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Clear awareness and panpsychism

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Abstract

The question of the intrinsic nature of concrete reality is one of the most intriguing in all of metaphysics. At its heart lies what has become known as the mind-body problem, a recurrent issue in our attempts to reconcile the notions of mind and body and their characteristics within a single ontology. In recent years, discussions of the mind-body problem have predominantly dealt with qualia and intentionality, the qualitative and representational aspects of mind, respectively. This dissertation, however, shows that a third option is available as well. Named *clear awareness*, this third aspect of mind is here identified as a central and necessary condition for mentality and, thus, as a novel, relevant player in the ongoing debate.

The main thesis defended in this dissertation is that clear awareness is non-reducible and fundamental in a way that supports a version of panpsychism. Non-reductionism is the view that at least certain mental phenomena are not metaphysically reducible to anything else. The latter, panpsychism, is much stronger, claiming that mind is both fundamental and ubiquitous, that is, present “inside” everything.

To argument for these points, a broad discussion is given. I advance an argument for the fundamentality of clear awareness, which in turn becomes an argument for a clear-awareness-based version of panpsychism. The argument, however, is aimed at supporting only the fundamentality of mind so that the ubiquitousness criterion of panpsychism remains, due to the shortness of this dissertation, only an assumption. The resulting thesis is that of CA-Panpsychism – the view that the clear awareness aspect of consciousness is a metaphysically fundamental and ubiquitous character of concrete reality. This thesis offers an account of the world as a mental realm within which all of our other ideas about nature and its workings are kept safely intact.

Key words: mind-body problem; consciousness; clear awareness; non-reductionism; panpsychism

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1 Clear awareness as a central aspect of consciousness

1.1 Introduction

The aim of this first section is to present the general mind-body problem in relation to consciousness. I will start by giving a short overview of the problematic relationship between mind and body and then proceed to narrow down the problem. First, I will restrict it to a metaphysical debate and, second, I shall opt for consciousness as a route to solving the problem. Specifically, I will point out and clarify the aspect of conscious experience that needs to be addressed if this problem is to be engaged with in a novel way.

1.2 The mind-body problem

We all know that we have conscious experience. For example, we have conscious experiences when we perceive a coloured object, hear music, when we feel pain or are rejoicing at the sight of a loved one. Popularly understood, the terms “experiential” and “consciousness” refer to what is usually called “mind”. Where we to investigate the nature of the world, by virtue of our awareness and introspection, we would conclude that at least some parts of the world are mental. However, our own experiences seem to suggest the existence of an objective world which we cannot experience intrinsically, that is, “from the inside”. This objective world, therefore, seems devoid of experience – it is not enminded, so to say. Consequently, its nature seems to be radically different than that of our mind. Size, weight, shape, position and motion are all characteristics that we would readily attribute to the objective world but would be reluctant to apply to the concept of mind. Likewise, characteristics such as subjectivity, perception, emotions and thoughts seem exclusively mental. Because of this, we have a discrepancy. We have the general notion of “body” which has, in this context, most often been regarded as non-mental and thus incompatible or contradictory to the notion of mind. In spite of this, we generally attribute mind to other human beings as well as to “higher animals” and,

moreover, recognise that we are each other's "outside" world. However, since we recognise that minded beings like ourselves are an integral part of a seemingly mind-less world, we are faced with the dilemma of how to connect mind and body. This mind-body problem, a recurrent difficulty in our attempts to reconcile the notions of the mental, the bodily and their characteristics, is one of the central questions at the intersection of metaphysics and the philosophy of mind.

In this dissertation, I shall be focused on the metaphysical questions that the problem evokes: "What are mental states and what are physical states and how do they relate to each other? What is the intrinsic nature of concrete reality?" Through history, these questions have been given various answers. Some propose that the world is entirely mental, some that it is entirely physical, some that it is neither and some that it is somehow both. Such answers, however, can be reached in various ways. One's approach depends on the aspect of the mental or of physical that one addresses. Here, we shall discuss the above metaphysical aspects of the mind-body problem in relation to the dimension of mind known as consciousness.

1.2.1 Terminology

Before we start, however, a brief terminological clarification is in order. Two terms necessarily stand out in any discussion of this kind – the "physical" and the "mental". Regarding the former, for now, it will suffice to say that I will use the terms "physical" and "material" interchangeably. Although it is true that physicalism and materialism have different histories, I will consider both to be a metaphysical claim that everything is physical or that everything supervenes on the physical. The second term, however, is harder to spell out. The mental is sometimes identified with consciousness and at other times used as a broader or even narrower term. To specify its range without argumentation, however, is to make a metaphysical assumption. For this reason, we will start by adopting its most common use in recent debates as a term that is broader than consciousness. So much for the mental. As mentioned, the focus

here is on “consciousness”, a term that has often been used in many different ways and quite commonly as involving attention or focus. For example, a person might have walked across the street while observing the traffic lights and successfully avoided collision with other people and all of that time have been lost in thoughts about dinner. The term “conscious”, if it involves attention, would not apply here. However, the person was conscious in a broader sense, in the sense of having concretely experienced all of that simpliciter. It is in this latter, broader sense that I will use the terms “conscious” and “consciousness” and do so interchangeably with “experiential” and “experience”.

1.2.2 A brief overview of consciousness

Nevertheless, such an understanding of consciousness is insufficient and, for the purposes of this dissertation, a more comprehensive understanding of consciousness is required. Recent discussions of the mind-body problem have predominantly relied on the two aspects of consciousness known as qualia and intentionality, so let us begin by examining these.¹ The first aspect, qualia, is also called the qualitative feel or phenomenal character of consciousness.² It is the what-it-is-like of an experience. To illustrate, it is the what-it-is-like of seeing blue, the blueness of sight. Of course, the mentioned is an isolated instance of phenomenal character. Experience, generally, entails not only one but multiple qualities. Seeing blue, for example, may be accompanied by a certain feeling such a sight evokes. In any case, examples of qualia are: the whiteness of a cloud, pain in my knee, anger, the sound of the sea, the flavour of strawberries, hunger, euphoria, the gentleness of touching silk and so on. To sum up, qualia are the intrinsic, non-representational properties of conscious experience. Next, the second aspect of consciousness, intentionality, is also known as the aboutness or representational character of

¹ For example, see Van Gulick (2004), ch. 4 and Gennaro (2015), ch. 3-4. Also, for an overview of the currently popular „hard problem of consciousness“ and how it revolves around the concept of qualia, see Weisberg (2015), ch. 1-2.

