, it is inconceivable that two holes could merge without becoming one. Here we arguably have a necessary form of fusion and a positive means of imagining the combination of subjects.

[32]Roelofs (2016, p. 3209) distinguishes between strong privacy and weak privacy. "Strong Privacy: A single experience cannot be directly known by multiple distinct subjects. Weak Privacy: A single experience cannot be directly known by multiple discrete subjects." The point here is weak privacy is compatible with experience sharing, even if strong privacy is not.

This would be a transparent form of conceiving subject summing, in contrast to an opaque (mysterian) account such as Goff's (2017b) phenomenal bonding solution. Goff conceives of phenomenal bonding as the relation between subjects "such that when subjects stand in it they produce a further subject" (Goff 2017b, p. 293). The current example, on the other hand, is of two subjects fusing into one rather than producing a third subject.[33]

Goff (2017b) thinks that since we cannot experience more than one subject at a time (i.e., we only experience ourselves) we cannot experience such a relation between them. Hence, we have no positive conception of it. By contrast, Harding uses the everyday example of two subjects looking at the same object from the same angle as a *prima facie* case of perspectives already overlapping and beginning to fuse into one. We generally assume in everyday life that when we look at the same object as someone else, we are experiencing numerically the same object. To assume instead that there are two different copies of the object in two discrete fields of consciousness is to beg the question by assuming that subjects are atomistic. Of course, all of the conditions in which subjects will and will not combine still need to be filled in, but at least combination would be *prima facie* possible.

In particular if subjects' experiences are not closed off from each other, there seems to be no reason why parts of their overall experiences could not also form the experience of an entirely new subject. Take for example the smell of roast beef for one subject, the feeling of being cold of a second subject, and the feeling of tiredness of a third subject (Goff 2009). These experiences may be phenomenally and numerically identical in a fourth subject that partially overlaps with these subjects. Once subjects are allowed to partially overlap, the variety of potential hybrid subjects is unlimited.

There are, however, limits to the above analogy. The holes that we are imagining are in space and have spatial boundaries. Gaps and holes are between and in things (they are bounded by things), whereas what I am looking out of is not apparently in anything or bounded by anything. In this sense, the term "gap" does not apply. Furthermore, on a purely idealist system, such as being considered here, subjects and networks of subjects are not in space. Spatial properties are in them.

I do not take myself to have solved the combination problem which

[33] A further move available to the emergent panpsychist idealistic is to draw upon Mørch's (2014) account of subject fusion to avoid the causal exclusion problem. For a discussion and critique see Goff (2017a, pp. 156f). Coleman (2014) denies that fusion is a form of "combination" because combination entails that the micro-subjects survive the process of combining. In any case, he goes on to argue that fusion of subjects also doesn't help because subjects are essentially discrete (Coleman 2014, p. 35). However, this is the one of the assumptions about subjects that has been disputed. Subjects can conceivably be distinct without necessarily being discrete.

comes in many varieties (Chalmers 2016). I do suggest, though, that thinking about subjects from the third-person point of view is the entirely wrong-headed starting point (pun intended). A positive account of subject combination first requires that we know what it is like to be a subject, and subjects are not seemingly objects in the world.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I outline motivations for idealist panpsychism, drawing on the empirical fact that things always appear in a field of consciousness. I argue that panpsychism is explanatorily simpler and more empirically based than positing a God or non-mental objects. I also argue that panpsychist idealism has phenomenological and epistemological advantages over panpsychist materialism. Finally, I make the case that the combination problem itself has been motivated by the problematic assumption that consciousness is in things. Thinking about subject combination from the first-person perspective by contrast is fruitful for re-framing the subject combination problem and for seeing how subjects could potentially combine for the idealist.

I have only been able to sketch some reasons in favor of panpsychist idealism here. There are many outstanding details that would need to be elaborated in a full theory. However, the hope is that these considerations show that panpsychist idealism is well worth further investigation. It may in fact be better placed than panpsychist materialism to explain how consciousness fits into the physical world – or better yet, how the physical world fits into consciousness.

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