

A Panqualityist Manifesto

A visual field could in a congenitally blind person just lie there—like a hidden pool in a corner of the mind: multi-coloured, unchanging, unremarked, perhaps never to come to the attention, forever dormant. This highly unnatural state of affairs is a real possibility, and that it is opens up an all-important space between consciousness and the visual field, even though the visual field of its nature lies open to consciousness.

Brian O'Shaughnessy, *Consciousness and the World*, p.502

We can begin at once with the peculiar predilection of scientific thinking for mechanical, statistical, and physical explanations that have, as it were, the heart cut out of them...[P]eople ceased trying to penetrate the deep mysteries of nature as they had done through two millennia of religious and philosophical speculation, but were instead satisfied with exploring the surface of nature in a manner that can only be called superficial...the great Galileo Galilei, always the first to be mentioned in this connection, eliminated the question of what were nature's deep intrinsic reasons for abhorring a vacuum and consequently letting a falling body penetrate space after space until it finally comes to rest on solid ground, and settled for something far more common: he simply established how quickly such a body falls, the course it takes, the time it takes, and what is its rate of downward acceleration...However disconcerting it may sound nowadays to speak of someone as inspired by matter-of-factness, believing as we do that we have far too much of it, in Galileo's day the awakening from metaphysics to the hard observation of reality must have been, judging by all sorts of evidence, a veritable orgy and conflagration of matter-of-factness! But should one ask what mankind was thinking when it made this change, the answer is that it did no more than what every sensible child does after trying to walk too soon; it sat down on the ground, contacting the earth with a most dependable if not very noble part of its anatomy, in short, that part on which one sits.

Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities*, pp.326-27

0. Introduction

A monistic theory of the mind, including consciousness, and how it relates to the physical body is implicitly a theory of all Reality—of the existing concrete universe and its nature. For what is required of this theory is to fit the conscious mind into the physical universe that, one way or another, provided the conditions for the formation of the body which carries the mind, and within which that minded body is deeply embedded, enmeshed—the universe which nourishes that body and mind, is perceived by them, acted upon by them, and so on. That's why the mind-body problem is the world-knot.¹

There is reality *inside* one's mind—by which I mean individual medium macro-minds like ours—and reality *outside* one's mind. These two smaller realities which together make up all Reality are, in at least some ways, different from one another: all realist theories acknowledge this, since the only view that denies this discontinuity is solipsism, on which there is no reality outside one's mind. It is this difference between inner and outer reality that makes the mind-body problem so difficult. For, since

¹ Schopenhauer's term, see Griffin 1998. Cf. Nagel 1986: 52-3.

a monistic theory of the mind is also a theory of all Reality, it must strike a sweet spot that is exceedingly hard to hit: it must posit a ground for mentality, including consciousness, that is at once a ground for the physical world. It must do justice to both, at the expense of neither. Justice here means *full justice*.

In 2006 Galen Strawson helped to put pansychism back on the map.² The variety of panpsychism he defended was what I then called ‘smallest’³—it conceived of our world as more akin to a bucket of shot than a bucket of jelly, in Russell’s phrase, with the facts and features pertaining to the smallest entities determining those of the entities they compose. Strawson’s panpsychism populated reality with micro-instances of consciousness, whose composites, in the right arrangements, included conscious minds like ours. Strawson’s argument for panpsychism placed great emphasis on inner reality, for his reasoning was that unless physical matter has consciousness built in it is in no shape to constitute conscious minded bodies. Claiming that this was possible was physicalism’s big error, he maintained—even attributing to physicalists a sneaking eliminativist attitude toward the mind.

