

Panpsychism and Real Mental Causation

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A Dualistic Panpsychism

Panpsychism is motivated by the view that biological processes in the brain cannot generate a radically new fundamental ingredient to the universe. Evolution can only work with the ingredients and physical processes it has available to it. Therefore qualities such as colors, sounds, feelings, and smells could not have been invented by the brain for the first time ever but must have already existed as real elements in our universe. Evolution did not miraculously create new physical laws or substances but merely used existing psychophysical bridge laws to generate those phenomenal qualities.

By the same principle the brain could not have created new subjective private worlds that bind those qualities into wholes. The universe must have already consisted of such private perspectives or points of view. There is no conceivable way that any future objective physics can allow for the creation of private subjective worlds with boundaries and limits out of a single smoothly connected objective world without any hard boundaries. These private mental perspectives of subjects must be fundamental as well.

Berkeley pointed out that a universe in which there are no sense qualities is an abstraction that cannot be imagined. Similarly he thought the objective world cannot be imagined except from particular perspectives. And so he takes the radical step of discarding the external public world. Panpsychists take the less radical step of putting sense qualities and private mental worlds with their own unique perspectives of those sense qualities back into the physical world at an elementary level.

How can the brain create consciousness, which it obviously appears to do, while at the same time enabling a purpose to consciousness? Why would the brain generate a show of colors and sounds and feelings if not for the benefit of an independent entity that can do something about it? By separating the generation of sense qualities from the minds that perceive them we can enable these two otherwise contradictory concepts, the generation of sentience and the efficacy of it, to simultaneously be true.

1. The symphony of electrical impulses in the brain can generate mental qualities as science shows us. For instance there is a visual processing center that can produce the color qualities of a visual field and this production is one-way and epiphenomenal. This can happen because the brain evolved to make use of existing psychophysical laws that connect certain primary movements of matter to the secondary creation of phenomenal sense qualities. In this way the brain produces the sense qualities that are the content of consciousness. Note that the content of consciousness is ephemeral matching the ephemeral symphony of nerve impulses. When I step outside into the fresh air my whole world changes in an instant.

2. But there is something that is continuous and unchanging in spite of the total abrupt changes of that transition of experience out into the fresh air. The conscious subject that experiences those qualia as a spatial and temporal whole is not generated by those second to second nerve impulses and exists via another physical mechanism. Panpsychism can help us here. Subjectivity is part of the flow of the living process and splits off from already conscious nerve cell(s) during the process of brain development to become what Leibniz called "the dominant monad" which because it is a fundamental atomic element in the universe, and not the end-product of the second to second nerve impulses, has causal efficacy. Of course this is just a form of Cartesian dualism, but one grounded in the panpsychists continuous natural flow of conscious living evolution, rather than the miraculous.

The private subjective worlds are fundamentals with causal powers. These fundamental mental beings exist at least at the level of elementary particles, eukaryotic cells and animals with nervous systems. The elementary physical point particles, what Russell in his Outline of Philosophy called "*emanations from a locality-the sort of influences that characterize haunted rooms in ghost stories*", are intrinsically subjective points of view. These physical mysterious ghostlike centers are the same kind of things as those other invisible ghostlike centers: "other minds"; things that have no extension and cannot be directly seen but are inferred from their effects.

In this panpsychist metaphysical model there is a fundamental circle. The relative movements of these subjective points of view deterministically, via psychophysical laws, generate the phenomenal qualities which all subjects in the neighborhood can then perceive and respond to according to their natures by making new movements which then produce new qualities.

