

Panpsychism.Roots

A surprisingly common view in philosophy up until the middle of the twentieth century....

- Presocratics: preoccupied with how physical transformation is possible (e.g. Anaxagoras and the burning / decomposing wood). Sometimes a kind of monism proffered as a solution to this.
- Spinoza: mind and matter are just two aspects of a single substance, identified with God himself. This does away with the problem of causation.
- Bertrand Russell: there's just one kind of fundamental substance that isn't really either mental or physical, but of some other unspecified sort, of which mental and physical are just aspects.

Terminology (a reference guide)

Neutral monism / dual aspect monism / Russelian monism: there's just one kind of fundamental matter...

Panpsychism: all members of some fundamental physical types have mental states, in particular *conscious experiences*.

- Is this sufficient for having a mind?

Panprotopsychism: fundamental entities are *proto-conscious* in the sense that they have certain special properties that are precursors to consciousness and that can collectively constitute consciousness in larger systems. (Chalmers p.2)

Macroexperience: the sort of conscious experience had by human beings and other macroscopic entities

Microexperience: the sort of conscious experience had by microphysical entities

"We are not in a position to say much about what microexperience is like. I think we can be confident that it is very different from human experience, however. It is almost certainly much simpler than human experience." (Chalmers p.7)

Motivations:1. Problems with emergence

- *How* can consciousness just emerge?
- Think: sperm: no consciousness! Baby: conscious! Fetus...consciousness at some point?? What changed and when?
- Why should complexity do that trick? What's another neuron here or there?
- Not *just* about complexity, but a failure to understand why this shift should happen at all: hard problem of consciousness...

2. The Hard Problem of Matter (Hedda Hassel Mørch, via Bertrand Russell and others.)

The hard problem of matter: "What is physical matter in and of itself, behind the mathematical structure described by physics?"

"We usually think of physics as describing the hardware of the universe—the real, concrete stuff. But in fact physical matter (at least the aspect that physics tells us about) is more like software: a logical and mathematical structure. According to the hard problem of matter, this software needs some hardware to implement it. Physicists have brilliantly reverse-engineered the algorithms—or the source code—of the universe, but left out their concrete implementation."

“The hard problem of matter calls for non-structural properties, and consciousness is the one phenomenon we know that might meet this need. Consciousness is full of qualitative properties, from the redness of red and the discomfort of hunger to the phenomenology of thought. Such experiences, or “qualia,” may have internal structure, but there is more to them than structure. We know something about what conscious experiences are like *in and of themselves*, not just how they function and relate to other properties.”

“Philosophers and neuroscientists often assume that consciousness is like software, whereas the brain is like hardware. This suggestion turns this completely around. When we look at what physics tells us about the brain, we actually just find software—purely a set of relations—all the way down. And consciousness is in fact more like hardware, because of its distinctly qualitative, non-structural properties. For this reason, conscious experiences are just the kind of things that physical structure could be the structure *of*.”

3. Panpsychism as a Hegelian synthesis: (Chalmers)

Thesis: materialism

BUT *conceivability argument against materialism*

(1) $P \ \& \ \neg Q$ is conceivable

i.e. it is conceivable that the world could be exactly as it is in all physical respects, but without there being any conscious experience in it. There could be zombies, e.g. It isn't, by contrast, conceivable that the world could be exactly the same in all physical respects, but there be no bicycles.

(2) If $P \ \& \ \neg Q$ is conceivable, $P \ \& \ \neg Q$ is metaphysically possible

i.e. that's a logically coherent scenario to imagine. So it's *metaphysically* possible, even if it isn't possible according to the laws that obtain in the world we're actually in.

(3) If $P \ \& \ \neg Q$ is metaphysically possible, materialism is false.

Because materialism claims that the mental is identical with the physical.

(4) Materialism is false

Antithesis: dualism

BUT *causal argument against dualism*

(1) Phenomenal properties are causally relevant to physical events

(2) Every causal physical event has a full causal explanation in physical terms

(3) If every caused physical event has a full causal explanation in physical terms, every property causally relevant to the physical is itself grounded in physical properties.

(4) If phenomenal properties are grounded in physical properties, materialism is true

(5) Materialism is true

Synthesis: panpsychism

➤ How does constitutive panpsychism avoid the conceivability argument and the causal argument?

“The conceivability argument refutes narrow physicalism but is compatible with broad physicalism. The causal argument establishes broad physicalism but does not establish narrow physicalism. The arguments put

together yield the Hegelian argument for the conjunction of broad physicalism with the denial of narrow physicalism. This is the ground occupied by constitutive Russellian panpsychism.” (p.14)

Narrow physicalism: mental properties supervene on microphysical role properties, such as the dispositional property associated with having a certain mass, or the second-order property of having a property that plays the mass role (excludes quiddities)

Broad physicalism: mental properties supervene on physical role properties along with any properties that realize the relevant roles (includes quiddities)

Quiddities: fundamental categorical properties that play the fundamental roles specified in physics.

