1. Introduction

In recent debate surrounding theory of mind, there seems to be a significant concern, for some even a disdain, regarding mainstream physicalism. This is the thesis that the entities described by physics make up all there is in the world, which is a mainstream view for good reason. Yet as a result, mind and experience are entirely reducible to physical processing as well.¹ The concern with physicalism is that it does not seem like we can explain conscious experience—what it is like to see a forested landscape, or to smell baked bread, etc.—using just the terms provided through physics. Experience as we know it has a subjective quality: there is something that it’s like to have such first-person experiences.² To use David Chalmers’ famous formulation, what we have here is the “hard problem” of consciousness: why should physical processing of the kind taking place within our brains lead to any subjective experience at all?³ We can understand quite well the physiology behind how, say, vision works, but many are convinced that such explanations do not suffice to explain the rich, subjective quality of the corresponding visual experience. The cause of such disagreement is called the explanatory gap—a genuine dissimilarity between what physics describes and what we all know experience to be like—and it serves

¹ To be sure, there are many nuanced views concerning consciousness that fall under the umbrella of physicalism, but in order to claim such a title they all must generally adhere to this description.
² This phrasing has been made mainstream due to Thomas Nagel. See Thomas Nagel, “What is it like to be a bat?” Philosophical Review 4 (October 1974): 435-50.
as a strong motivation against physicalism and towards other options.\(^4\)

Though there are many theories to choose from, in this essay I will narrow my focus to panpsychism and a similar variant of Russellian monism called panqualityism. The reason I’m inclined to explore these options is the same as why one may be disinclined from accepting mainstream physicalism—the intuition that it would be very mysterious and seemingly unintelligible for consciousness to arise from unconscious building blocks. As will be shown later on, panpsychism provides the most direct and obvious hypothesis accounting for this intuition, but it runs into what may be insurmountable problems in the process. In an attempt to counter these problems while still bridging the explanatory gap, panqualityism will be evaluated. Recent work by Sam Coleman has outlined the main motivations of this position, one that he believes ought to be trusted over panpsychism. Against Coleman’s suggestion, I will aim to show that panqualityism, too, has serious problems that require a seemingly unforeseeable explanation, and that we are not justified in assuming it has more promise than panpsychism.

A brief road map of where we’re headed: in (2) I will outline a few motivating assumptions that will be used throughout the essay. In (3) I will describe the best form of panpsychism, and in (4) I will describe the theory’s biggest challenge as well as explore solutions to it. In (5) panqualityism will be spelled out, and in (6) I describe its challenges and potential solutions. In closing, (7) will detail my take on which problems are worse than others, yet also why a new solution ought to be in sight.

2. Motivating Assumptions

It will be helpful to state two assumptions that will be held throughout this essay. These will be briefly argued for here, but not completely.

2.1 Smallism

The first assumption that I will hold is what can be called smallism: any and all facts about the physical world are determined by facts about the smallest things in the physical world. When looking for an explanation of macroscopic phenomena, we need only look to the microphysical level to provide a complete description. In other words, to account for all facts about the world, the description begins with the smallest things (e.g. atoms, electrons, quarks, etc.), and builds up from there. Note that this does not necessarily require a scientific thesis about what exactly is the smallest unit of the physical world. Rather, wherever an explanation is required about physical phenomena, it is to be found in the physical building blocks of that phenomena. This thesis may be attractive to anyone with strong inclinations towards the causal closure of physics, but it does leave us with an enormous task: all things in the physical world, including subjective experience—insofar as this can be called physical—must be accounted for from the smallest things.