² For a more detailed account see Tye (1997).

consciousness.³ It is the what-it-is-like of a having a concept or, more strongly, a belief associated with a certain experience. To clarify, a visual experience of a computer screen before me is about the computer screen, an auditory experience of instrumental music is about the music and a tactile experience of the gentleness of silk is about the gentleness and the silk. Most if not all conscious experiences are about or represent something, that is, involve an object within themselves. For example, in judgement something is affirmed, in love something is loved, in sight something is seen and so on. In short, intentionality is the representational framework underpinning conscious experience or, in other words, the representations in consciousness shaped by a certain associated conceptual content.⁴

Taken together, qualia and intentionality seem to explain the whole of consciousness⁵ and, indeed, they have been almost exclusively called upon in contemporary discussions of the mind-body problem.⁶ However, there is a third aspect of consciousness which, I believe, offers a new and rewarding perspective to the discussion. This third aspect, which I call *clear awareness*, is, in a sense, in contrast with any other aspect of consciousness. That is why all other aspects of consciousness, whatever they may be, can be grouped into a single contrasting aspect. I shall call this latter *the dramatic aspect* of consciousness. Since I will assume that beside clear awareness there are only qualia and intentionality, it will be they that compose the dramatic aspect. Therefore, as I understand it, consciousness has two major aspects – clear awareness and the dramatic aspect. To speak of aspects, however, does not necessarily mean to reify them as separate things and the differentiation in this text is done purely for the sake of analysis. Also important to observe is that for there to actually be a dramatic aspect, only one of its two aspects

³ For a more detailed account see Jacob (2014).

⁴ Note, however, that some philosophers assume that there are representations that are non-conceptual. For example, Fred Dretske and Michael Tye see qualia as non-conceptual representations. For a more detailed account see Jacob (2014), ch. 10.

⁵ There have been attempts to reduce qualia to intentionality and vice versa. However, in this dissertation, for purposes of simplicity and brevity, I shall assume that both qualia and intentionality exist.

⁶ See footnote 1.

is required or, in other words, that qualia and intentionality may occur independently of each other.⁷ That being said, notice that the dramatic aspect will not be relevant to the present discussion. As already stated, most recent discussions focus on the dramatic aspect and ignore clear awareness and it is for that reason that I will try to do the converse, if only for the sake of novelty. Therefore, since my intention in this dissertation is to provide a discussion based on the aspect of clear awareness, it is crucial to elaborate it before we proceed any further.

1.3 Consciousness and clear awareness

Clear awareness, or CA for short, is the ground or most basic aspect of consciousness. For this reason, not only is it a necessary condition to call something “mental” but also, to borrow a phrase from Franz Brentano, represents the mark of the mental.⁸ This concept of CA that I am trying to elaborate was inspired from related ideas within Buddhist philosophy.⁹ Unlike Buddhism, however, which is said to use ideas to lead the practitioner towards the experiential realization of the nature of mind, I shall be focused on a theoretical clarification of what CA would be if it could somehow be the sole object of experience.¹⁰ In order to accomplish this, I will now draw on related materials found within Nagatomo (2006).¹¹

Let us begin with an analogy for consciousness.¹² Imagine a clear, transparent mirror. It may either face something or nothing at all.

“If it does not face a thing, no image is reflected in it. To say that it mirrors an image means that because it faces something, it just mirrors its image. [...] That the mirror

⁷ My own standpoint is that qualia are always present as opposed to intentionality which need not be.

⁸ Jacob (2014), ch. 1.

⁹ Intellectually, CA is parallel to what is known in Buddhism as the emptiness aspect of mind; not to be confused with emptiness itself.

¹⁰ Which it actually cannot, since it cannot be an object for itself, nor can it be isolated.

¹¹ The chapters I will be drawing on are primarily 6.3 and 7.4. Note, however, that Nagatomo is not presenting CA but a different concept called emptiness and is focusing on the meditative experience of said concept.

¹² The analogy is taken from Yanagita (1974), p. 132–3 via Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

reflects a thing means that it always mirrors regardless of whether it is facing or not facing a thing.”¹³

Now, notice that the analogy presents the mirror in two modalities: the mirror by itself and the mirror as it faces an object. The mirror by itself has no image to mirror; whether an object to mirror is present or not is irrelevant for the mirror by itself.¹⁴ The mirror by itself is thus described as being clear, transparent and as always mirroring. These indicate the mirror’s intrinsic nature – it is *constant* and *pure*. To say that it is constant means that it is eternal, unchanging and that it does not admit of gradation. It does not change whether it mirrors an object or not, nor due to the kind of object it mirrors.¹⁵ Furthermore, since the mirror’s nature is pure, that is, nothing except its constant activity of mirroring, it does not impose form on that which is mirrored. In terms of consciousness, the mirror’s intrinsic nature, its constant and pure activity of mirroring is CA. Everything else is the dramatic aspect. To be more precise, the image being mirrored represents qualia, while the form imposed on that image represents intentionality. Since it is not contingent on any specific experience, CA is always present in consciousness and is always of the same *nature*: constant, pure and prefixed as first-person i.e. mental. We might also call CA “the light of consciousness”, while the dramatic aspect “the illuminated” for without CA qualia and intentionality would not have a space in which to appear, so to say, and without qualia, at least, CA would not have anything to “illuminate”. The relationship between CA and qualia is the same as the relationship between existence simpliciter and existence-in-some-way, existence-how. It is for this reason that CA and qualia are only conceptually distinguishable but actually inseparable. This is one reason why CA can never be directly observed. Another reason is that CA, which is the observer, cannot observe itself since nothing can at one and the same time be an object for itself. The closest one can

¹³ Yanagita (1974), p. 132–3 via Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3

¹⁴ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

¹⁵ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

come to experiencing CA then would be by completely removing intentionality from one's conscious experience; a feat that is theoretically possible because of the pure nature of CA as described above. Since it is difficult to think one's way to CA, for the sake of clarification then, let us try to provide a description of the awareness conceived in such a way. Nagatomo (2006) calls this Zen "seeing".