Upshots

If panpsychism is right, then your various particles will continue to have conscious properties after your death, and may be integrated into new complex information-processing systems.

- Does this make you feel any better about dying?

If panpsychism is right, consciousness is very widespread. Consciousness is often taken to have ethical upshots: you shouldn't mistreat conscious beings or cause them unnecessary suffering.

- Does panpsychism have ethical upshots?

The Combination Problem.

How do the experiences of fundamental microphysical properties combine to yield conscious experience at the person level?

“Somehow thousands of experience-involving ultimates come together in my brain to constitute the ‘big’ experience-involving thing that is the subject of my experience.”

(i) William James:

“Where the elemental units are supposed to be feelings, the case is in no wise altered. Take a hundred of them, shuffle them and pack them as close together as you can (whatever that may mean); still each remains the same feeling it always was, shut in its own skin, windowless, ignorant of what the other feelings are and mean. There would be a hundred-and-first feeling there, if, when a group or series of such feelings were set up, a consciousness belonging to the group as such should emerge. And this 101st feeling would be a totally new fact; the 100 original feelings might, by a curious physical law, be a signal for its creation, when they came together; but they would have no substantial identity with it, nor it with them, and one could never deduce the one from the others, or (in any intelligible sense) say that they evolved it.

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. We talk of the ‘spirit of the age,’ and the ‘sentiment of the people,’ and in various ways we hypostatize ‘public opinion.’ But we know this to be symbolic speech, and never dream that the spirit, opinion, sentiment, etc., constitute a consciousness other than, and additional to, that of the several individuals whom the words ‘age,’ ‘people,’ or ‘public’ denote. The private minds do not agglomerate into a higher compound mind.

In other words, no possible number of entities (call them as you like, whether forces, material particles, or mental elements) can sum themselves together. Each remains, in the sum, what it always was; and the sum itself exists only for a bystander who happens to overlook the units and to apprehend the sum as such; or else

it exists in the shape of some other effect on an entity external to the sum itself. Let it not be objected that H₂ and O combine of themselves into 'water,' and thenceforward exhibit new properties. They do not. The 'water' is just the old atoms in the new position, H-O-H; the 'new properties' are just their combined effects, when in this position, upon external media, such as our sense-organs and the various reagents on which water may exert its properties and be known." (*The Principles of Psychology* 1895)

(ii) Variants of the problem:

- How do microphenomenal properties aggregate to form macrophenomenal properties?
- How do proto-phenomenal properties aggregate to form macrophenomenal properties? (A question for pan-protopsyism?)
- **Subject combination problem:** Experiences always have to be had by a *subject*. Can subjects aggregate?
 - o Can a group of microsubjects necessitate the existence of a macrosubject? It doesn't generally seem as though any group of subjects can necessitate the existence of a further subject.
- **Structure combination problem:** How does microexperiential structure combine to yield macroexperiential structure?
- **Unity problem:** How do microexperiences come together to yield a *unified* consciousness?
 - o How does that consciousness come to have a **boundary**?

More generally: What **rules** determine when the combinatorial process occurs and what results it produces?

"It follows that for LITTLE PAIN 1 to be part of BIG PAIN is for *what it feels like to be LITTLE PAIN 1* to be part of *what it feels like to be BIG PAIN*. But what it feels like to be LITTLE PAIN 1 is not part of what it feels like to be BIG PAIN. LITTLE PAIN 1 feels slightly pained, BIG PAIN does not."

(iii) Ways of avoiding the problem:

- Emergent panspsychism: macroexperiences are not grounded in microexperiences but are strongly emergent from them, i.e. ontologically novel entities, connected to the base by contingent laws of nature.
- Identity panspsychism: macrosubjects are identical to microsubjects, macroexperiences to microexperiences.
- Eliminativism about subjects: there are no macrosubjects

(iv) Combinatorial responses:

- Fusion: lower-level subjects merge to form higher level subjects, and then no longer exist.
- Bonding: there are distinctive *phenomenal* relations between subjects, not just causal or spatio-temporal relations. Those distinctive phenomenal relations explain how the pooling of perspective happens.
- Everyone else is in just as much trouble, because emergence of the mental from the non-mental is no less mysterious.
- This is an epistemic problem rather than a conceptual problem: in time we'll find a solution

Recommended reading:

- Chalmers, David. The Combination Problem for Panpsychism. In Godehard Brüntrup & Ludwig Jaskolla (eds.), *Panpsychism*. (2016) Oxford University Press.
- Hassel Mørch, Hedda, 'Is Matter Conscious?' *Nautilus Magazine* April 6 2017. Available at <http://nautil.us/issue/47/consciousness/is-matter-conscious>
- Goff, Philip. Experiences don't sum. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* (2006) 13 (10-11):53-61.