2.2 No Brute Emergence-From

Emergence can be defined as the derivation of a phenomenon/property X from phenomena/properties Y in which X is not present. There are different degrees to which emergence can occur. The kind of emergence that I will assume ought to be avoided is that no phenomena X can be derived unintelligibly, by appeal to a brute fact, from any bases Y in which the property of X is not present in the bases Y. In other words, describing how some phenomena can come about from a state of affairs that lacks that phenomena should make understandable sense to us. For example, as what could be considered the standard case, the emergence of liquidity from non-liquid water molecules can be completely described using the terms of physics. Most importantly, the description provided—water molecules sliding past one another and being attracted to one another with enough force—sensibly describes what liquidity is, with no further explanation required.
3. Russellian Panpsychism

Panpsychism is the view that mentality is a fundamental feature throughout nature. Under this thesis, the fundamental building blocks of nature—i.e. ultimates—have experience and, hence, are subjects of experience. Let’s refer to the phenomenal properties of human experience as macrophenomenal properties of macroexperience. Under panpsychism, there are also microphenomenal properties, microexperience, and ultimates existing as microsubjects. In short, under panpsychism, consciousness pervades the universe: it is a fundamental feature of the physical world. Let’s evaluate panpsychism in the context of our motivating assumptions: smallism and no brute emergence-from.

3.1 Panpsychism and Smallism

Recall: smallism is the thesis that all facts about the physical world are determined by facts about the smallest things. Panpsychism and smallism may happily coexist. Macroscopic consciousness, in the case of conscious individuals like you and I, are what need to be explained. The explanation, for the panpsychist, is found by looking at the smallest things: we are conscious because we have brains composed of physical bits that have consciousness built-in to them. Indeed, smallism is very important for panpsychists: by the fact that macroscopic phenomena must be explained at the microscopic level, experience (of a sort) is posited at such lower levels. Some will object that panpsychism isn’t really a physicalist theory, but the primary focus of smallism is about explanation of macroscopic phenomena.

---

5 One may object that this explanation begs the question: isn’t consciousness what we’re trying to explain in the first place? This objection doesn’t properly understand the position of panpsychism in the first place. Panpsychism’s claim is that the only way to explain consciousness at all is for it to be a fundamental posit—for what could we derive it from?

6 Looming in the background is a distinction between broadly and narrowly physical entities. This technicality will be omitted for this essay, but it should be noted that panpsychism is considered a broadly physicalist thesis.
From what’s been seen so far, panpsychism is well-motivated by such an assumption.

3.2 Panpsychism and No Brute Emergence-From

As said previously, *liquidity* emerges from the molecules of water in an intelligible, conceptually consistent way that makes pleasing sense. Yet to say that subjective experience can emerge from the non-experiential cannot — *in principle*, importantly — be made sense of in the same way. Even if we were provided a complete description of the brain, this would still not provide an intelligible explanation for why experience should exist at all. Back to the original definition of brute emergence-from: no phenomena *X* can be derived unintelligibly, by appeal to a *brute fact*, from any bases *Y* in which the phenomena *X* is not present. Take *X* to be subjectival experience and take *Y* to be the non-experiential components of the brain. In this case, trivially, *X* is not to be found in the bases *Y*. And there seems to be *no way* — other than appealing to a brute fact — to intelligibly explain how experience should supervene on the non-experiential.7 Any explanation provided would be nothing short of stating a miracle: just *how* could a physical arrangement like the brain lead us to *experience* as an end product?

Panpsychism avoids this criticism.8 Accepting the thesis, we are to find experientiality all the way down at the fundamental level. Given that our brain is made up of physical ultimates (be they atoms, electrons, …, their true identity is of no importance here), then subjectival experience, *X*, is already to be found in the bases *Y*. In terms of explaining phenomenal consciousness at the most basic level, there is no appeal to brute emergence-from.9

We can now see that panpsychism is consistent with our two motivating assumptions (2.1) and (2.2). This is good reason to move