Returning to our mirror analogy, the mirror is pure i.e. clear, transparent insofar as there is no determination in its activity of mirroring. It reflects objects exactly as they are without imposing structure, form, making any value discrimination or judgement. In such a seeing, therefore, there are *no* representations in consciousness shaped by a certain associated conceptual content. In other words, the nature of such a seeing is holistic, non-dualistic. As Nagatomo nicely describes it:

"Conceptually, [...] this holistic perspective [is taken] to mean the [epistemological collapse of polar opposites i.e. the] de-substantialization and de-ontologization of any two polar concepts, such as one and many, being and non-being, universal and particular, absolute and relative, transcendence and immanence, and birth and death. [The] observation is that each of the polar terms is non-dualistically related to each of the other polar terms such that they are connected with, interdependent on, and relative to, each other for their being and meaning."¹⁶

Things perceived in such a way are seen as being empty of an essence or self-nature which is in direct contrast to our everyday experience of perceiving the world as constituted out of many independent entities, including a subject of experience. Here, the subject of experience and all of the experienced become one continuous whole. This state marks the cessation and transcendence of the discriminatory activity of consciousness, a rejection of the belief that there is a reality corresponding to a name or concept.¹⁷ In short, it is a rejection of Husserl's

¹⁶ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

¹⁷ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

intentionality thesis. This means that while thinking, linguistic activity and conceptualization are active, these subtler aspects of consciousness are obscured. One can only access CA pre-reflectively. Furthermore, such an awareness enables one to refute the idea that a subject is a tabula rasa or inert being upon which certain features are imprinted.¹⁸ According to Nagatomo:

“These implications are suggested because [such an] awareness arises out of the state of no-ego in which no projection from the unconscious and no superimposition of intellectual ideas occur in the field of meditative awareness.”¹⁹

In such an awareness all appearances are “equal” insofar as there is no hierarchy and no Gestalt distinction between foreground and background. For example, the feeling of being a subject is just an appearance in CA just as seeing the sky and trees is an appearance. There is no distinction between the subject and the world just as on a screen there is no distinction between the image of the person and that of its surroundings – they are just different features of one and the same image. In this awareness neither space nor time are perceived as a container but are rather expressions of the phenomena themselves, another feature of the image, so to say.

“In phenomenological terms, [since] there is nothetic positing in this kind of seeing [...] the noetic act is rendered nothing. Accordingly, the noematic object is allowed to announce itself without an intentional constitution by the latter. This is the meaning of “no projection” and “no superimposition” mentioned above. It consequently opens up a bottomless horizon, on which a noematic object announces itself *in toto* as a phenomenon.”²⁰

Zen master Dōgen illustrates this by noting that “nothing is hidden in the universe.”²¹ To summarise, all of the above characteristics of seeing can be condensed into a single phrase –

¹⁸ See Nagatomo (2006), ch. 7.4.

¹⁹ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 7.4.

²⁰ Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3 and 7.4.

²¹ trans. Nearman, H. (2007), p. 669.

motion in stillness (seichū no dō).²² In such an awareness, the subject recognizes that they are not really the subject but rather CA which “sees” the dramatic aspect of consciousness in which the experience of being a subject, a human being, for example, is included. Of course, since CA cannot be directly observed, the recognition is, ultimately, that of the inseparability of CA and the dramatic aspect. Buddhists would say that by recognizing that you are nothing, you recognize that you are everything. More precisely, in this kind of awareness one does not experience CA as an object. Rather, the recognition mentioned above refers to the experiential fact that seeing has *turned into* one’s basic nature of consciousness - the inseparability of CA and qualia.²³ Since the attainment of the latter state of mind is pre-reflective and actualised rather than grasped as though being an object, it can be known fully and intimately.

1.4 Conclusion

In this section, I have given an overview of the mind-body problem and presented consciousness as one of the dimensions of mind that is at the focus of contemporary discussions of the mentioned problem. Specifically, I have isolated from the phenomenon of conscious experience the aspect of clear awareness. It is hoped that such an approach will provide a novel and clearer grasp of the discussion and so contribute to the eventual resolution of the metaphysical predicament. The next step is, therefore, to see how the mind-body problem can be solved in relation to this specific aspect of consciousness and our mental life.

²² Nagatomo (2006), ch. 7.4.

²³ See Nagatomo (2006), ch. 6.3.

2 The fundamentality of clear awareness

2.1 Introduction

After having clarified the notion of clear awareness and its relation to the other aspects of consciousness in the previous section, in this section I will offer an argument for the conclusion that clear awareness is metaphysically fundamental. I will present several available positions that one can take with regard to the mind-body debate and gradually eliminate those options that prove to be untenable in connection with the above elaborated understanding of consciousness.

2.2 An overview of the available positions

Since there are many available positions that one can take when discussing the mind-body problem, I will try to narrow these down to several positions which represent the main routes of argumentation in contemporary debates. They are eliminativism regarding the mind and two blocks of positions – reductionism and non-reductionism. Among the reductionist positions, I will explore the options of identity physicalism and neutral monism, while among the non-reductionist positions, I will explore dualism (substance and property), emergentism (as supervenience physicalism) and panpsychism.

2.2.1 *Eliminativism*

Eliminativism or eliminative materialism is a metaphysical position which claims that at least some of the mental states that we usually presume to exist are actually non-existent and thus illusions.²⁴ The claim implies that we are deeply mistaken regarding some or all of our psychological states and processes and that upon scrutiny it will be found that some or all of these do not actually exist even though, as concepts, they play an important role in folk

²⁴ For more details see Ramsey (2003), Churchland (1981) and Dennet (1991).

psychology. Contemporary discussion lists such examples as beliefs, desires but also qualia and consciousness itself. For example, on this view, “the “inner light” we associate with consciousness may be nothing more than a remnant of misguided Cartesian intuitions.”²⁵

Let us consider shortly the position of eliminativism with regard to CA. According to such a position, believing in the existence of CA is but a false intuition, an introspective mistake. Nevertheless, as elaborated in the first section of this dissertation, we can be certain of CA’s existence. On the one hand, this may be achieved by coupling introspection with an understanding of the inseparability of qualia and CA and, on the other, by direct experience. The awareness involving CA is an experiential fact that cannot be a product of clouded judgement since the very experience of it becomes more evident as judgement and conceptualisation are cleared away. On the present understanding of mind, there would never have been any conscious experience in the whole of existence were it not for the aspect of clear awareness. In short, I conclude that this “knowing” aspect of consciousness is the single most secure thing we know about reality and hereby discard the option of eliminativism about CA.