Since 2006, in some ways recapitulating much older debates, many authors have highlighted problems for Strawson-style constitutive smallest panpsychism—*constitutive* in that it aims to explain how conscious macro-minds are intelligibly formed from micro-things, as opposed to emerging from them. Notable among these were ‘combination problems’, and most notable among the combination problems was the problem of understanding how many conscious subjects could come together and, in and of themselves, make up a larger subject without achieving their own annihilation—something composite *and yet* single in respect of consciousness.⁴ With Strawson’s contribution of impetus panpsychism was propelled high and wide. But then, faced with these problems, many, perhaps most, advocates have come back down to ground and abandoned smallest panpsychism, essaying instead emergentist, or non-smallest ‘cosmopsychist’ versions.⁵ These face their own problems. Some have moved to or explored neighbouring theories, non-standard (some might say oxymoronic) ‘Russellian’ forms of physicalism, neutral monism, idealism.⁶ Amidst all this activity—early promise slowly giving way to frustration—eliminativist physicalism has once more, unsurprisingly, seen its own rise.⁷

² See also Nagel 1979, Chalmers 1996, Strawson 1994, Griffin 1998.

³ Coleman 2006, Goff 2022.

⁴ For a taxonomy of combination problems see Chalmers 2016. Cf. Coleman 2016. See also Goff 2006, Coleman 2014, James 1890/1981, Roelofs 2019.

⁵ Brüntrup 2016, Seager 2016, Mørch 2018, Goff 2017, Shani 2015, and arguably Strawson himself, who places less emphasis on the constitutive explanatory virtues of panpsychism these days (see e.g. his 2016).

⁶ Montero 2015, Stoljar 2001, Coleman 2016, Chalmers 2019.

⁷ Frankish 2016, Kammerer 2021.

After setting out some groundwork I will make a case for one of these alternatives: *panqualityism*.⁸ I will do this by showing that panqualityism, of all the theories at our disposal, and especially as compared with panpsychism, provides the most comprehensive vision of inner and outer reality, hence of Reality.

1. Terms and Theories

Noting first that people are free to define terms and names for theories as they see fit, let me engage in some discussion of how I see fit to define some relevant terms and names for theories, before getting into more substantial matters.

Panpsychism, if we are guided by etymology, has it that mind is everywhere. But by contemporary usage it is, more strictly, the claim that *consciousness* is everywhere, and that it is fundamental.⁹ Now, panpsychism is often ridiculed by allegations that it makes rocks, trees, cars etc.—*all* clumps of conscious particles—themselves each into a consciousness. Some panpsychists embrace this consequence, but many try to avoid it, saying that only *special organisations* of the micro-consciousnesses generate macro-consciousness. Which special organisations, though? The best candidates are of course brains, with their capacities for representing, cognising, information-processing,¹⁰ and so on. So that's why brains are conscious and coffee cups are not.

The first, promiscuous, kind of panpsychism is false if there are any pockets of non-consciousness in the universe, among which would figure, notably for my purposes, pockets of *unconscious mentality*. But the second, more chaste, panpsychism also faces a problem regarding unconscious mentality. The problem is this. If the special organisation—the recipe—that combines micro-conscious items into macro-consciousness has to do with the brain's distinctive material arrangement and consequent *capacities for representation*, information processing etc., how could *those* capacities and *that* organisation obtain without consciousness, as they would do by hypothesis if there is such a thing as unconscious mentality—unconscious beliefs, cognition, desires, perceptions, proprioceptions, and such? The special organisation chaste panpsychism invokes as grounding macro-consciousness is just that sort of organisation which, more widely, is usually taken to ground *mentality per se*—cognition, representation, and so on. But then unconscious mentality and cognition would seem to be impossible by the lights of even chaste panpsychism, hence for panpsychism of any stripe. Where we would find mentality we would *ipso facto* find consciousness. If the brain is so organised as to produce mental

⁸ Advocates include Mach 1897/1959, James 1904, Russell 1927, Feigl 1975, Coleman 2015, and Cutter 2018.

⁹ Goff 2022.

¹⁰ Tononi's Integrated Information Theory associates consciousness with informational complexity, and would seem as such especially vulnerable to the criticism I present just below, though it is somewhat unclear whether IIT actually implies full-blown panpsychism (see e.g. Tononi and Koch 2015).

content or representations of any kind, then that would seem to have to be conscious content or representations, given panpsychism—for how could a mental content or representation formed of conscious ingredients fail, itself, to be conscious? This problem is related to the fact that panpsychism nowadays equates to pan-consciousness, and, additionally, that panpsychists, at least tacitly, equate mentality with consciousness. That makes unconscious mentality very hard, if not impossible, for them to compass.

