

« Realistic monism: why physicalism entails panpsychism »»

Galen Strawson

I Introspective data

We are certain that experience exist

« You're certainly not a realistic physicalist, you're not a real physicalist, if you deny the existence of the phenomenon whose existence is more certain than the existence of anything else: experience, 'consciousness', conscious experience, 'phenomenology', **experiential 'what-it's-likeness'**, feeling, sensation, explicit conscious thought as we have it and know it at almost every waking moment. »

Experience as a hard datum

- Strawson's methodological starting point, like Goff's, is that phenomenal consciousness is a hard datum that any complete and adequate theory of reality must accommodate.
- He says that: « Full recognition of the reality of experience, then, is the obligatory starting point for any remotely realistic version of physicalism. »
- Similarly, here is what Goff says: « Any adequate theory of reality must entail that at least some phenomenal concepts are satisfied. (A concept is satisfied when it truly corresponds to reality, for example, the concept of God is satisfied if and only if God exists). »

The naturalist's predicament

- Strawson's comments on Dennett's eliminativism, but also on Dretske's or Tye's reductive materialism, are very controversial.
- On his view, they are « looking-glassing » the word consciousness.
 - The debate, again, rests on the interpretation of « conscious experience »
- On Dennett, Tye or Dretske's view, a conscious experience is something that can be objectively observed from a third-person perspective;
- Strawson and Goff disagree: they consider phenomenal properties as being only accessible from a « subjective » point of view.

- The « Louis Armstrong-Block reply »: « if you gotta ask, you ain't never get to know ».
- Eliminativism is self-defeating: « There seems to be phenomenology, he concedes, but it does not follow from this undeniable, universally attested fact that there really is phenomenology ».
- Strawson: this « fails for the simple reason that for there to seem to be rich phenomenology or experience is for there to be such phenomenology or experience ».
- So if eliminativism is true, it is false ==> the position is self-defeating.

Louis Armstrong/Ned Block joke

- **Armstrong on swing:** « if you gotta ask, you ain't never get to know ».
- Cf. challenge for reductive physicalism: we can't define nor even really comprehend phenomenology if we presuppose a physicalist's conceptual framework, but from a first-person perspective nothing is more obviously existent.



Source: wikipedia

II Physicsalism vs Physicalism

Real physicalism

- In contrast with physicalism, « real physicalism » includes phenomenal properties among the set of real properties.
- « every real, concrete phenomenon in the universe is . . . physical. »
- « I will equate ‘concrete’ with ‘spatiotemporally (or at least temporally) located’, and I will use ‘phenomenon’ as a completely general word for any sort of existent. Plainly all mental goings on are concrete phenomena ».
- The challenge: understanding « how can experiential phenomena be physical phenomena? »

Panpsychism

- Strawson's definition: « the view that the existence of every real concrete thing involves experiential being, even if it also involves non-experiential being ».
- « Every real concrete thing »: that includes fundamental entities !
- So the physical « includes everything that concretely exists in the universe. If everything that concretely exists is intrinsically experience-involving, well, that is what the physical turns out to be »

Structural vs Intrinsic

- Physics is interested in the structural features of reality, not in its intrinsic features.
- That's the conclusion Strawson's draws from Eddington's discussion:
 - « science has nothing to say as to the intrinsic nature of the atom'. The atom, so far as physics tells us anything about it, is, like everything else in physics, a schedule of pointer readings [on instrument dials]. The schedule is, we agree, attached to some unknown background. Why not then attach it to something of a spiritual [i.e. mental] nature of which a prominent characteristic is thought [=experience, consciousness]. It seems rather silly to prefer to attach it to something of a so-called 'concrete' nature inconsistent with thought, and then to wonder where the thought comes from. »

A simplicity argument for panpsychism?

- Just like Smart, Strawson mounts a simplicity argument in support of his view, an inference to the best explanation:
 - Panpsychism is the best explanation which is available for the hard datum that subjective experience exists.
- Since this is an inference to the best explanation, the panpsychist explanation has to be compared to other available explanations, and has to be shown to be simpler than those explanations.