Notice, however, that eliminativism about qualia, for example, might still be a viable option. Even so, on the present understanding of consciousness, that would be irrelevant to the present discussion. Truly, I have written that qualia and CA are inseparable, yet only because that is what I took to be the representative of a minimal dramatic aspect of consciousness. CA must be inseparable with some part of the dramatic aspect and, because of the previously elaborated reasons, it cannot be intentionality but it may be some other part of the dramatic aspect, perhaps one that we have not yet described. Because of this, eliminativism about qualia and other parts of the dramatic aspect need not worry the proponent of CA, unless the eliminativism addresses the whole of the dramatic aspect or consciousness itself. And so, as eliminativism is discarded as a plausible route, we may move on to exploring other options.

²⁵ Ramsey (2003), ch. 3.3.

2.2.2 *Reductionism and non-reductionism*

When it comes to the status of mind, philosophers are usually divided between two broad camps: reductionists and non-reductionists. The former believe that mind is reducible to something more fundamental, while the latter that it is not.

2.2.3 *Physicalism and identity physicalism*

One reductionist position is identity physicalism. Physicalism in general is the thesis that everything is physical or that everything supervenes on the physical.²⁶ Let us quickly address the terminology here. Just as throughout this dissertation, the term “physical” is used interchangeably with “material.” Furthermore, supervenience is a term designating a specific kind of relation which can be explained in the following way:

“A set of properties A supervenes upon another set B just in case no two things can differ with respect to A-properties without also differing with respect to their B-properties. In slogan form, “there cannot be an A-difference without a B-difference”.”²⁷

Once the B set is given, the A set automatically appears.

Identity physicalism, being a subcategory of physicalism, leaves notions of supervenience on the side and claims simply that everything is physical or, in other words, attempts to directly identify the mental with the physical. There are two conceptions of the physical, however, and they are crucial in any debate involving physicalist claims. Stoljar (2001) presents these in chapter 11 of his article on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. The first is *the theory based conception*:

²⁶ Stoljar (2001).

²⁷ McLaughlin and Bennett (2005). For more details see also Francescotti (2015).

“A property is physical iff it either is the sort of property that physical theory tells us about or else is a property which metaphysically (or logically) supervenes on the sort of property that physical theory tells us about.”²⁸

The second is *the object based conception*:

“A property is physical iff: it either is the sort of property required by a complete account of the intrinsic nature of paradigmatic physical objects and their constituents or else is a property which metaphysically (or logically) supervenes on the sort of property required by a complete account of the intrinsic nature of paradigmatic physical objects and their constituents.”²⁹

As already mentioned, the position of identity physicalism avoids notions of supervenience and assumes direct identity between what is regarded as mental and the physical.

2.2.4 *Neutral monism*

The second reductionist position is neutral monism.³⁰ According to this position, reality is fundamentally neither mental nor physical but rather made of a wholly non-mental and a wholly non-physical neutral substance. On this view, the mental and the physical are not fundamentally different kinds of stuff but only different modes of presentation of one and the same neutral substance.

Were one to show, however, that there is indeed something mental, for example, CA that is incompatible with the physical vis-à-vis the given definitions of the physical, then one could discard neutral monism as a viable option within the mind-body debate. Alternatively, it would also suffice to acknowledge the existence of either mental stuff or physical stuff since in that case neutral monism would be eliminated on pain of logical impossibility. The reason is simple; the underlying neutral substance cannot be neither mental nor non-mental or, conversely, it

²⁸ Stoljar (2001), ch. 11.

²⁹ Stoljar (2001), ch. 11.

³⁰ For a more detailed account see Stubenberg (2005).

cannot be neither physical nor non-physical. For example, if the reader were to recognize consciousness or, more specifically, CA as an existent, mental aspect of the world, the possibility of a neutral wholly non-mental reality would immediately cease. Since this is precisely my standpoint in this dissertation, I will now discard the option of neutral monism.

2.2.5 *Substance and property dualism*

The first non-reductionist position that we shall explore is dualism. There are two basic types of dualism in metaphysics: substance dualism and property dualism.³¹ The former holds that concrete reality is made of two ultimately different types of *properties*, while the latter of two ultimately different types of *substances*. The main difference between these two lies in the weight given to the concept of substance over the concept of property. Substance dualists believe that a thing is more than the collection of its properties and therefore identify substance as an underlying entity which *possesses* those properties. According to this view, the mind is more than a collection of mental states, it is the object that has them; in the same way, a subject of experience is more than a bundle of experiences, it is something over and above the experiences. To sum up, the mental and the physical are seen as two incompatible properties by property dualists and as two incompatible substances by substance dualists.

Both these positions, I believe, offer a fundamentally divided metaphysics and thus fail to give an account of the relation between the mental and the physical. Since my intention in this dissertation is precisely to explore this relation or, in other words, to offer a monistic solution to the mind-body problem, I will ignore all dualist positions.

³¹ Predicate dualism is ignored here since it is about language rather than the world. For more information see Robinson (2003).

2.2.6 *Emergentism (supervenience physicalism)*

The second non-reductionist position is emergentism. The concept of emergence is generally taken to mean an arising of certain entities out of more fundamental ones such that the arisen entities are novel in respect with and irreducible to the more fundamental ones.³² One should note, however, that there are two types of emergence - the epistemological and metaphysical kind – and that the given description is much closer to the metaphysical than the epistemological. To clarify, epistemological emergence is “complexity, perhaps of a high enough degree to stop all attempts at practical prediction and explanation;”³³ it deals with knowledge and the inability to get to know a phenomenon, either presently or in principle. On the other hand, metaphysical emergence deals not with knowledge but with concrete reality, it is “the production of genuinely novel, causally efficacious features of the world, stemming from the combination of fundamental components”³⁴ and laws which connect the emergent features with the underlying complex structures; it presents a layered view of the world with a specific science for every such layer. As a standard metaphysical position, emergentism corresponds to this latter, metaphysical type. On this picture, metaphysical emergence is seen as a “supervenience relation which holds in virtue of emergent laws, which are fundamental laws.”³⁵ Moreover, since all contemporary forms of emergentism rely on physicalism, such a position might be characterised as a non-reductive supervenience physicalism or, for short, as supervenience physicalism.