Idealism has been defined as the view that the universe is fundamentally mental, or that all concrete facts are grounded in facts that exclusively involve mental properties.¹¹ Contemporary panpsychists seem to take it that instantiating consciousness is *eo ipso* instantiating a mental property. But the basic, ‘diminished’, instances of experience which panpsychists attribute to basic physical particles hardly seem to qualify as genuine mindedness. Minds as we know them are rather complex things: they involve sensitivity to the environment, representation, perception, thought, memory. These are the minds we know, and the sort of mentality we attribute to God, when we think about God. As Russell said, being mental is more similar to being a harmony—it is not something a point particle can be. Since panpsychists explicitly deny that electrons perceive, have worries, thoughts, memories and so on, I think they should at most claim that *ultimate particles have experience of some kind but lack minds*. Particles have, then, an ingredient of mindedness—because, again, all the minds we know about are conscious at some time, and their capacity for consciousness is an important part of them. In sum, contemporary panpsychism—including Strawson’s—can be equated with *panexperientialism*: the ubiquity of experience, if not of mindedness. Idealism, by contrast, places the metaphysical emphasis squarely on mindedness as such. Consider Berkeley’s version, on which Reality consists of minds and their ideas, and ultimately all that exists is contained within God’s mind. That is a truly mental universe.

Now a crucial point: Minds are not limited to what is in consciousness. There is such a thing as *unconscious mentality*, and it would be mistaken to construe this as talking simply in terms of dispositions to conscious mentality.¹² There exists *occurrent unconscious mentality*—thoughts, beliefs, desires, memories. These interact, actively, with conscious states when we do things as simple as reason, converse, react fearfully to things that long ago scared us, manifest anger with colleagues and friends which we do not wish to surface, work out what we fancy for lunch, and fall in or out of love with someone.

¹¹ Chalmers 2019.

¹² Which is not to deny that there are dispositions to conscious mentality. Below I argue that these should not be classed as mental just in virtue of their manifestations. This is a surprisingly controversial stance.

Given this point, idealism can be quite opposed to panpsychism. Idealism is compatible with the notion that large chunks of Reality consist of God's *unconscious ideas*, for example, or with a universe of dreamlessly sleeping Leibnizian monads. Panpsychism, on contemporary usage, is not so compatible. Nor is its neighbour, cosmopsychism, which can construe the universe as comprising a massive single mind: that mind is still supposed to be conscious through-and-through, which is why cosmopsychists expend time arguing *against* unconscious sensory states and the like.¹³

Next we come to panqualityism. It can be picked out by comparison with a claim made by panpsychism, namely:

Reality is populated with properties of the same broad class as those of our acquaintance, which comport consciousness.

By this the panpsychist means *experiential* or *phenomenal* properties like perceptual consciousness of red, experiencing pain, feeling anger, and so on, except they don't say that properties of *exactly* these kinds are had by particles. Rather there is an extension, by analogy, to conceptions of far simpler sorts of experience supposedly had by the smallest entities.¹⁴

Panqualityism, which is also a smallist constitutive theory, makes a closely related claim:

Reality is populated with properties of the same broad class as those of our acquaintance, which do not comport consciousness.

The difference between panpsychists and panqualityists, then, is that panpsychists see consciousness or experience as *built into* qualities (or qualitative states) like perceptual redness, pain, and anger; the kinds of quality we are often conscious of. Panqualityists disagree. They think that not only can we conceive of such properties—qualities—as existing without conscious awareness, but that we have good reason to believe they actually do so exist—and often. Perceptual redness by itself, on this conception, is not a phenomenal property—not a property the having of which by itself constitutes an experience. It is more like the *possible content* of an experience or episode of awareness, a content that can exist without our being aware of it. The properties of the 'ultimates' are qualities in the sense, then, of being conceivable contents of experience for some subject, however small.¹⁵ Awareness, or

¹³ Shani 2022.

¹⁴ Goff 2022, Rosenberg 2004.

