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SELVES: THE VIEW FROM PANPSYCHISM

ABSTRACT: In this paper I will pose the question of the nature of subjects of experience or selves in the context of Russellian panpsychism. In order to solve the subject-summing problem in panpsychism deflationary views about subjects are endorsed. Deflationary views about the nature of subjects have been defended by Hume, James, Parfit and Strawson among others. On such views subjects of experience are not persistent through time as we pre-theoretically conceive of them, though they have synchronic unity. Strawson's deflationary transience view of the self is examined and criticized on the ground that it suffers from the problem of self-identification. Strawson's view is problematic in light of phenomenal holism. Since synchronic experiential field as a whole is prior to its parts, there is only one holistic experience to which a subject is identical to. Even if a subject is identical to its stream of consciousness, on the base of diachronic unity, it cannot be short-lived.

KEY WORDS: self, subject of experience, Russellian panpsychism, deflationary view, persistence

*And He (Jesus) asked him (the man), "What is thy name?"
And he answered, saying,
"My name is Legion: for we are many."
(Gospel of Mark 5:9)*

INTRODUCTION

One of the main questions that every religion and philosophy has to answer is the question of the Self or the Ego, the soul. Does it exist, what is it made of and will it survive death? In the modern materialistic/physicalistic worldview Self is losing its place, becoming almost nonexistent, disappearing from the human mind. Rationalist and physicalist philosophy will give very different answers to these questions than religion or dualistic/panpsychistic philosophy. The anti-physicalist position on these questions will constitute the center of my discussion in the paper. I will examine how a version of Russellian monism could answer if we have a persistent Self.

RUSSELLIAN MONISM

This paper poses the question of the nature of subjects of experience or selves in the context of panpsychism. Panpsychism is to be understood as a form of Russellian monism, as Russellian panpsychism. Russellian monism is a metaphysical position which states that we cannot explain all the phenomena in nature with just relational, extrinsic or structural properties, we also need intrinsic, categorical properties. Science can't say anything about phenomenal properties. Science knows only of extrinsic, dispositional properties and nothing about intrinsic, categorical bases of those dispositions. Physics reveals just the relational structure of matter. It knows no quiddities nor

haeccities. If the categorical base properties of fundamental physical dispositions are phenomenal, rather than neutral, as I will assume, we arrive at Russellian panpsychism.

It is specially difficult to explain human consciousness. In order to solve the hard problem of consciousness we need to appeal to quiddities; so we could explain mentality. It is monism because these are not distinct properties. The most plausible variant of Russellian monism seems to be Russellian identity theory. One version of Russellian monism claims that basic fundamental physical entities (and fundamental physical dispositions) have categorical bases. These categorical properties can be phenomenal or protophenomenal properties. If they are phenomenal then we have Russellian panpsychism (Chalmers 2015). The task of this paper will be to examine the notion of the self (subject of experience) in the metaphysical theory broadly construed as panpsychism. The focal point will be the deflationary or „thin“ view of subjects.

SELF/LESS

Self is not easily defined. Strawson identified up to twenty-one concepts of the self: „cognitive self, the conceptual self, the contextualized self, the core self, the dialogic self, the ecological self, the embodied self, the emergent self, the empirical self, the existential self, the extended self, the fictional self...“ (Strawson 1999, 484). The self that will be discussed here is the core self, or the minimal self that is found in panpsychism. This means that the subject or self is not a fabricated entity but a real one. This is in opposition to the narrative self view where the subject lacks any substance. It will be a different question whether this subject, although very real, has only momentary (synchronic) unity or if it can be persistent through time (and have diachronic unity). This problem of subject persistency will be examined on the paradigmatical case of Galen Strawson's *semsets* (“subject-of-experience-as-single-mental-thing”). This paper will suppose that a subject is a real mental thing that is ontologically fundamental. The objective will be to better understand its nature, specifically the nature of its phenomenal unity and persistence. This is why the deflationary view of the subject, that is discussed in the paper, seems to be the middle way between dissolving the self into nothing and having a pre-theoretical persistent self.