2.2.7 *Panpsychism*

The third and last of the non-reductionist positions is panpsychism. It is the view that mind, however one conceives of it, is a metaphysically *fundamental and ubiquitous* character

³² O'Connor and Wong (2002).

³³ Seager (2009), p. 207.

³⁴ Seager (2009), p. 210.

³⁵ O'Connor and Wong (2002), ch. 3.1.

of concrete reality.³⁶ To say that it is fundamental means that it is not reducible to anything else, either epistemologically or metaphysically or, in other words, that it is neither epistemologically nor metaphysically emergent. Furthermore, to say that it is ubiquitous means that it partakes in every aspect of concrete reality. Since a deeper exploration of panpsychism awaits in the third section of this dissertation, I shall now proceed to the argument for the fundamentality of CA.

2.3 The argument for the fundamentality of clear awareness

2.3.1 The argument

I shall now provide an argument to show that the aspect of consciousness I have named “clear awareness” or “CA”, for short, is a *fundamental* character of concrete reality.

The argument can be presented in a succinct way as follows:

- 1) CA either exists or CA does not exist.
- 2) If CA does not exist, it is not fundamental.
- 3) If CA exists, it is either reducible or not reducible to the physical.
- 4) If it is reducible then one of following is true:
 - 4.1) CA is outright identical with the physical.
 - 4.2) CA is epistemologically emergent on the physical.
- 5) If, on the other hand, CA is not reducible to the physical, then one of the following is true:
 - 5.1) CA is metaphysically emergent from the physical.
 - 5.2) CA is fundamental.
- 6) And, the following premises are true:
 - 6.1) CA exists.
 - 6.2) CA is mental and thus not outright identical with the physical.

³⁶ See also Seager (2009), p. 206.

6.3) If CA exists and is not outright identical with the physical then it may still be emergent or fundamental.

6.4) If CA is emergent then it is either epistemologically or non-epistemologically emergent.

6.5) CA is not epistemologically emergent on the physical.

6.6) CA is not non-epistemologically i.e. metaphysically emergent from the physical because such emergence is incoherent.

7) Therefore, CA is fundamental.

2.3.2 *A short analysis of the argument*

Let us examine the argument more closely. Premise 1) “CA either exists or CA does not exist.” is but a clear example of the law of the excluded middle. Something either exists or it does not exist; there is no need for any special clarification or defence. Premise 2) “If CA does not exist, it is not fundamental.” Points out the obvious fact that CA cannot be a fundamental character of concrete existence if it does not even exist. Premise 3) “If CA exists, it is either reducible or not reducible to the physical.”, just like premise 1), is another example of the law of the excluded middle. If CA exists it is either reducible or else non-reducible, since the concept of reducibility does not allow partiality. For this reason, cases of both-and and neither-nor are excluded. Premise 4) “If it is reducible then one of following is true: 4.1) CA is outright identical with the physical. 4.2) CA is epistemologically emergent on the physical.” merely reiterates the available metaphysical positions I have already presented above. In short, premise 4) states that in the case of reductionism the available options are identity physicalism or, if we are unable to provide a clear identification, at least epistemological emergence – a claim that CA cannot be explained via recourse to the physical but is still believed to be reducible to it. In the same way, premise 5) “If, on the other hand, CA is not reducible to the physical, then one of the following is true: 5.1) CA is metaphysically emergent from the physical. 5.2) CA is fundamental.” reiterates the available positions from the non-reductionist block presented above. The claim is

that if CA is not reducible to the physical, then it is either metaphysically emergent or else fundamental. Premise 6) “And, the following premises are true:” offers a list of premises that after scrutiny are believed to be true. They are “6.1) CA exists. 6.2) CA is mental and thus not outright identical with the physical. 6.3) If CA exists and is not outright identical with the physical then it may still be emergent or fundamental. 6.4) If CA is emergent then it is either epistemologically or non-epistemologically emergent. 6.5) CA is not epistemologically emergent on the physical. 6.6) CA is not non-epistemologically i.e. metaphysically emergent from the physical because such emergence is incoherent.” These premises have to be defended and in case such a defence is successful, they yield the conclusion that 7) “Therefore, CA is fundamental.” Now follows the defence.

2.3.3 A defence of the fundamentality of CA

Let us begin with premise 6.1) “CA exists”. As already discussed above in chapter “2.2.1 Eliminativism”, the truth of this premise is intimately evident. Moreover, it cannot be a product of false or mistaken reasoning since it is arrived at pre-reflectively. Any consciousness recognizes that it has this aspect. It may not know it in a propositional sense, but it surely knows it in an experiential, pre-reflective way. So much about that.

Moving on to premise 6.2) “CA is mental and thus not outright identical with the physical.” The first part of this premise states that CA’s basic character is mental. This is also evidently true for the very reasons explained above regarding premise 6.1). When one encounters CA, the encounter is necessarily also with the basic nature of CA or, in other words, to know CA is also to know its intrinsic nature. More broadly, by virtue of being a conscious being one intimately knows what consciousness is; just as a being with a hand knows how to raise a hand even without having studied how to do it. The second part of the premise concludes that since CA is mental, it cannot be directly identified with the physical. Of course, one may

call CA physical but that would imply that the physical is intrinsically mental, something that the physicalist could never accept.

The next is premise 6.3) “If CA exists and is not outright identical with the physical then it may still be emergent or fundamental.” and it is a claim that limits the available options that one can take in the present metaphysical debate. It basically says that for any existing entity there are four possible *metaphysical* categories it can be placed in. The entity can be identical with what is already considered to be fundamental, it may be emergent, either epistemologically³⁷ or metaphysically, or it may replace the existing paradigm and be fundamental in its own right.³⁸ Let me reiterate this in a different way. The newly discovered phenomenon may be identified as a form of the already recognized fundamental stuff or, if such an identification fails, this is due to one of two possible reasons. The first reason is the inability of explanation – either the knower or the world limit the acquisition of knowledge. The former indicates epistemological emergence, while the latter metaphysical emergence. To clarify, if it is the knower that limits knowledge, it is either the case that we cannot know the phenomenon in question because of a priori reasons such as the nature of mind, of knowledge or of logic in general, or because we are beings that are ill-equipped for such endeavours. If, on the other hand, it is the world that limits knowledge, then it must mean that there is a certain layer of the world which remains inaccessible to investigation. If neither of these two are the case, then the problem is not an inability of explanation, but the lack of an explanation itself. This is the second reason why identification may fail. In such a case, we are compelled to posit the fundamentality of the discovered phenomenon. In our example, since CA is mental, it cannot be identical with the physical. This leaves open the options that CA is emergent, either epistemologically or

³⁷ Strictly speaking, this is not a metaphysical category however, it may enter the metaphysical debate.