7 Appealing to brute facts would take the following form: experience is derived from the non-experiential brain, because it just *does*.
8 Any theory that opposes emergentism can be called *constitutive*. For completeness’ sake, the version of panpsychism supported here should be considered constitutive.
9 Those who have done significant work on the Subject Combination Problem — e.g. Coleman and Chalmers — claim that panpsychism must appeal to emergence in order to make sense of macrosubjects. This is a claim that will have to be considered in later sections.
forward with the theory, or at least hold it as a viable option for explaining the mind. But, of course, this is not to say that panpsychism passes all troubles with ease. One may object that the details that really matter when bridging the explanatory gap are in how the microphenomenal properties combine to yield macrophenomenal properties. This is the well-known combination problem, a problem that has plagued panpsychism since its origin. There are countless subdivisions of the problem, such as the structure and quality combination problems, the unity problem, and the boundary problem, not to mention many more. All of these problems need to be satisfactorily addressed in order for panpsychism to succeed, and such answers to the combination problem are hard to come by. There is even a further combination problem that I have failed to mention so far, as it is considered to be especially difficult to answer—the subject combination problem.

4. The Subject Combination Problem

The subject combination problem can be stated as follows: how can macrosubjects, like ourselves, be constituted by microsubjects? The intuition behind the problem was originally and most famously delivered by William James in The Principles of Psychology:

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.\textsuperscript{11}

The upshot of James’ argument is that there’s no reason to suppose that microsubjects, in any aggregation or arrangement, should ever necessitate the existence of a macrosubject. In the same way that a large room of 100 people does not lead to the production of a single conscious entity constituted by each person in the room, why should physical ultimates arranged brain-like do the same? Just what would such a process look like?

4.1 Current Status of the Problem

The subject combination problem has been bolstered by many in recent debate, but here I will focus on an argument put forth by Sam Coleman.\textsuperscript{12} His argument runs as follows: to be a subject of experience is to be an experiential entity with a phenomenological viewpoint. What would it look like for subjects to combine, as indeed they must for panpsychism to be true? “If micro-subjects combined into macro-subjects, then, what we should anticipate is their coming together closely enough to interact, thereby modifying their properties, whilst all the while they survived in the whole they formed.”\textsuperscript{13} The formation of the water molecule is a token example of combination: two atoms of hydrogen and one of oxygen combine as they interact in ways that modify each atom—each atom completes their outer electron shell through sharing of electrons—yet the atoms remain wholly intact all the while. Yet Coleman holds that it is impossible for subjects, be they on the micro- or macro- level, to fulfill this criterion of combination. To make the problem worse, Coleman holds that the fundamental posit of subjectivity must do some explanatory work at the higher-order level, in the same way that in physics the

\textsuperscript{11} William James, \textit{The Principles of Psychology} (Boston: Henry Holt), 343.


\textsuperscript{13} Coleman, “The Real Combination Problem,” 31.
fundamental posit of charge directly accounts for the higher-order phenomenon of magnetism. Panpsychists posit subjectivity as a fundamental feature of ultimates only so that subjectivity at the macroscopic level can be explained, namely through some form of combination. But this, to Coleman, cannot be possible, for subjective points of view cannot combine: what could it even mean for subjects to combine like this?

I am not inclined to argue against Coleman here, as I think he is correct. The subject combination problem has some serious intuitive pull, and if this problem stands as is, then panpsychism surely fails. This, of course, is not to say that there haven’t been many attempts at solving it.

4.2 Is a solution in sight?

In order to provide a satisfying answer to the subject combination problem, it may seem natural to start by exploring what a subject of experience might be. Any reasonable answer must admit that subjects of experience do in fact exist. The most manifest truth of all—the one indubitable fact—is that experience exists, and for any experience to exist there must be a subject there to experience it. So we know that a subject of experience must at least exist, but what else can be said about it? Perhaps there are different ways to diminish our notion of “subject” without eliminating it all together. The idea here is that if we can diminish the notion of “subject,” then perhaps this diminishes the requirements of combination as well. The more concrete the macrosubject is, it seems, the harder it will be to derive it from microsubjects, so diminishing the subject may be just the strategy. Just this approach is taken by current sympathizers with panpsychism: Galen Strawson and David Chalmers.