¹⁵ Lockwood 1989.

consciousness, itself, is thus construed as something distinct, so that a full-blown episode of experience involves these two factors: consciousness and qualities.¹⁶

People profess to find the notion of unexperienced qualities very perplexing, even incoherent. I am consistently surprised by this attitude. My reason is that most philosophers seem to have little trouble making sense of *naïve realism* about perception—or, at least, if they fail to find naïve realism sense-making that is not on account of its having to do with unexperienced qualities. But naïve realism has *everything* to do with unexperienced qualities. A naïve realist says the red colour quality I experience on being perceptually conscious of a ripe tomato is contributed by the tomato's redness itself; as the slogan goes, qualia ain't in the head. Fine. But I can close my eyes on what's not in my head. Does the tomato's redness disappear, cease to exist as such, when I close my eyes (or we all close our eyes—or aren't around in the quad where the tomato sits)? No—naïve realists don't say that, because *they are not Berkeleian idealists*. They don't hold that *esse est percipi*. But, then, when the tomato's redness—remember the redness *is* the quality, quale, which I experience with my eyes open—exists unseen *it is an unexperienced quality or quale*. So if naïve realism even makes sense, regardless of its truth or falsity, then unexperienced qualities make sense. Panqualityists tend to—but need not—hold that the qualities of which we intermittently become aware exist inside the head.¹⁷ But otherwise the view can be remarkably similar to direct realism—panqualityist Michael Lockwood labels his view 'inner direct realism',¹⁸ and maintains, with Russell, that what we are immediately aware of in consciousness are qualities belonging to our brains—painted brains, agonised brains, happy, smelly, loving brains.

I am not at all ashamed to say such things, and, as I'll now argue, panqualityism is preferable because of all theories in the ballpark it makes best sense of reality inside and out, hence of Reality. My focus will be on comparing panqualityism with Strawsonian panpsychism.

2. reality Inside

Panpsychism struggles with unconscious mentality. Strawson (2006) is rightly up in arms about standard physicalism's proclivity for demeaning or eliminating consciousness—often eliminating it in effect, just by giving a glaringly inadequate account of it. But we should be up in arms, too, about any theory that demeans or eliminates the unconscious—that is, unconscious *mentality*. There is an unconscious side to the mind—perhaps the larger side. We have this from Freud. We have this from modern cognitive science. *We have this from common sense*. People do not lose all their beliefs and

¹⁶ A duality Kriegel 2009 accepts in conceptual terms but rejects as metaphysically impossible. Cf. Rosenthal 2005.

¹⁷ See Coleman 2015, 2016, Russell 1927, Cutter 2018.

¹⁸ *Op. Cit.*

desires when dreamlessly asleep, nor do sleepers cease to be *people*, qua mental beings. We are awoken by pains; but pains which bring us to consciousness—to feeling—cannot themselves have been being felt. Migraines can last for days—mercifully, one need not feel them all the time. When we talk, when we infer, when we ponder, act, these activities involve real chains of content that dip in and out of consciousness—for it is absurd to hold that everything that is relevant to one’s drawing a certain conclusion, or coming to a certain course of action, or resolution, flows in the stream of consciousness. That stream is fast, but rather narrow, by all accounts.¹⁹ We can be angry all day without feeling it—and it takes someone else to tell us, with whom we *have been being angry*. It can take therapy to realise that one is depressed, or loathing. As the therapy concludes the depression or loathing does not appear *ex nihilo* to consciousness—it surfaces. It was there, waiting to be uncovered.

I argued above that panpsychism is on the face of it incompatible with unconscious mentality. What do panpsychists and their kin say, in practice, about unconscious mentality? None allow that the very qualities we are aware of in thinking, perception, emotion, and so on, could exist unconsciously as such—hence from the get-go they proffer some sort of bifurcated picture of the mind. Freud, too, denied there were unconscious qualities—but he had the sense of propriety to acknowledge that the conscious mind had better be *continuous in nature* with the unconscious mind. So he made the whole thing neural in nature—qualities for him are just the pleasing, if illusory, and wholly epiphenomenal, way we represent the brain to ourselves.²⁰ This is little short of illusionism—but at least it keeps the mind in one piece. Those of the contemporary panpsychist ilk do not want to forgo the insight that qualities matter to the conscious mind: what we think, feel emotionally, how we act, infer, perceive; all that which in respect of intentionality and causality turns on qualities. But they bar qualities from the unconscious. So what do they replace them with? Neural dispositions to conscious qualities—the Searlian/Strawsonian solution from the 1990’s.²¹