³⁸ Excluding co-fundamentality since that would be a dualist/pluralist position and, as explained in chapter 2.2.5, we are ignoring those positions.

metaphysically, or that it is fundamental in its own right. Since premises 6.1) and 6.2) are true and since the given options exhausts all possibilities, this premise is true.

The following premise 6.4) “If CA is emergent then it is either epistemologically or non-epistemologically emergent.” is once again the law of the excluded middle and builds on the previous premise. It says that in the case of emergence there are but two possibilities: either emergence is epistemological or non-epistemological. There is no third option. In general, if a phenomenon is classified as emergent that classification means an inability to explain the phenomenon by appeal to some more basic stuff such as parts at a lower level of complexity. There are two possibilities then as regards metaphysics: either we keep the existing metaphysics and claim ignorance or impossibility of gaining knowledge about the phenomenon, or we expand the existing metaphysics and postulate a novel, irreducible phenomenon which arises out of the more basic stuff. The former claim results in the classification of a phenomenon as epistemologically emergent, while the latter as metaphysically i.e. non-epistemologically emergent.

Now, let us for the moment skip premise 6.5) and go straight to premise 6.6.) “CA is not non-epistemologically i.e. metaphysically emergent from the physical because such emergence is incoherent.” This is a claim against the rationality of metaphysical or, as it is sometimes called, radical emergence. Thomas Nagel, for example, supports the premise when saying that:

“There are no truly emergent properties of complex systems. All properties of a complex system that are not relations between it and something else derive from the properties of its constituents and their effect on each other when so combined.”³⁹

More recently, Galen Strawson has also defended such a position claiming that:

³⁹ Nagel (1979).

„The only kind of emergence of Y from X that makes sense is one in which Y is in some sense wholly dependent on X and X alone, so that all features of Y trace intelligibly back to X.”⁴⁰

In short, if we accept that there is something more than regularity when it comes to the nature of causality, if we believe that causality entails necessity rather than being purely a matter of regular occurrences, then we are assuming a position called causal closure, a position which, for example, every physicalism endorses as well. If we then observe metaphysical i.e. radical emergence from such a standpoint, we conclude that in metaphysical emergence the mental is causally arisen from where there is none and that is a violation of *ex nihilo nihil fit* – the basic logical tenet which says that something cannot arise out of nothing and, vice versa, that something cannot become nothing. Since I will assume causal closure, I conclude that CA, which is intrinsically mental, cannot arise out of the physical i.e. something that is intrinsically non-mental and that, therefore, premise 6.6) is true.

Now we can return to premise 6.5) “CA is not epistemologically emergent on the physical.” Let us suppose for a moment that CA is epistemologically emergent from the physical. If that is the case then the physical and CA are compatible. Moreover, what follows then is that either we have a partial understanding of CA or of the physical, or both. However, to begin with, we do have an understanding of the physical. As mentioned before in chapter 2.2.3 “Physicalism and identity physicalism”, the physicalists themselves provide us with two conceptions of what it means to be physical. The first is the theory based conception according to which a property is physical if physical theory posits it as such or if it metaphysically supervenes on such a property.⁴¹ Let’s see if CA can be made compatible with this characterization of the physical. First, CA is definitely not a property that physical theory tells us about and, second, since metaphysical emergence is incoherent (assuming causal closure)

⁴⁰ Strawson (2006).

⁴¹ See chapter 2.2.3

CA cannot metaphysically emerge from properties that do not include it. Therefore, the theory based conception of physicalism is incompatible with CA. The second conception of the physical is the object based according to which a property is physical if it is necessarily present in a full description of the intrinsic nature of a paradigmatic physical object and its parts or if it metaphysically supervenes on such a property.⁴² Is CA compatible with this second characterization of the physical? If CA were part of the intrinsic nature of a paradigmatic physical object then the latter would be intrinsically mental, which is contradictory to the idea of physicality. However, if CA is not part of the intrinsic nature of a paradigmatic physical object, then it cannot emerge from it because, as already stated, metaphysical emergence is incoherent. Therefore, neither the theory based nor the object based conceptions of the physical are compatible with CA. To sum up, we have said that if CA is epistemologically emergent from the physical then: either we have a partial understanding of CA or of the physical, or both. However, we do not have a partial understanding of the physical and, moreover, the understanding that we have is not compatible with CA. Still, CA might be epistemologically emergent from the physical in case we have a partial understanding of CA. So, do we have a partial understanding of CA? No, CA is a given, it is known pre-reflectively rather than via representation or conceptualization etc. and thus known intimately and fully. That is why we could assess its compatibility with the physical in the first place. And so, we have an understanding of both CA and the physical and they are still incompatible. The incompatibility of the physical and CA, therefore, is not a matter of epistemology but of metaphysics. CA is not epistemologically emergent from the physical and, consequently, premise 6.5) is true.

There is another reason why CA cannot be epistemologically emergent from the physical. I have noticed that in contemporary debates, physicalists see mind and consciousness as phenomena that appear when a specific organization of matter on a high enough level of

⁴² See chapter 2.2.3

complexity is achieved. On the present view of consciousness, however, this shows a basic confusion between the aspect of CA and the dramatic aspect of consciousness. Let me spell this out a bit. As elaborated in chapter 1.3 “Consciousness and clear awareness”, the nature of CA is characterized as pure and constant. “Pure” means that CA is nothing but the continuous activity of “illuminating” the dramatic aspect, the empty space in which it appears. Presently, even more important, however, is the term “constant” which means that CA is eternal, unchanging and that it does not admit of gradation. It does not change whether it has qualia or not, nor due to the kind, organization, complexity etc. of those qualia and this is crucial. It is only the dramatic aspect and its parts that can evolve and change, be simpler or more complex, richer or scarcer but not CA. To speak of epistemological emergence then, given the nature of CA, is misleading. All consciousnesses have exactly one and the same aspect of CA but may differ wildly when it comes to the dramatic aspect. Complexity and organisation, therefore, have everything to do with the dramatic aspect but nothing to do with CA. And so, it makes sense to speak of the epistemological emergence of qualia, for example, but no sense with regard to CA since it cannot arise by being assembled in any way. This is the second reason why I conclude that CA is not epistemologically emergent and why premise 6.5) is true.