Let us start with Strawson, who rather than attack the subject combination problem head on focuses on just what a subject of experience is at all. To Strawson, there are three conceptions of “subject” that could exist, and one ought to be preferred over the others. There is the thick conception: human beings (and other conscious creatures), considered as a whole, are subjects of

experience. There is also the *traditional* conception: the subject is some sort of inner, persisting, mentally propertied entity. Strawson argues that these two tend to capture almost all common intuitions about what a subject might be. However, he proposes a third possibility; a *thin* conception of the subject is one that does not and cannot exist without an experience also existing. This conception is motivated by the conceptual truth that for any experience to exist, there must be a subject there to experience it. It should be noted too that this thin conception of the subject is remarkably, well, *thin*. One does not need to posit much of anything metaphysical to accompany the thin subject; we can accept it without claiming that it is persistent, physical or immaterial, autonomous, etc. All we *know* is that for any existing experience, there must be an accompanying subject of experience that also exists.

Strawson concludes that the thin conception of the subject ought to be accepted over the others due to reasons of simplicity. I, too, would say that for reasons of epistemic humility, the thin subject out to be trusted—when in doubt, we ought to go with the answer that posits the least, and leaves the least room for mistakes. It can be seen how the thin notion of the subject is a diminished notion of the concept. We are not talking about an immaterial soul, or a metaphysical self that persists over time, or any other metaphysically spooky entity that may lead us to depart from (2.1) and (2.2). Rather, we are on firm metaphysical and epistemic grounds when we say that a subject of experience must exist, for we know that experience exists, and all we are willing to posit thus far is that this subject—whatever it amounts to metaphysically—exists only when and for as long as its corresponding experience exists. So much, then, for the isolated discussion of what a subject of experience may be. We can now turn back to the subject combination problem and look to David Chalmers’ discussions of how to solve it.

As mentioned previously, diminishing the notion of the subject is an intuitive approach to solving the subject combination problem. Chalmers engages with this idea first when evaluating different responses to the problem. To use Chalmers’ terminology of “deflating the subject,” he first considers if full eliminativism of subjects will work. Of course, this would be a rather expedient option for solving the subject combination problem, but for reasons

---

discussed previously, it is untenable given the obvious existence of experience and its corresponding subjectival element.

Chalmers’ next option is to deflate the subject past anything that is metaphysically primitive—past something like a soul, metaphysical self, or any other persistent entity. A metaphysically primitive subject, properly defined, is an entity that cannot be constituted by anything more fundamental—be it a collection of microsubjects or anything else for that matter. This kind of a subject is something necessarily posited in ontology to explain our subjectivity as we know it. Denying this kind of subject lends itself to a constitutive theory in which subjects are, somehow, created or derived from something else (perhaps subjects of a lesser kind, like microsubjects or protosubjects). This strategy of denying a metaphysically primitive subject is certainly not a new idea, and for anyone partial to panpsychism or Russellian monist theories in general, it ought to be the strategy. Chalmers notes that this denial has been attempted by figures such as James and Mach (in rejecting a “soul” and “ego” with “real unity,” respectively), and Russell too certainly fits the bill with his introspective denial of a self and/or mind.16

With Strawson, we’ve already performed this deflation of a metaphysically primitive subject. The thin conception of the subject, in contrast with the traditional conception, is not necessarily metaphysically primitive like that of a soul or self. Recall: positing that a subject must exist whenever its corresponding experience does does not posit anything metaphysical about the entity. We are still on firm metaphysical and epistemic grounds to say that this thin subject could very well be some kind of composite or derivative entity. At least so far, then, we are working with a subject that is consistent with Chalmers’ suggestion of deflating the subject. Now, however, we ought to consider if such a notion actually provides a solution to the subject combination problem.