In truth this is an old idea: Ironically, younger Freud also held that in the unconscious there exist, at most, dispositions to consciousness, but he did this *expressly to eliminate unconscious mentality*. The Searles and Strawsons, and those who now follow their lead,²² purport to give an account of unconscious mentality. But their theories really give this aspiration the lie. Searle affirms, revealingly, that it’s merely a terminological matter whether we say that someone unconsciously believes that *p*, or just that there’s a neural state in them poised to produce the conscious belief that *p* if they are ever

¹⁹ See Strawson 2009.

²⁰ Wakefield 2018.

²¹ Searle 1992, Strawson 1994.

²² E.g. Kriegel 2011, Mendelovici 2018, Smithies 2019. But see Pitt 2016 for refreshing candour about this strategy—he tellingly observes that a dispositional sensation is not a sensation; just so, ‘dispositional mental content’, especially on a phenomenal intentionality account, is *not* mental content. Cf. Coleman 2022.

prodded by the question whether *p*. Strawson thinks we have unconscious mental states in the sense in which there is music on a CD. But there *is* no music on a CD! Dispositions to *x* are not *x*, only potential *x*. Potential *x* is not *x*. So, potential qualitativity, potential mentality, is no qualitativity, no mentality at all. That would be like calling potential pain real pain, believing that wishes literally made one rich, or saying that a dormant bomb, with the fuse perfectly intact, is exploding *right now*, ‘in a sense’, thanks to its disposition to explode if lit.

Despite advocates’ protestations of realism,²³ this eliminativism is, we can see, properly in keeping with panpsychism: if one conflates mentality and experientiality, it is going to be a struggle, and a pointless one, to accommodate genuine unconscious mentality.

And this is where panqualityism really earns its corn, because it offers us a realist account of (occurrent) unconscious mentality that is continuous with conscious mentality, and which thus makes best sense of its existence and their interaction. Mentality is the organisation—a Russellian harmony—of qualities, by brains; an organisation apt to carry content, to represent Reality: to recall it, to think about and act upon it. But these qualities can exist unconsciously. So unconscious mentality, is real, occurrent, not-merely-as-if or dispositional. Panqualityism and its associated doctrine of the qualitative nature of unconscious mentality can make the mind all of one piece—doing justice to mental life as a whole. Panpsychism cannot. Crucially, here, panqualityism can give a univocal account of mental *content*, as qualitative; hence of the contentful interactions of conscious and unconscious mental processes. If, therefore, panqualityism does just as well with outside reality as panpsychism, as I shall briefly show below, it is preferable overall.

Epistemic humility is congenial to Strawson at choice moments—e.g. when it comes to the combination problem that threatens to derail panpsychism. We should be more humble about consciousness itself. We do not *know* that it accompanies every possible instance of qualities. Introspection cannot tell us *that*. All we know is that consciousness comes with such qualities *when we are conscious of them*. This is hardly a surprising or earth-shaking datum. And it no more licenses the belief that unconscious qualities cannot exist, than cats are licensed to believe that milk cannot exist outside their bowls—which is, simply, where they find it. Saying qualities *must* be conscious might be like saying that water must be liquid, potable, and fall from the sky. Kripke taught us that when it comes to a kind’s nature, its most salient properties—those prominently associated with our encounters with it—may not be in its deep essence.²⁴ Consciousness could just be a reference-fixing property, quite contingent, of qualitative characters. We do not know whether this is true or not

²³ Though Kriegel and Mendelovici are fairly frank about the eliminativist trajectory of their accounts, in fairness.

²⁴ Kripke 1980.

directly, since the only samples of qualities we get hold of are conscious. What we need to do is see where the best, most coherent, most satisfying theory takes us and what it says.

But how qualities appear is how they are, so this is no mistake!

