The Universe as the Manifestation of Brahman: Physicalism, Russellian Monism & Advaita Vedānta

By

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Abstract

In this thesis I propose the manifestation relation between Brahman—the fundamental reality—and the universe. Brahman which is non-dual consciousness manifests as the universe and its objects. I begin by arguing that the physicalist universe does not explain consciousness and criticize physicalism by discussing the knowledge and the conceivability arguments. I further develop the knowledge argument to demonstrate that knowing all physical facts entails the ability to identify a phenomenal fact. I then argue that the responses from the physicalists, namely, illusionism and the phenomenal concept strategy are not convincing. Next, I discuss Russellian monism and its forms—panpsychism and cosmopsychism—as an attempt to complete the missing picture of the physicalist reality. I introduce the *binding aspect* of the combination problem for panpsychism and argue that the thesis remains unconvincing. Cosmopsychism suffers from the decombination problem and hence is unappealing. Afterwards, I introduce the concept of Brahman in the system of Advaita Vedānta and take issue with its claim that the individual and Brahman are identical. I propose the *manifestation relation* as a better interpretive solution. I contend that this manifestation relation is a non-mereological grounding relation, which gets rid of the combination and the decombination problems. I conclude that my interpretation of Advaita Vedānta—the manifestation relation—presents a complete picture of reality.

Acknowledgements

Perhaps this is the only space in the entire thesis where I do not have to worry about *academese* and arguments!

Some of the things I have written are parts of the perennial truths known by a few individuals since the ancient times in different regions of the world. I want to mention one such individual, Osho Rajneesh, whose words and no-words appeal to my deepest intuitions. I have been motivated by these perennial ideas to give my own understanding of them by situating them in the present-day context of western analytic philosophy.

In this endeavour I first of all thank my parents. I thank them for not freaking out when five years back I announced that I would be doing philosophy instead of starting an entrepreneurial venture or getting a job.

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Contents

Introduction

Physicalism is the thesis that reality is constituted entirely of physical entities. It is the metaphysical picture painted by using the colours of physics, i.e. physicalism derives its metaphysical claims based on physics—which tells us how the earth revolves around the sun; how atomic nuclei disintegrate and release energy, and why you stay on the ground and not float into outer space, etc.

However, in this physicalist universe, there is one essential element which is missing: consciousness. While physical explanations are given for what lemonade is made of and what are its effects on your body, or what photons are, and how they cause heat, but nowhere in physicalism does one find anything about the *feeling* of the taste of the lemonade and the warmth by the sunshine. The physicalist explanations seem to present a picture of reality which is grayscale, yet it is our phenomenal consciousness which adds a million colours to it.

This thesis is an attempt to complete the physicalist universe by accounting for consciousness. I have a radical proposal: while in the physicalist universe consciousness is missing, I propose that it is the fundamental reality in the form of non-dual fundamental consciousness which is at the very centre of reality. This consciousness manifests itself into the universe and its objects.

In chapter 1, I begin by arguing that physicalism does not explain consciousness. I criticize physicalism by discussing the knowledge and the conceivability arguments. I further develop the knowledge argument to demonstrate that knowing all physical facts entails the ability to identify a phenomenal concept—Mary having known all the physical facts, should be able to identify that the apple is red in colour on seeing one. I then examine the responses

from the physicalists, namely, illusionism and the phenomenal concept strategy (PCS). Illusionism denies subjectivity, while the PCS ignores the subject. I show that the responses are wanting.

In chapter 2, I discuss an attempt to complete the physicalist universe, namely Russellian monism. It comes in two forms—panpsychism and cosmopsychism. In my discussion of panpsychism, I discuss the standard version of the combination problem which renders panpsychism as a problematic thesis. Then, I introduce what I call the *binding aspect* of the combination problem for panpsychism and argue that the thesis remains unconvincing. Finally, cosmopsychism suffers from the decombination problem and thus is not the optimal solution.