Usually when we talk about the problem of the subject Hume is cited. Famous passage from his *Treatise* that is commonly interpreted to mean that there is no subject, meaning that Hume expounds a bundle view, is:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. (Hume 1888, 252)

The bundle theory states that the subject is a collection of experiences - unified whole of experiences. This would mean that a subject is nothing more than a bundle of experiences, there is nothing beyond like an experiencer for whom there is some experience. It is just those qualities. Also Self could be a linguistic and social invention. To use another well known and often cited passage from Dennett's book:

Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self-control, and self-definition is not spinning webs or building dams, but telling stories,

and more particularly concocting and controlling the story we tell others — and ourselves — about who we are... Our tales are spun, but for the most part we don't spin them; they spin us. Our human consciousness, and our narrative selfhood, is their product, not their source. (Dennet 1991, 418)

How then a panpsychist views the subject?

SUBJECTS IN PANPSYCHISM

Russellian monism seems to avoid the mental causation problem plagues dualism. This is why it posits itself as an appealing theory that promises to solve the hard problem of consciousness. But it suffers from problems of its own. The main problem of constitutive Russellian monism (and this is argued to be the most plausible version of Russellian monism) is the combination problem. Combination problem for panpsychism arises when we try to understand how macroexperience comes from fundamental microexperience.

This problem can take several forms depending of what we are trying to combine. The most pressing version of the combination problem or the hard problem of combination would be the subject combination problem (subject-summing problem): this relates the difficulty of getting the macro-subjects from micro-subjects.

The main candidates for the relation between micro-subjects and macro-subjects (or between microexperience and macroexperience) are constitution and emergence. Causation is another possibility, as a form of intelligible emergence as opposed to brute emergence. Russellian panpsychism helps us avoid ex nihilo radical emergence of experiences from the non-experiential, though a kind of intelligible emergence of macrophenomenal facts from microphenomenal facts is still possible.

According to constitutive Russellian monism macroexperience is wholly or partially grounded in or constituted by microexperience (Chalmers forthcoming). It is an in virtue of relation. This all means that macroexperience (macro-subject) is nothing over and above microexperience (micro-subject)¹. All the small subjects come together and combine to make a large, macro-subject or o-subject that we pre-theoretically know and identify with ourselves. On the other hand emergence entails that something new and unexpected has come to being on higher levels. This could be something fundamental that is over and above microexperiential going ons. Goff considers causal relationships as non-constitutive grounding relations, i.e. grounding relations between distinct and fundamental truths (Goff 2015). Since o-experience is over and above micro-physical and microexperience, and micro-closure is accepted, then there is a problem with causal efficacy of macroexperience. Emergent forms Russellian monism have a problem with breaching the micro-physical causal closure. Constitutive Russellian monism doesn't face such a problem. On the other hand, it seems to have a fatal flaw. This brings us to the famous Coleman's argument for neutral monism. In a recent paper he pointed out a problem constitutive panpsychism has with combination of subjects.

SUBJECT-SUMMING

The combination of subjects seems to be an insormantable problem for constitutive panpsychism. Goff (2009) argues that a set of set of subjects does not a priori

¹ Goff's term.

entail the existence of another subject. Coleman (2014) while acknowledging Goff's argument, goes on to reason that it is metaphysically impossible to combine subjects to yield new subjects and this rules out constitutive panpsychism. If this would to happen, some kind of brute emergence would be involved and a panpsychist doesn't want this, because panpsychism is a position that originally tried to avoid emergence. That is why Coleman denies the plausibility of constitutive panpsychism and argues that panpsychists should become neutral monists.

Coleman's stronger version of no-summing argument is very true, but I don't share his conclusion and the solution to the problem. I do believe that such an argument works against constitutive panpsychism, though not against forms of emergent panpsychism. Panpsychism is a good position from which to avoid radical emergence because what emerges and from what it emerges seem to be of the same matter or stuff. So even if there is emergence in panpsychism it shouldn't be as strong or radical.

Strong emergence would entail if we endorse fusion to get macro-subject from micro-subjects. William Seager (2010, combinatorial infusion), Luke Roelofs (2015) and Hedda Hassel Mørch (2014) all endorse some version of fusion in their accounts. In fusion lower level subjects produce another subject while themselves disappear. They are annihilated in the process. Fusion also doesn't conform to the „criterion of structural isomorphism or compatibility for Russellian monism“ (Mørch, 2014, 50). We want the mental realm to shadow the physical realm (Seager 2010), that is to have mental correlates of physical processes and vice versa. If it can be used to explain the relation between micro- and macro-subjects and for these to be the phenomenal correlates of physical brain processes then this would be an advantage. If the mental doesn't shadow the physical and we don't have mental correlates of physical processes then we wouldn't have Russellian monist panpsychism. Seager's combinatorial infusion can't fulfil this requirement, because there seems to be no processes like it in the physical.