4.3 The Subject Combination Problem Remains

We have deflated our notion of the subject to something very minimal: the subject exists only when and for as long as its

corresponding experience exists. The subject of experience, on the macroscopic scale, cannot be something metaphysically primitive, for then we only strengthen the combination problem against it. So we must be dealing with a subject that is composite or derivative of some kind. This may seem like a trivial claim for the panpsychist to make: *of course* the subject has to be composite/derivative, otherwise what is the point in having microsubjects in ontology? All of this is just to say that we are on the right track in properly answering the problem.

But it seems to me that our thin notion of the subject still faces the subject combination problem in full force, and Chalmers’ suggestion of deflating the subject is without purpose. We need not be dealing with a metaphysically primitive subject to still face the problem—so long as we are dealing with subjectivity *at all*, and remaining in the panpsychist worldview, the combination problem will remain. We have the physical ultimates being properly called microsubjects, and these microsubjects must come together in a way to produce the *thin* subject of experience. Where in this picture is the subject combination problem still not as forceful as ever? We can switch out “thin” in this scenario with anything you like: metaphysical, persistent, thick or traditional, and so on. Subjectivity still must be explained by dint of constitution from the microsubjects, and the subject combination problem immediately ensues. The only way to avoid the subject combination problem, as Chalmers hopes to do with a deflated notion of the subject, is to deflate the subject entirely to full eliminativism. Then the microsubjects in ontology need not combine into anything *necessarily*, and the problem is solved. But this is completely untenable given the total obviousness of the existence of experience.

To summarize: the subject combination problem is indeed a serious problem, one that must be addressed in order for panpsychism to succeed. And even with a severely diminished notion of the subject, the thin conception, the problem still stands as strong as ever. No deflation of subjectivity will provide any help in solving it unless we go all the way to full eliminativism, which is unacceptable. It is true that in order for panpsychism to succeed, this problem must be solved, but to some this is not reason to give up on panpsychism entirely. All problems are unsolved problems before they are given solutions, and it may be justified to continue efforts on solving them. Others, however, are not so convinced. Due to the severity of the subject combination problem, Sam Coleman departs from panpsychism entirely, arguing that the best promise is found
elsewhere in the Russellian Monist camp under the guise of neutral monism.\textsuperscript{17} This view is a serious departure from panpsychism, where subjectivity is no longer a fundamental posit in ontology. However, if Coleman is right about the severity of the subject combination problem, then this may be the only way to safely proceed. His views, and argument for neutral monism as a better alternative to panpsychism, will be considered in the next section.

5. Neutral Monism over Panpsychism?

In his evaluation of panpsychism, Coleman notes two incompatible intuitions:

(1) Experientiality cannot come from the non-experiential, and
(2) Macro-subjectivity cannot be compositely derived from micro-subjects.

We’ve seen plenty of reason to think that (1) is true. Yet (2) is a strong intuition that now needs to be given proper respect. Panpsychism receives abundant support from (1), but its greatest downfall is of course (2). Given these intuitions, Coleman departs from panpsychism and posits a form of neutral monism that he believes is consistent with both: panqualityism. Keeping (2) at the forefront, Coleman writes “[w]e should retain qualities in micro-ontology, but deny that they require subjects to experience them.”\textsuperscript{18}

On panqualityism, \textit{qualities} are the irreducible intrinsic properties that constitute matter and mind. These qualities are not intrinsically phenomenal: each quality can exist independent of any subject experiencing it, and the quality itself is not a subject of experience. But these qualities are also not themselves physical—hence the neutral monism\textsuperscript{19}. Coleman is partial to this view at least because there is no subject combination problem: with no microsubjects posited at the


\textsuperscript{18} Coleman, “Panpsychism and Neutral Monism,” 259.