2.3.4 The argument's conclusion

As we have seen in the previous chapters, the argument for the fundamentality of CA can be successfully defended. It presents and discards four attempts of either eliminating CA or establishing it as something non-fundamental. They are: a) that CA is eliminated in favour of the physical, b) that CA is identified with the physical, c) that CA is epistemologically emergent on the physical and d) that CA is metaphysically emergent from the physical. There are four reasons why these attempts fail to prevent CA from being classified as fundamental and they are: a) CA exists, b) CA is mental and thus cannot be identified with the physical, c) CA is not epistemologically emergent and d) CA cannot be metaphysically emergent. The only remaining

option and, therefore, also the conclusion of the present argument is that CA is a fundamental character of concrete reality. Accordingly, the intrinsic nature of concrete existence is mental.

2.4 Conclusion

In this section I have attempted to offer a monistic solution to the mind-body problem. In order to do so, I have argued that the aspect of consciousness called clear awareness is a fundamental character of concrete reality. After the argument's defence, I have concluded that the intrinsic nature of concrete existence is mental, rather than physical. However, what remains to be clarified is the exact relation that CA has with the "body". In short, what is now needed is a positive account of concrete existence compatible with the given solution to the mind-body problem.

3 Panpsychism and clear awareness

3.1 Introduction

In this section, I will present a version of panpsychism as a viable theory for explaining the nature of concrete reality. The version I will present is one compatible with the above given solution to the mind-body problem where the clear awareness aspect of consciousness is identified as a fundamental aspect of concrete reality.

3.2 CA-Panpsychism

3.2.1 *Panpsychism in general*

Panpsychism is the view that mind or, in other words, consciousness is a metaphysically fundamental (or co-fundamental) and ubiquitous character of concrete reality.⁴³ To say that it is fundamental means that it is not reducible to anything else, either epistemologically or metaphysically. Furthermore, to say that it is ubiquitous means that it partakes in every aspect of concrete reality. Panpsychism has also been characterised as “any view that reunites mentality with materiality, and thereby dismantles the foundational dualism of Western thought.”⁴⁴ This leads to a further point – panpsychism is a meta-theory rather than a proper theory of mind. As such, its claim is simply that *mind* applies to all of concrete existence, regardless how one comprehends it.⁴⁵ Here are a few examples. One can be a panpsychist property dualist, believing that existence has both irreducibly physical and mental properties, the latter being present in all things. One can be a panpsychist personal idealist, believing that all things are self-realizations of their own, individual mind. One can be a panpsychist functionalist, regarding the functional character of all objects as mentality. Arguably,

⁴³ See Seager (2009), p. 206.

⁴⁴ See Mathews (2003), p. 4.

⁴⁵ See Skrbina (2005), p. 2.

panpsychism is applicable to most contemporary theories of mind. However, it is important to note a common misconception regarding panpsychism's connection with subjective idealism.

“Panpsychism is sometimes described as a version of [subjective] idealism, but such is not necessarily the case. [Subjective] idealism posits mind as the essential reality of all things; panpsychism argues, roughly, that all things “have minds.” The former is from an external perspective, the latter from an internal one.”⁴⁶

This shows that one may be a subjective idealist without being a panpsychist and vice versa. Either way, an important insight offered by these remarks is that panpsychism does not deflate the outside world to a subject's sphere of experience as, for example, in the case of George Berkeley's version of idealism where physical objects are merely collections of a subject's sensory impressions. Moreover, when it comes to subjects, one should be aware that:

“panpsychism does not imply that there are subjects of experience in addition to experiential reality, or that everything that exists involves the existence of a subject of experience in addition to the existence of experiential reality.”⁴⁷

This is, however, not to say that experience does not entail an experiencer.⁴⁸ As all experience is necessarily experience-for, that is, for someone or something, it is necessarily had and entails an experiencer. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the experiencer must be irreducibly ontologically distinct from the experience itself. Therefore, panpsychism leaves open the question whether there is an additional experiencer to experiential reality or whether the two are actually one and the same. So much about panpsychism in general.

3.2.2 *CA-Panpsychism*

Panpsychism based on CA or, *CA-Panpsychism* for short, is not as broad a theory as panpsychism in general. Since here “mind” is replaced by the concept of CA, its definition is

⁴⁶ Skrbina (2005), p. 11.

⁴⁷ Strawson (2015).

⁴⁸ See Strawson (2015), ch. 12.

slightly narrower: CA-Panpsychism is the view that the clear awareness aspect of consciousness is a metaphysically fundamental and ubiquitous character of concrete reality. Notice how the concept of *mind has now become synonymous with consciousness*, as understood in this dissertation, since everything that happens, happens in CA and, consequently, in consciousness. This makes the present variant of panpsychism a so-called “pure” panpsychism.

In spite of this, CA-Panpsychism retains the title of meta-theory as it allows a range of more concrete theories to fall under its scope. As a meta-theory, it simply states that, however one conceives of mind, so long as this conception involves CA as its basic aspect, such mind will apply to all of concrete existence. Thus, for example, one can be a CA-panpsychist subjective idealist or a CA-panpsychist functionalist. The important point here is that CA-Panpsychism is restricted to monistic theories of concrete reality that posit mind as the ultimate nature of the world, rather than matter or some neutral stuff. This is based on the conclusion reached in the previous section according to which there is ultimately one kind of stuff in concrete existence and it is intrinsically mental since it is marked by CA.⁴⁹ To exemplify, as a result, one cannot be a CA-panpsychist physicalist or a CA-panpsychist property dualist but can be a CA-panpsychist objective idealist.