Mørch then argues that subjects partially survive (as do particles that are their correlates in Russellian monism), they are changed by the whole of which they are parts, but still exist, since there seems to be no fusion in the brain. So this is fusion without annihilation. In such an account there is no novel macro-subject in the strong sense of a new point of view, apart from those micro-subjects that make it, though they are changed somewhat. In fusion there could only be emergence, and only radical emergence that would be brute², so it is of no help to the constitutive panpsychist. In Mørch's account there is no strong emergence, because we have the survival of micro-subjects, and also there is no macro-subject in any strong sense. That macro-subject is a whole that has micro-subjects as parts and as a whole is prior to its parts. These is plausible if a deflationary view of subjects is endorsed.

In order to avoid these problems with subject-summing, strategy of deflating the subject comes into play in modern panpsychism. Such subjects of experience are not persistent through time as we pre-theoretically conceive of them. They are not distinct, transcendent entities. Deflated subjects are not diachronically unified, though they have synchronic unity. Deflationary views were defended by James (1890), Parfit (1971), Strawson (2009), Mørch (2014). Deflationary but not eliminative. Let us examine some of the representative deflationary views.

² Seager's infusion seems to entail such radical emergence.

“I SHALL NOT SURVIVE”

Parfit (1971) imagines fision (division) and fusion cases. According to him, there is no personal identity, just survival. These cases show him that when it comes to survival everything is a matter of degree; survival is not a matter of all-or-nothing. Such cases involve the imaginary scenario in which someone would have a voluntary control over his corpus callosum, bridge between the hemispheres of the brain. Under control it could be temporarily disconnected and each hemisphere would have its own independent stream of consciousness until they are connected again. For example, each hemisphere could do a separate math calculation. This would be Parfitian psychological fusion. These cases³ serve to weaken the rigidity of personal identity. He just asks for psychological connectedness between „persons“. Parfit’s psychological criteria for personal identity are non-exact similarity and causal connectedness (Mørch 2014).

Parfit concedes that subject is a single: „in each of my two streams of consciousness I would believe that I was now, in my other stream, having thoughts and sensations of which, in this stream, I was unaware“ (Parfit 1984, 246–8). He is a reductionist when it comes to the self and personal identity. He prefers to call his position Constitutive Reductionism. This means he thinks that we are distinct from our brains but not as separately existing entities (Parfit 1998, 218).

For Parfit „a person’s existence just consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of a series of thoughts, experiences, and other mental and physical events“ (Parfit 1995, 16). So not to be just a Reductionist he claims though a person is distinct from the body and thoughts and experiences, person just consists in them. Although he is not a panpsychist and Reductionists do not believe in mental substances, they can still be dualists, according to Parfit. Mental or not, his persons are not distinct entities, they just consist in the stream of experiences and thoughts, whatever their nature may be. This is why we may consider him a proponent of a deflationary view of persons (subjects).

Contrary to the common belief, Parfit argues for the unimportance of personal identity. He thinks that what is important is psychological continuity and psychological connectedness between different parts of a person’s life (like between me now and some future me). And these relations are a matter of degree, something that is not the case with identity.

Parfit envisions experiences as wholly impersonal. There seems to be no notion of the subjective in this kind of Reductionism and no distinct subject. What would then distinguish my experiences from someone else’s? It seems to me that the real criterion for personal identity is and should be the subjective character of consciousness, the primitive self-experience, that is the telltail of someone’s being a subject of experience.

STRAWSON’S SUBJECTS

We find Strawson’s position on the question of the self somewhere in the middle, between pro-selfers and anti-selfers. Strawson expounds the transience view of the self. He argues that there are no persistent subjects. He can be called a panpsychist, or in his terms a real materialist (real physicalism) and not just a physicalist.