\textsuperscript{19} Or, at least, they ought not to be considered as such. Coleman doesn’t seem to directly explain how qualities can ground matter and mind without being physical. However, if panqualityism claims to be a form of neutral monism, then it must claim that these qualities are \textit{neither} physical nor mental.
micro-level, then there is no need for macrosubjects to be derived from smaller units of subjectivity. However, this means that any panqualityist account will have to depart from the intuition (1) which motivates panpsychism—that experientiality cannot come from the non-experiential—meaning that subjectivity will have to be explained in some reductive or functionalizable fashion. What on the panqualityist account explains subjectivity? Qualities are present at the fundamental level, and they become what we are aware of when we have phenomenal properties. For the faculty of awareness itself, this is where Coleman introduces a higher-order thought theory (HOTT).

Higher-order theories regarding consciousness maintain that experientiality can be reductively explained through higher-order representations. HOTT holds that a phenomenally conscious mental state is one that is the object of a higher-order thought (HOT). A mental state causes a (generally non-conscious) belief that I have that mental state. If such a mental state has the kind of character corresponding to an experience (visual sensation, feeling of discomfort, etc.), then once it is properly situated to a HOT, we have a sufficient condition for that state becoming conscious. An example seems necessary to spell this out. I form a belief that I am feeling hungry by unconsciously noticing my stomach aching and a smell of dinner cooking from down the hall. With this belief formed, and the added stipulation that I draw an unconscious inference that these phenomena correspond to a mental state that I have, then I will become conscious of my hunger.

An oft-celebrated intuition from HOTT is that a conscious mental state is one in which the subject is aware of having. From this, I take it that awareness, as is meant here, can be taken as interchangeable with any conscious mental state. If I am conscious of being hungry, then I am aware I am hungry. If I am not conscious of the blind spot in my

---

21 It should be noted that HOTT can be classified as a functional account for subjectivity. It is by dint of the way that HOTs are targeted at specific mental states that makes them conscious to a subject, and it is the emphasis on this relation between HOT and mental state that makes it functional.
eye, then I am not aware of the visual content that I am hence blind to. It seems to me that Coleman takes this to be true—in his combination of panqualityism with HOTT (what he calls HOT-panqualityism), he writes “consciousness is simply that relation whereby qualities are brought into subjectival awareness.”

Yet at this point, it may seem strange to try and include panqualityism with HOTT. Why not simply take HOTT as our explanation for consciousness and move on? Coleman thinks that combining panqualityism with HOTT leads to a much more fruitful view. With panqualityism, there is purportedly no need for a reductive explanation of qualities, as is often done by physicalist HOT theorists. Qualities, hence, are supplied in ontology through panqualityism, and HOTT can account for how we become aware of them. Yet, as will be discussed below, there seems to be a peripheral worry that a higher-order theory can simply reduce anything and everything to pure physicalism. Mental states are products of the brain, as are unconsciously formed beliefs, and hence it really is all just a matter of neurons firing. It is for this reason, I believe, that Coleman has the hesitation to endorse a purely physicalist HOTT, and supplement it instead with panqualityism. With this addendum, qualities, with all of their qualitative feel that we know in experience, are just there in ontology, supplying HOTT with the contents of each mental state that can become conscious to a subject.

With the view laid out, we can now look at its downsides. Panqualityism may provide a fine view concerning the ontology of qualities and such, but HOT-panqualityism doesn’t seem to offer much more. The problems with this view will be discussed in the next section.

6. Problems with HOT-panqualityism

Recall the two intuitions laid out by Coleman in his evaluation of panpsychism: (1) experientiality cannot come from the non-experiential and (2) macro-subjectivity cannot be compositely derived from micro-subjects. It was shown that panpsychism is supported by (1), but is challenged by (2). HOT-panqualityism faces no such challenge from (2), but it certainly must answer to (1).