The Failure of Emergence

I will begin this discussion with a quote from the philosopher John Searle from his The Rediscovery of the Mind:

"This conception of causal emergence, call it "emergent 1," has to be distinguished from a much more adventurous conception, call it "emergent2." A feature F is emergent2 if F is emergent 1 and F has causal powers that cannot be explained by the causal interactions of a, b, c...If consciousness were emergent 2, then consciousness could cause things that could not be explained by the causal behaviour of the neurons. The naive idea here is that consciousness gets squirted out by the behaviour of the neurons in the brain, but once it has been squirted out, it then has a life of its own. [...O]n my view consciousness is emergent1, but not emergent2. In fact, I cannot think of anything that is emergent2, and it seems unlikely that we will be able to find any features that are emergent2, because the existence of any such features would seem to violate even the weakest principle of the transitivity of causation"

Emergent2 (a strong emergence) is for the same reason impossible to me. If the nerve impulse in the brain are responsible for the generation of the conscious subject and also sustain it and produce everything about it, then how can the conscious subject still have its own real power to decide anything on its own, as it is totally under control of the physical forces producing it? Emergence2 is incoherent and should be ruled out.

The problem is that emergence¹ (weak emergence) is also fatally flawed. We may describe it as follows: Let a be the inputs to the brain, b be the computational processing of the brain, c be the output of the brain and X is the conscious mind. X is the product of b . In order to preserve the closure of the physical so that no mind stuff can interfere with the known physical processes, there is a one way relationship: x is the epiphenomenal byproduct of b but cannot influence b . There is no escaping it. In emergence¹ there cannot be an effect of the purely mental on the purely physical for that would break physical closure. So when I say I see the color red my actual experiencing redness doesn't count. It is only the nerve cells (which are blind) that produce the output that says that I see red. It is merely the result of blind computation and not the real conscious me saying it. Thus our very own direct evidence that we report what we are experiencing must be discarded so that we can preserve closure. Throwing away evidence to preserve the scientific theory of closure seems quite unscientific. The argument from physicalism is that we suffer from an illusion for only blind nerve cells can really make things happen in a physically closed world. Ignoring experiential evidence (even if it is private) to preserve a theory is a serious problem.

There are still more problems with emergence. Any deterministic theory in which a private subjective world pops into existence is doomed to fail for the same reason that if I claim that "when I waive my arms a flock of angels flies off" will fail. For other minds, like my angels, are invisible. We cannot directly see the seer and emergence¹ claims that the invisible subject is an epiphenomenon with no unique effects of its own. Because we cannot see the private conscious world of the subject directly we need to be able to see it indirectly through its effects. But if it is epiphenomenal it has no effects. How can we measure the effect of anything which by definition is entirely the product of nervous impulses and has no power of its own? When I say the c-fibre caused me to feel pain it is not really me feeling pain that causes the verbal report for the response is already there in the pattern of nerve firings that only generates me as a side effect. So no theory of a deterministic creation of a private conscious observer can ever be tested unless the observer has causal efficacy. But that is not possible as long as the observer is entirely the byproduct of nerve signals. Such a theory like my angels can never have any scientific or practical significance for an invisible ghostlike entity (the mind) that produces no distinct effects of its own can never be tested or measured or proven. So the most dominant theory in science on the production of consciousness is unscientific. It is not only not falsifiable, it is untestable, because according to the theory the stimulation of the nerve fibers only generates reports of what I experience and the reports are not coming from me but from neural computations that have no need of me. Like my angels, as there is neither direct nor indirect evidence, it cannot be tested at all. Emergence² is logically incoherent and emergence¹ has no practical consequences and no way to ever choose from one emergence theory over another. From K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*: "The criterion of the scientific status of a theory is its falsifiability, or refutability, or testability". Ironically the dominant scientific theories of consciousness, because they attempt to preserve the closure of microphysicalism, fail the Popper test, and are therefore pseudoscience.

Panpsychism can save this situation but most panpsychists fall into the same problem by preserving the closure of the physical. They propose that the constituents of the subjective mind experience phenomenal qualities. Let's say for instance, that the neurons are not blind. Let's say when I see the

color red some of the neurons are actually seeing red. And perhaps the neurons see red because the electrons inside them see red. Constitutive panpsychism then says that the parts see red and have real efficacy and then add up to a mental whole which is me that sees red within a larger context. This theory gets us closer at least as the parts are conscious but how do they add up to me? This is the combination problem. A neuron may see red but I am seeing a whole picture of which red is just one part. I am driving a car. I feel my foot on the brake as the light turns red. It is the whole unity of my subjective being that must have causal efficacy as I see the red traffic light simultaneously with the experience of driving the car and feeling my foot on the brake. Without that we are still in the same place wondering how an invisible emergent mental being can produce any effects that can be tested and are not illusionary. Therefore, a constitutive panpsychism that aims to be totally compatible with the closure of existing physical theory is of no help in combatting the failure of emergence.