³ This is similar to split-brain cases and questions is the same, do we have the breakdown of unity in fision (division) and how many subjects do we have then? There are other interpretations possible. Perhaps this would constitute a breakdown of access unity, but not of phenomenal unity. Chalmers and Bayne (2003) argue that in such cases there is only some breakdown of access unity (still a single subject), though this doesn’t have to entail the breakdown of phenomenal unity, if there is such a distinction.

The three uses of the term “subject of experience” that can be found in Strawson’s book on selves are:

- 1) the thick whole-creature use (the human being)
- 2) the traditional inner-entity use (the subject conceived as some sort of persisting inner entity that can exist in the absence of any experience)
- 3) the thin/live inner-entity use (subject considered as something that is live and present in the lived present of experience and that can’t exist in the absence of any experience) (Strawson 2009, 374)⁴

The real subjects for Strawson are „thin“ ones. “Thin subjects” are synchronic unifiers of co-conscious qualities, but not diachronic unifiers. „There’s a fundamental and immovable sense in which one can’t experience the self as multiple in the synchronic case” (Strawson 2009, 90). Strawson thinks that we have short streams of consciousness. They are short pulses of experience which can last up to about two or three seconds, although this is disputable. James called this temporary selves “‘perishing’ pulses of thought”. When there is a gap between them, no subject exists⁵. Strawson thinks of subjects as real mental things. He dubs them SESMETs (short for “subject-of-experience-as-single-mental-thing”). Subject is a single, but only synchronically: „The unity or singleness of the (thin) subject of the total experiential field in the living moment of experience and the unity or singleness of the total experiential field are aspects of the same thing.” (Strawson 2010, 81)

Strawson endorses the identity view between experience and subjects of experience. Every time we have a new experience with it comes a new subject. We also find the identity view in William James’s *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. In the first essay he argues for the unity of consciousness and content. James finds that experience has two different aspects, in one case it is the consciousness, as it plays the part of the knower (subject) and in the other case it is the thing known (experience). His famous doctrine of pure experience can be interpreted as stating the subject/object identity, but it also relates the subject/experience identity.

When it comes to the connecting of „pulses of thought” Strawson follows James:

Successive thinkers, numerically distinct, but all aware of the past in the same way, form an adequate vehicle for all the experience of personal unity and sameness which we actually have.... My present Thought stands... in the plenitude of ownership of the train of my past selves, is owner not only de facto, but de jure, the most real owner there can be... (James 1890, 1.360)

There is a problem of self-reference in a deflationary theory of subjects such is Strawson’s. Which one of these “perishing’ pulses of thought’ is “me”? This also connects with the problem of Self-Identification that is a strong argument against combinationism and constitutive panpsychism. One great problem of combinationist (constitutive) views is that if we as o-subjects are made up of many subjects as parts, then we cannot say for sure who of those subjects we really are, the dreaded Problem of Self-Identification (Roelofs 2015) that seems to seriously undermine experiential combination. In the combinationism view we „refer to a multitude of subjects” when we ask „who is

⁴ In the referential behaviour of ‘I’ there are two or three uses of ‘I’ according to Strawson.

⁵ Some kind of experience could be present even in such cases, when it seems we experience nothingness. Even experience of nothingness is some kind of experience.

talking now"? Roelofs contends that „knowing which set of harmoniously-connected overlapping parts we belong to is all we need“ (Roelofs 2015, 303). Who am I? Which of these subjects is me? Am I a human being, a human head or medulla oblongata, one might wonder in combinationism. Similar questions could be asked about Strawson’s pearle view of the self.

WHY NOT GO DIACHRONIC?

When we talk of subjects identity to experience what experience exactly should we take into consideration? First of all, experience is holistic - the experiential field seems to be a whole prior to its parts. Phenomenal holism seem to be a very plausible thesis. Distinct experiences are „carved“ out later. It could be defined, for example, like this: „PHENOMENAL HOLISM – this is the view that, within a person’s total psychical whole, the nature of a single identifiable experience [...] is essentially determined by the other experiences occurring along- side it – synchronically – within the whole“ (Basile 2010).