---

22 Coleman, “The Real Combination Problem,” 41.
As stated earlier, HOT-panqualityism must functionalize awareness via appealing to a relation between a HOT and mental state, and it is exactly this functional-analysis of awareness that should make anyone who respects the explanatory gap worried. At the level of intuition, there doesn’t seem to be any reason that the reduction of mind through the HOT relation should fare any better against conceivability arguments than a basic physical reductionist theory. If we didn’t find intuition (1) to be pressing, then we should have every reason to just accept the standard picture of materialist physicalism and move on with it. But the fact that we’ve made it this far means that (1) is important, and the HOT-panqualityist theory should answer to it all the same.

Chalmers sees this tension as well. Panqualityism, to him, suffers from a conceivability argument regarding qualitative zombies. This argument hinges on the quality-awareness gap: qualities never necessitate awareness of themselves.\textsuperscript{23} In this zombie world, we have an exact replicate world of microqualitative and microphysical truths. This is essentially asking us to imagine the same duplicate world that most zombie arguments require, but now with a special emphasis on the replication of the qualities as they are instantiated at the microphysical level.\textsuperscript{24} With all this being granted, Chalmers argues that it is still conceivable that any being in this world could be a zombie: they could exist without consciousness—hence the quality-awareness gap. Just because all of the qualities are there in the micro-ontology, as well as the same physical structure, it is still conceivable that this should not necessitate that any being is consciously aware of those qualities—hence it is conceivable that they should not be conscious at all. If this is true, then the qualities at the micro-level do not necessitate consciousness, and constitutive panqualityism must be false.

Coleman responds directly to this argument in his own defense of panqualityism. Though, we should be mindful of what kind of phenomenology Coleman claims the zombies lack in Chalmers’ argument:

\textsuperscript{24} In other words, duplicate our world and assume panqualityism is true.
The anti-HOT panqualityism zombie argument is thus to operate much like the anti-physicalist zombie argument—it hangs on a failure to reductively capture a certain phenomenology. In our case the missing target is narrower than *phenomenology in general*—the target of standard zombies. Chalmers apparently holds that, in addition to being aware of sensory qualities, we’re *aware of our awareness* of sensory qualities. This further object of awareness—awareness itself—comes with its own patch of phenomenology: a qualitative feel. It’s this feel which our HOT-panqualitative duplicates are alleged conceivably to lack.\(^{25}\)

Coleman is here claiming that the qualitative zombies lack the phenomenology that is *awareness of awareness*. It seems to me that this is a mistake that misses Chalmers point, but more on this in a moment. The objection against panqualityism from Chalmers is (seemingly) solved for Coleman by denying that we have this awareness of awareness. To spell this out, Coleman cleverly uses the analogy of a camera shooting a television scene: being aware of awareness would be “akin to the camera appearing in the periphery of every shot of a television show.” There seems to be no reason to think that we *should be* aware of awareness, but even if there were, introspectively it does not seem to be the case that we are.

Though I do agree with the assessment that awareness may be without phenomenology of awareness, it seems that this response entirely misses the point. Awareness of awareness is not, it seems to me, *at all* relevant to the zombie argument put forth here. The qualitative zombies described in Chalmers’ argument are beings in a panqualityist world—one with (assuming the truth of panqualityism) the qualitative and microphysical truths of our very own. However, it is conceivable that this, and this alone, does not necessitate awareness of *those* qualities. Nowhere in the argument does there figure awareness of awareness of those qualities.

Coleman writes that Chalmers’ argument “doesn’t seem directly to concern the irreducibility of awareness as such,” but that instead it is concerned with a phenomenal complement of awareness. Yet, as shown above, it certainly does. In fact, this is the thrust of the quality-awareness gap—there is no reason to think that the presence of qualities necessitates awareness of them by a subject, meaning that awareness itself must come from elsewhere. But this brings us back to (1): if experientiality, consciousness, phenomenality, awareness, whichever you prefer, cannot come from that which it lacks, then the irreducibility of that faculty is the central point at hand. Coleman’s analogy of the camera in the television scene does well to avoid any objection regarding awareness of awareness, but it does not respond to the thrust of the qualitative zombie argument. Hence qualitative zombies are indeed conceivable, in the same way that physicalist zombies are, and the quality-awareness gap is still as robust as ever.