III Emergence

The position

- Here is how Strawson describes it:

« Consciousness properties, experience properties, are emergent properties of wholly and utterly non-conscious, non-experiential phenomena. Physical stuff in itself, in its basic nature, is indeed a wholly non-conscious, non-experiential phenomenon. Nevertheless when parts of it combine in certain ways, experiential phenomena ‘emerge’. Ultimates in themselves are wholly non-conscious, non-experiential phenomena. Nevertheless, when they combine in certain ways, experiential phenomena ‘emerge’ »

Strawson's argument against emergentism

- There is a contrast between the emergence of phenomena like liquidity, and the emergence of consciousness.
- It is wholly intelligible how a property like liquidity reduce to more fundamental physical phenomena.
 - That's because the causal role that « liquidity » plays can be reduced to a sum of simpler causal roles, of more fundamental properties
- On the other hand, it is not intelligible how phenomenal properties might be dependent (or supervenient) on more fundamental physical properties.

Argument against type-B physicalists

- According to type-B physicalists, identity statements like:
 - Pain = C-fibers stimulations
- Describe brute facts: they cannot be a priori deduced from physics.
- Strawson, however, rejects the idea that there could be « brute » true identity statements:
 - « Emergence can't be brute. It is built into the heart of the notion of emergence that emergence cannot be brute in the sense of there being absolutely no reason in the nature of things why the emerging thing is as it is (so that it is unintelligible even to God) (...) One problem is that brute emergence is by definition a miracle each time it occurs »

Neutral monism

- Russellian origin: physics reveals the relational structure of matter but not its intrinsic nature.
- According to this view, classical physics tells us a lot about what mass does—it resists acceleration, attracts other masses, and so on—but it tells us nothing about what mass intrinsically is.
- « If experience like ours (...) emerges from something that is not experience like ours, then that something must already be experiential »

The Combination Problem

If panpsychism is true, we face a new challenge:

How do micro-experiences (in fundamental particles) *combine* to form macro-experiences (in humans, animals)?

William James: This is the 'combination problem'

What Needs Explaining

My unified conscious experience includes:

- The redness of an apple
- The sound of music
- A thought about dinner

But I'm made of trillions of micro-subjects (particles)

Question: How do their separate experiences combine into *my* unified experience?

Coleman's Three Sub-Problems

1. The Subject-Summing Problem:

How do many micro-subjects become one macro-subject?

2. The Quality-Summing Problem:

How do micro-qualities combine into macro-qualities?

3. The Privacy Problem:

Why don't I experience the micro-experiences?

The Subject-Summing Problem

Each electron has its own perspective

Each quark has its own perspective

But *I* have *one* unified perspective

How do billions of separate subjects merge?

Why is there a 'me' rather than just a crowd?

The Quality-Summing Problem

Micro-experiences:

Whatever electrons feel

Macro-experience:

The redness of red, the taste of wine

Problem:

These seem completely different in kind

How does 'electron-feeling' → 'seeing red'?

The Palette Problem

Colors example:

If micro-experiences are like 3 primary colors,
we can explain how they combine to make all colors.

But what are the 'primary colors' of experience?

And why should electrons have those specific qualities?

A New Emergence Problem?

Strawson criticized emergence:

How can experience emerge from non-experience?

But now panpsychism faces:

How does macro-experience emerge from micro-experience?

Isn't this equally mysterious?

Coleman's Verdict

Panpsychism faces a dilemma:

Either:

- Micro-experiences are so alien that combination is unintelligible, or
- They're similar to ours, but then we need an account of the 'palette'

The combination problem may be as hard as the original emergence problem

Conclusion

Strawson's achievement:

A powerful argument that physicalism requires panpsychism

The challenge:

The combination problem shows panpsychism has its own explanatory burden

Question:

Is explaining combination easier than explaining emergence?