Another important point is the distinction between the dramatic aspect of mind and CA. When panpsychists argue that everything has mind I believe that, in most cases, they mean only that everything has this aspect of clear awareness. Furthermore, as the latter cannot exist independently of the dramatic aspect, for example, of qualia, everything has at least some qualia. On the present view, there is no such thing as the unconscious and the term ideally refers to the *minimally conscious* or, in other words, to the conscious with almost nothing in the dramatic aspect. This is only logical since taking mind as an irreducible phenomenon, how could one conceive of a person losing consciousness, for example, upon falling asleep and

⁴⁹ See chapter 2.4.

somehow regaining it upon waking up without breaking the principle of the conservation of information or, more basically, *ex nihilo nihil fit*? To illustrate, both a human and a pebble have experience insofar as they have the aspect of clear awareness, however the human's experience is content-rich, in terms of qualia per chance, while the pebble's experience has almost no such content. By no means does the CA-panpsychist conceive of sticks and stones as having complex emotions, sensations and so on. What is constant, hence, is the CA aspect and what changes and evolves is the dramatic aspect. The difference between a pebble and a human being is, therefore, a difference in their local dramatic aspect with the human one being richer and more organized and the pebble's being much emptier and disorganized. In brief, it rests upon a proper theory of mind and perhaps a theory of epistemological emergence to account for the structure and richness of the dramatic aspect and science already does a fairly good job when it comes to explaining it. For example, we have a solid intellectual understanding of why and how human vision differs from that of a fish or of why and how a human's sense of smell differs from that of a dog. Likewise, science, and especially physics, gives us an elaborate picture of the workings of the universe, that is, in this case, of the workings of the dramatic aspect of mind. Notice that

“the panpsychist hypothesis performs a ‘global replace’ on physics as ordinarily conceived. In so doing it leaves the whole of physics—everything that is true in physics—in place. So too for all the other sciences. [...] It leaves the physical world untouched, as ‘out there’, relative to each one of us, as it ever was.”⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Strawson (2015), ch. 13.

3.3 Some objections to CA-Panpsychism and replies

With this general clarification in place, we may now examine panpsychism with regard to its position in today's discussions. One popular problem that many see as intimately connected with panpsychism but is actually only pertinent to some of its versions is the so-called "combination problem". How can many instances of experience come to constitute a single instance?⁵¹ The question arises because of three reasons. One is holding that the world is composed of a great many components or parts, that is, fragmented and formed out of a host of separate objects. The second reason is the belief that a subject of experience is one whole and the third is the impossibility to accept some sort of fusion whereby more separate instances of experience come to form a single one. For example, if we are composed out of atoms, which, according to panpsychism, are themselves subjects of experience, how is any person then a single subject of experience? Is there some fusion process that allows this? There are various answers to these question and, personally, I do not believe that the combination problem presents a threat to panpsychism insofar as I do not believe the world to be fragmented. In a continuous world there arises no such problem. However, I am not going to defend this non-duality thesis at present since I only wanted to inform the reader that there can be a version of panpsychism, maybe a CA-Cosmopsychism⁵², which withstands such counter-arguments.

Moving on, from its definition, it is clear that panpsychism contrasts with two of today's mainstream views of reality, namely, mechanism and humanism. Let us first consider mechanism. Although universal mechanism, the idea that all natural phenomena can be explained mechanically in terms of matter, motion, force and mechanical laws, seems to have been abandoned, the philosophy of mind still hosts the debate over the narrower thesis of anthropic mechanism, the view that everything about human beings can be explained

⁵¹ See Strawson (2015) and Shani (2015).

⁵² See Shani (2015).

mechanically in the previously mentioned terms.⁵³ However, should one try to reduce the mental to or identify it with the material, as does anthropic mechanism, the “hard problem of consciousness” springs forth.⁵⁴ Anti-mechanists such as panpsychists argue that unconscious matter cannot completely explain the phenomenon of consciousness or, in other words, that the non-experiential cannot completely explain the experiential, at least not the aspect of clear awareness. Basically, the problem is that anthropic mechanism, by relying on pure materialism, denies the fundamentality of the experiential which is one of the main points of panpsychism. On the other hand, another of its main points, the ubiquitousness of the experiential, is contested by humanism, which carries the assumption that mind is limited to humans and perhaps the “higher animals”.⁵⁵ Indeed, humans do possess remarkable mental capabilities such as reason, language, an array of complex emotions and feelings, however “nothing so unique as to alone account for the presence of a mind. What is at issue is *not*”⁵⁶ the structure and richness of the dramatic aspect of consciousness, but rather the aspect of clear awareness of experience in general. Nevertheless, despite the difficult problems they face, mechanism and humanism are still deeply ingrained in the collective psyche of the modern Westerner. Since they represent the modern scientific worldview, challenging them often means to be marginalised and labelled as controversial. This is only natural, since acquiring a certain paradigm makes it a basis for all further understanding and action. Everyone is necessarily biased and therein rests the need to continually re-examine one’s basic assumptions. There are good reasons to believe CA-Panpsychism is true or, at least, to consider it a serious candidate for resolving the mind-body problem.

“For most of humanity, for most of history, panpsychism has been an accepted and respected view of the world. More to the point, it is a matter of fact that many of

⁵³ See Psillos (2007), p. 149-50.

⁵⁴ See Van Gulick (2004), ch. 5.4.

⁵⁵ See Skrbina (2005), p. 1.

⁵⁶ Skrbina (2005), p. 1.

the greatest [Eastern and] Western thinkers advocated some form of panpsychism.

[...] For this reason alone it is deserving of serious consideration.”⁵⁷

Its allure lies with its simplicity and with the apparent fact that it avoids the problems of dualism and materialism while at the same time retaining all their benefits. It does not struggle with the problem of interaction, nor with the so-called “hard problem of consciousness.” And so, as counterintuitive as CA-Panpsychism may seem, it may be perhaps the best theory we have when it comes to the nature of reality and that of the mind.

3.4 Conclusion

In this final section, I have presented CA-Panpsychism as a positive account of concrete existence compatible with the above given characterisation of consciousness and solution to the mind-body problem. It elaborates on the relation between mind and body by presenting us the world as a mental realm within which all of our other ideas about nature and its workings are kept intact.

⁵⁷ Skrbina (2005), p. 3.

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