Perhaps we have been too faithful to physical closure. If within the brain a(input) can cause changes to b(processing) which causes changes to c(output) there is no need at all for X(mind) and no theory of X that can have practical consequences. But now suppose that b only causes certain effects in X so that it experiences phenomenal qualities and is aware of what is going on around it. But X, the conscious individual self, is not created by b, which only creates the content that X observes. Then X may have a real unique causal influence through a downward causation. X, because it is a fundamental being and not a mere byproduct would then have some power of its own to feed back to b. After all, does it make any sense for the majority of brain processing (b) to generate a virtual reality show filled with colors and sounds with pleasures and pains if not for the benefit of an independent entity (X) that can make its own decisions based on what it experiences? Yes, it is a kind of interactive dualism, but grounded within a naturalistic framework based on panpsychism.

The whole point of panpsychism is to provide an alternative to the radical emergence of a new essence, the subjective self, me, out of physical processes which bare no hint of anything like the private subjective world of phenomenal qualities that I am. Panpsychism then should provide for continuity, a historical path for a conscious entity to evolve from simpler conscious entities that are fundamental to our world.

In Leibnizian terms the conscious self is the dominant monad in the body. Perhaps it is a single nerve cell or during development branched out of a single nerve cell's mind or then maybe fused with the minds of a group of nerve cells to become the dominant monad. Then the private point of view that is me had already existed as a seedling within the flow of life and was not generated abruptly from the ongoing nerve impulses (as the qualia are). The self was never created. It doesn't pop in and out of existence de novo, but has a stability that evolved from the union of egg and sperm which themselves had inner natures that fused. Said Lucretius: "nothing comes from nothing". A basic principle at the heart of our scientific outlook is belief in conservation, continuity and gradual evolution over abrupt miraculous creation. As elementary subjective points of view with some causal efficacy we are at least equal to the elementary particles in that we can both exert a force, and going far back in time we must have evolved from those elementary beings.

Quantum Physics and Teleology

The elementary particles of physics and the conscious agents of the biological world are of the same type. They are the fundamental points of view for observing the world from particular locations. But they are also causally efficacious self-movers who are not just pushed around but initiate activity. That activity is oriented towards specific goals. Because they can observe their surroundings they receive feedback and can act in flexible ways to achieve their ends.

Any practical theory that hopes to identify where in the natural world consciousness exists, must then attribute to it some observable effects. Said William James in *The Principles of Psychology* (Vol 1) :
“pursuance of future ends and the choice of means for their attainment, are thus the mark and criterion of the presence of mentality.”

Each point of view or monad has its own nature that encapsulates its goals. For living biological creatures like us that nature is flexible and can change, learn and grow. Individuality and variety are the hallmarks of conscious biological beings. The fundamental particles of physics, however, are conformist stable conservatives. That does not necessarily mean they have no sentience, as the Jamesian test for the presence of mentality is not flexibility of goals but flexibility in achieving goals. For the microphysical fundamental individuals the goals may be highly conserved.

For instance, the pointlike particles that dynamically create atomic and molecular structure may be consciously drawn to an attractor; an ideal state. In quantum physics the behavior of each individual particle is only known probabilistically but over time millions of events can sum up to a highly predictable structure. Physicists don't know why it works this way. Teleology provides an explanation. If the individuals are all unique but share a common basic ideal end state, the end state will emerge over time. Think of a bunch of painters painting a wall. They can all start from anywhere; top, bottom, left or right. But as long as they can perceive the state of the project and share in the goal they will ultimately progress towards a predictable ideal end: the solidly painted finished wall with no holidays. Mentality at the physical level may then allow for freedom of action of micro individuals achieving an ideal end state which in itself is frozen and predictable.