So why would subject be identical to only one experience at a time? Why are subjects synchronic unifiers and not diachronic? Strawson says: „The ‘stitching software’ that underwrites our sense of being a single persisting subject—and delivers a sense of the flowing continuity of experience (for those who have such experience)—is as remarked extremely powerful“ (Strawson 2009). Similarly James: „as the brain-changes are continuous, so all these consciousnesses melt into each other like dissolving views. Properly they are but one protracted consciousness, one unbroken stream“ (James 1890, 1.247–8). What is it exactly that stays the same in all experiences? In sum, Strawson’s view is problematic in light of phenomenal holism. Subjects cannot be identical to single identifiable experiences. Since synchronic experiential field as a whole is prior to its parts, there is only one holistic experience to which a subject is identical to. Even if the identity relation stands and a subject is to be identical to its stream of consciousness, on the base of diachronic unity, it cannot be short-lived.

DREAMS THAT KILL

How do we survive sleep and unconsciousness? This is the Problem of continuity (of a stream of consciousness) as Dainton notes. If Strawson is right, then we are identical to episodes of experience, we do not have experiences (Dainton 2012, 185). Dainton claims there are overlapping chains of diachronic co-consciousness. The problem with subject’s persistence is how to account for the diachronic unity. This involves solving the problem of continuity of a stream of consciousness that seems to have gaps in the form of unconscious states and dreamless sleep.

Dainton (2008) answers it with the Potentially Conscious Self thesis. He dismisses the thesis that subjects are always conscious entities (Essentially Conscious Self thesis), and argues that they are entities that are capable of being conscious. Subject or self is potentially conscious because it has a capacity to be conscious. This could be a problem because this way subject is defined dispositionally which goes against the standard notion of subjects as categorical. In order for the subject not to be potential, it needs to have experience at all times. Subjects seem to have a special kind of experience, experience of itself or self-experience.

SUBJECTIVITY

Most of these authors argue that experientiality is the constant in experience. We are loosing the sight of the subject. This is only the qualitative side of conscious-

ness. For example, Eddington has claimed in *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928) that the stuff of the world is the mind-stuff. To quote Searl: „Consciousness cannot be spread over the universe like a thin veneer of jam; there has to be a point where my consciousness ends and yours begins.“ (Searl 2013, 4). There are no subjects from such a perspective.

Phenomenally conscious mental states have a qualitative character and a subjective character (Levine 2001). Subjective character of a conscious state is something it's like to be in that state and qualitative character of a conscious state is what it's like to be in that state for the subject. Conscious experience involves having a “point of view” (Nagel). Subjectivity has a self-intimating nature (Levine 2001, 109) and because of such character we can't explain it.

It seems that there are good reasons to take the mineness of experience (the subjective character) or the act of experiencing as the constant and not experientiality. What I find in introspective observation of myself is a persistent sense of this “for-meness” of experience. Any experience is unimaginable without a subject of experience. It is the subject that has the experience.

DIACHRONIC IDENTITY

Zahavi also defends a deflationary view of the self. Subject is something minimal, but very real and diachronically persistent for him. He argues for the experiential self. There is no experiential self when we are non-conscious. That doesn't mean we can't have both the diachronic identity and unity of the experiential self. „Whether the same experiential self is present in two temporally distinct experiences depends on whether the two experiences in question partake in the same dimension of mineness or for-meness“ (Zahavi 2014, 72). When there is for-me-ness or mineness, when this subjective dimension of experience is present, we have the same experiential self that we had before the non-conscious state. Zahavi also finds Dainton's thesis problematic and shares many aspects of Strawson's view of the subjects, difference being the diachronic identity and unity of the self. He states that the problem of experiential diachronicity comes from the third-person perspective, from which it looks as there are gaps in our consciousness. From the inside this is different. And it is the experiential view that we are interested in.

CONCLUSION

To sum up here are a couple of ending metaphors. Much like our perception of moving objects that is not just a succession of static snapshots, the Self is not a succession of thin subjects but one “moving image” that has a duration, to use a Bergsonian term. And the subjective character is like the cosmic background radiation, always present in experience.

Although this is can be problematic and hard to imagine, let us for a moment assume a pulsar's point-of-view. Not of a bat, but a neutron star. And this may not seem so far off and crazy if you are a panpsychist, though not all panpsychist would agree that a cosmic object like a neutron star is a subject of experience. It is from the third-person perspective of us, the observers, that we find the discreteness of the pulses. A pulsar can make countless emissions of electromagnetic radiation though it is still the same neutron star. All these pulses connect into one seamless flow of emission. The same could be said about the Self.

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