An Analytic Perspective on Panpsychism — Review of:
Godehard Brüntrup & Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), ***Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives***. Oxford University Press, 2017. 414 pages. (ISBN: 9780199359943, HB)

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"Panpsychism is stupid because rocks can't be conscious," is commonly heard. In this volume of collected essays, philosophers of mind do a fine job of demonstrating that panpsychism is a significant and worthwhile question, at least for analytic philosophy. It is both a challenging introduction to the topic and a further development of the issues involved for specialists. Brüntrup and Jaskolla clarify this common misconception: "Most forms of panpsychism … distinguish between mere conglomerates like a rock formation and genuine individuals like animals and possibly elementary particles. Mental properties can only be attributed directly to genuine individuals" (p. 2). *Individuals* mean primary experiencers.

To begin, the editors cite their approved very general definition of their central term: "Panpsychism is the doctrine that mind is a fundamental feature of the world which exists throughout the universe" (p. 1). However, this generic definition says nothing about the size, shape, or nature of the original or primal "minds" or "mind" from which all other minds derive. This question of the fundamental nature of experiencing entities or fields seems to be the major one being addressed in these pages.

This is an important collection in that it fleshes out the vague postulate of panpsychism with a detailed analysis of how it might be understood (if not exactly what it might mean). For the many skeptics who simply dismiss the very idea as ridiculous, there is much here to demonstrate that a good deal of serious thought has gone into this ancient proposal. There are many ways to interpret panpsychism, and they are well represented in this group of philosophers, each speaking for a unique take on the subject or one of its variations – from cosmopsychism to panprotopsychism to panexperientialism to neutral monism, etc. The combination problem is fully interrogated, as is panpsychism associated with dualism, idealism, physicalism, theism, etc. Anyone reading this book is bound to gain some respect for the complexity of such subject matter and the compelling logic for approaching it.

However, it is the entire logical edifice that leaves this writer somewhat dissatisfied. Despite widely different conclusions, each essay clearly seems to be written from within the analytic tradition, often centrally relying on logical syllogisms to strengthen its arguments. This is fine as far as it goes if one can accept sometimes monotonous reading, but the problem with this is that such arguments most often are limited to negatively revealing what *cannot* be the case, not what positively comes forth as intuition or revelation. Panpsychism itself is revealed to be a default position that must be accepted as a metaphysical necessity since experience cannot logically be understood to have somehow evolved within a non-experiencing reality without calling upon radical emergence or magic, which are much the same thing.

Famed philosopher of consciousness, David Chalmers, figures prominently here. He wrote two keystone chapters for the book, one introducing a logical breakdown of the possible ways to interpret and understand panpsychism and the other to do much the same for panpsychism's combination problem. Chalmers is a deeply incisive thinker who is able to bring out unexpected hidden angles in any topic; however, his ability to clarify by complexity is not matched by an ability to clarify by simplifying.

In Section I, "The Logical Place of Panpsychism", Chalmers first sets up the parameters of the discussion to follow with some important clarifications, emphasizing that experience likely begins with the very small or very brief, as does the physical world. Chalmers astutely outlines all possible interpretations of this reductive stand, outlining the similarities and differences among panpsychism, panexperientialism (all things experience but not necessarily consciously), and panprotopsychism (fundamental entities are proto-conscious but must combine to produce consciousness): "Panprotopsychism is then the view that some fundamental physical entities have protophenomenal properties" (p. 31). However, Brüntrup notes that panprotopsychism implies a radical emergence from non-experiencing protophenomena to experiencing phenomena, so it does not seem to have solved the hard problem. Just what a protophenomenal property might be or how it could emerge into phenomenality is never explained. Brüntrup sees that wholes that are greater than their parts may emerge: "There is an opening for macrolevel agents to make a causal difference. This is a genuine difference from constitutive panpsychism" (p. 69). This is a good point though the nature of the pre-phenomenal remains a mystery. But then none of these essays ever really attempts to deal with just what a microsubjective experience might be like.

Section II includes wide ranging essays on possible panpsychist ontologies. Strawson offers his ironic view of a self-conscious panpsychism that yet leaves physical science fully intact. Nagasawa and Wager give priority to the cosmos as a whole over its parts: "…priority cosmopsychism says that exactly one basic consciousness, the cosmic consciousness, exists" (p. 116). So in this case the cosmos *decomposes* into smaller units of experience or consciousness, like our own, rather than *combining* from the very small and rudimentary into larger units. Brogaard's chapter searches for *mentons*, mental experience equivalents of gravitons, which I found perplexing.

But if Brogaard left me perplexed, Rosenberg's much anticipated chapter sometimes left me feeling all at sea – even though it was entitled "Land Ho"! I have long intended to read Rosenberg's version of panexperientialism, for Whiteheadian panexperientialism is where my sympathies lie. However, Rosenberg looks to his alternative to classical cause-and-effect – the *Theory of Causal Significance* (TCS) – to extoll the necessity for pan-experience in the world, though TCS remains unclear.

Section III deals with panpsychism's *combination problem*: how could the micro-subjects or micro-experiences combine into becoming full-fledged macro-subjects of consciousness like ourselves? Chalmers and other notables offer their attempts to deal with this problem but physicalist Barbara Gail Montero simply asks, "What Combination Problem?" by noting that experiences combine more readily than do objects.

The last section, "Panpsychism and Its Alternatives", dares to be more speculative while not really dealing with panpsychism, as such. McLaughlin comes up with the contorted notion of

panprotoexperientialism, which I defy anyone to clearly differentiate from panprotopsychism, but he ends by declaring himself ultimately in favour of *neurobiologicalism*. The other pieces in this section seem unwilling to grasp the uniqueness of panpsychism, so they offer instead alternative ontologies. The jumble of charts used by Stephan cannot hide the fact that strong emergence cannot be panpsychism, which posits actual experience from the universal get-go. Stubenberg has more luck with a very strong essay suggesting neutral monism as the necessary ontological background for panpsychism, which is indeed compatible. The last two chapters by Taliaferro bringing in dualism and Meixner supporting idealism do not seem to see that their perspectives leave panpsychism behind. Both end up calling upon theism (implying *God*) as ultimate. However, panpsychism if associated with theism would likely be polytheistic or pantheistic.

Can panpsychism ever be shown to be a phenomenological reality? None of these essays give any indication panpsychism is anything more than a default position, arrived at by a process of logical elimination. If panpsychism in any form were ever revealed as likely, it would lead to a major upheaval in the world of physics and in our relation to nature. We would find ourselves subjectively connected with all other aspects of reality, as poets have experienced. Surely such an awesome possibility cries out for a philosophical phenomenology or even a literary treatment beyond the grim objective tedium offered by analytical deduction.

Phenomenological philosopher Merleau-Ponty (1968) hinted that only the undoing of memory could lead us to the hollows of being where our experiential origins lie: "If being is to unveil itself, it will be in the face of a transcendence and not an intentionality; it will be brute being caught in the shifting sands, a being that reverts to itself: it will be the sensible hollowing itself out" (p. 210).

The other suggestion to discovering awareness in all things is via poetic reverie. Allow me to close this review with the words of William Wordsworth (1798) when he was inspired to express his own vision of panpsychism, perhaps even pantheism, with the wonder intact:

> —And I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man.

Then again, this sort of obfuscation or romantic allusion may be just the sort of thing to leave materialist skeptics in apoplectic horror.

References

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