7. How to Actually Make Up One’s Mind between Panpsychism and Neutral Monism

So perhaps panqualityism—even with its HOTT counterpart—isn’t as promising as once hoped. If we do really respect the explanatory gap, and require that in any good theory experience cannot come about from brute emergence (2.2), then any attempt at functionalizing awareness, experience, subjectivity, … , should be taken with extreme skepticism.

The greatest upshot from our discussion of panqualityism (and I think this can be said of neutral monism as a whole) is that, if we accept the motivating assumptions of neutral monism, then we may as well just be physicalists through and through. Again, if we want to avoid brute emergence, and avoid appealing to an explanation that is entirely unintelligible to us, then what good does positing qualities at the ontology do? Subjectivity—awareness of these qualities—still

---

26 Sam Coleman, “Panpsychism and Neutral Monism,” 278.
27 Recall that HOTT (and Coleman) claim that a conscious mental state can be defined as one that a subject is aware of being in, allowing for the usage of consciousness and awareness to be interchangeable.
hasn’t been explained, and it must be explained in an intelligible way. The only reason we went down this road in the first place was to explain our capacity for consciousness, both metaphysically and epistemologically. If this capacity is still suspect under panqualityism, then what is there to gain in the theory? If we still must appeal to some kind of brute emergence, then we may as well just forget about intrinsic natures and be hardcore physicalists. After all, it is the mainstream, and some are willing to accept that the explanatory gap really isn’t so daunting.

This discussion has brought us through panpsychism and panqualityism, showing both their promises and perils. Panpsychism suffers from the subject combination problem, a terrible problem indeed. And panqualityism suffers from an appeal to brute emergence through a functionalizable account of subjectivity. I could simply stop here and say that both sides have their problems and perhaps we should move on. Though, of course, every decent view is not without its drawbacks. While accepting the subject combination problem in its most daunting form, panpsychism seems the stronger theory than panqualityism. Again, we ought to remember the reason we strayed from mainstream physicalism in the first place. If you and I find the hard problem of consciousness a serious one—that we can’t conceive of why there should be experience at all from that which lacks—then panqualityism doesn’t seem to offer any solace. Yes, panpsychism is going to have to do some major work to make sense of the subject combination problem, and maybe it never will be able to provide satisfying answers to it. But as mentioned before, all solved problems were at once unsolved, and the fact that we have not yet seen an adequate response to the combination problem as a whole does not necessitate abandoning panpsychism outright.

8. Conclusion

In this essay, I have outlined the major motivations and drawbacks of two variants in Russellian theory of mind: panpsychism and panqualityism. Both of these theories draw on Russell’s insight of the structuralism of physics, leaving the intrinsic nature of the physical open to creative possibilities. Panpsychism does well to avoid any appeal to brute emergence—from regarding experience, while suffering from the subject combination problem. Panqualityism has its advantage of avoiding said problem, but has its drawback from
appealing to brute emergence-from. In light of this dilemma, if a choice must be made, I would side with panpsychism. That is not to say, however, that I am fully satisfied with the theory. The subject combination problem has been around for a long time, and no satisfying answers have been given to it. What this means then is that a new synthesis within Russellian monism may be called for. This may be done by taking the best parts of each view and disposing of the bad, or building a new theory from the ground up. This project, however, is one for further research.

One last closing thought: it has hopefully been shown throughout this essay that ideas like panpsychism may not be as far-fetched as one initially thinks. There are very good theoretical reasons to think that physical ultimates may have experience, many of which stem from the long-time problems of physicalism. Furthermore, one may consider what would change about the world around them if panpsychism were true. Would chairs and lamps suddenly jump to life and communicate with you? Of course not. Indeed, it doesn’t seem that anything would change at all—which is perhaps the true sign that a theory isn’t so crazy after all.