Panqualityists do not, or need not, deny this. But how qualities appear is *as qualitative*. To say that, in appearing via consciousness—in appearing at all—qualities’ appearing, their being conscious, is itself part of the appearance, is to beg a weighty question. People can, if they want, define qualities into consciousness—as qualia—but then that’s a definition that only begs the question, too. Definitions, perhaps surprisingly, *can* beg the question—when they latch onto a real-world phenomenon and frame it as we wish it to be, as opposed to how it is. Just look up the definition of democracy.

3. reality Outside

Panqualityism shares the *considerable* virtues of pansychism when it comes to making sense of reality outside the mind. It offers a picture of the world as continuous in nature with the mind. Russell pointed out how such a continuity thesis was helpful for comprehending the process of perception—how the world enters the mind. This also helps to explain how, when a small portion of the world is rearranged in the right way, qualitative mentality is the product. Panqualityism and panpsychism, further, both offer answers to the question—again influentially posed by Russell—of what there is to matter other than that part physics reveals, a part that falls manifestly short of providing a sufficient basis for mentality.

4. Reality

But, now, panpsychists, in equating consciousness with mentality, and in saying that consciousness is everywhere, wish to imply that mentality is everywhere. I have said that consciousness *simpliciter* does not suffice for mentality. Consciousness is an *ingredient* of mentality, mindedness—having a mind: but an ingredient of mentality is no more mentality than an ingredient of lasagne is lasagne. But panpsychists ought not to hold that reality outside the mind is mental in any case. There is just no need for this, in order to make the world into one in which macro-minds can arise. If consciousness, phenomenal qualities, is the carrier of mental content—if to be intentional is to be phenomenally-qualitative, as Strawson additionally holds, then every particle in the universe is a bearer of intentionality. Unless we *want* to be pantheists, there is just no need to say this. That is not duly to respect the difference between Reality inside and outside. A theory that hits the sweet spot will respect everyday intuitions sufficiently to be able to say that outside reality is non-mental, whilst nevertheless beautifully suited for mentality in organisation. It will make inner and outer reality at core continuous, but will have the resources to say that the inner is intentional and mental, some of

it conscious some of it not, while the outer is physical and non-mental/intentional. That sweet-spot theory is panqualityism. Call this the ‘sweet spot argument’ for panqualityism.

But what of consciousness? What makes a bunch of qualities really subjectively ‘for me’?

We need to be careful about how much of a premium we place on consciousness. Of course there is consciousness, subjective character—of course some qualities are *for me* and not *for you* and some are *for you* and not *for me*. But, as I’ve explained, if we cram consciousness into base matter we will eliminate part of the mind—the unconscious. So matter, in itself, *must* lack consciousness. Panpsychism, then, is flatly false.

But panpsychism as such does not even explain the much-touted subjective for-me-ness. Let us say that all the qualities, all the enqualityed ultimates, in the universe are aflame with consciousness. Still, what makes one clump of those *for-me*, and another, distinct, clump subjectively *for-you*? Why do you experience *those* ones but I experience *these* ones? What, in other words, is the panpsychist account of individual macro-*perspectives*? The answer cannot be that those ultimates are for you, fall within your perspective, which form ‘your’ mind—for since the panpsychist conflates your mind with your conscious mind, which ultimates you consciously experience (and which not) and which compose your mind (and which not), and why, is just one and the same issue. Hence the panpsychist, on top of saying all ultimates are conscious, in any case owes us an account of the extra relational property, the metaphysical lasso, that harnesses sets of (already conscious) ultimates into distinct perspectival macro-subjects. The panqualityist, too, must propose some such relational property—this will be the property that confers consciousness on enqualityed ultimates in the first place (for instance, a relation of higher-order representation). But that relation will do double-duty: it will capture consciousness and for-me-ness/macro-perspectivalness in one. And that is as it should be, for, *contra* panpsychism, they *are* as one. So even when it comes to consciousness, panqualityism is to be preferred to panpsychism. And, as I’ve explained, panqualityism can, where panpsychism seemingly cannot, make room for our unconscious mentality.²⁵

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²⁵ Thanks especially to Madeleine Cohen for helpful discussion that aided in the preparation of this paper.

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