In chapter 3, I introduce the concept of Brahman in the system of Advaita Vedānta. I take issue with its claim that the individual and Brahman are identical. I propose the *manifestation relation* as a better interpretive solution. I contend that this manifestation relation is a non-mereological grounding relation, which gets rid of the combination and the decombination problems. I conclude that my interpretation of Advaita Vedānta—the manifestation relation—offers a better alternative to present complete picture of reality. I discuss possible criticism to my view.

Chapter 1: The Physicalist Universe

1.1 Introduction to Physicalism

Physicalism is the thesis that reality is constituted entirely of physical entities. The ontological claim it makes is that whatever exists—entities like objects, events, and properties—are physical. The physicalist believes that there is nothing over and above the physical facts; that "Everything is physical!"

But, what exactly is physicalism? Perhaps, it can be best surmised as that picture of reality which can be found in the most updated book of physics, since physicalism "…is often combined with a claim about the explanatory supremacy of physical theory (physics)."[1]

There are a few issues with this. What is a thing? Moreover, what is the domain of entities considered by physics? While a physics textbook would talk about objects such as electrons, protons, satellites etc., what it would be missing would be objects from other fields, such as, ecosystem, nation, and market. Is this to say that the latter do not exist, or that they are not physical?

The physicalist replies to this by saying that anything is physical, if it *grounds* on other things which are physical. The concept of grounding can be explained as an "in virtue of" or "metaphysical dependence" relation. It is neither an identity relation, nor a causal relation. Additionally, it is neither a purely modal relation which is a statement about possibility and necessity. For example, it is possible for me to be an astronaut. However, it is not *possible*, but *necessary* for

[1] Macdonald, 'Physicalism', 553.

2+3=5 and necessary for all bachelors to be unmarried. Now, 2+3=5 and "all bachelors are unmarried" are necessary truths, which entail and supervene on each other. But, it cannot be said that either of these truths grounds the other truth. Is 2+3=5 in virtue of all bachelors being unmarried? Not quite. Grounding, thus, is unlike a modal relation of supervenience. Moreover, it is not a reductive relation in which type-identities between the ground and the grounded fact is implied. For example, a mental state—pain—is taken to be identical with some physical state—c-fibers firing. Grounding does not imply this kind of relation.

Following is an example of grounding: the glass is fragile in virtue of how the molecules are arranged, together with the physical laws.[2] The fragility of the glass is nothing over and above the arrangement of its molecules. But it is explained in a non-causal manner by the arrangement of the molecules. Similarly, as Philip Goff explains,

> Suppose the rose is scarlet. It follows that the rose is red, and moreover that the rose is red because it is scarlet. But the scarlet colour of the rose does not *cause* it to be red; the rose does not secrete redness as the liver secretes bile. It seems that in both cases we have a non-causal explanatory relationship; and this we call 'grounding'.[3]

It is difficult to see if grounding is completely different from causation. One may argue that the fragility of the glass is in fact caused by the molecular arrangement. As Jonathan Schaffer contends, "Grounding is something like metaphysical causation. … Grounding connects the more fundamental to the less fundamental, and thereby backs a certain form of explanation."[4] While causation

[2] Rosen, 'Metaphysical Dependence', 110.
[3] Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, 42.
[4] Schaffer, 'Grounding, Transitivity, and Contrastivity', 122.

links entities across time, grounding links entities at the same time. As Kit Fine writes that whereas causation stands for science, grounding stands for philosophy.[5] However, it is not very clear to distinguish between explanation by grounding, and causation. Moreover, one may further claim that *red* and *scarlet* are just how we denote some aspects of reality. Do we want to say then that one name (red) *grounds* on another name (scarlet) in virtue of how they are defined or conceived of? The notion of grounding remains contentious.[6]

Nevertheless, we do have an understanding of what grounding is, even if it is difficult to give a precise, explanatory definition. Rosen contends, we do not have to give the necessary and the sufficient conditions for a term in order to be able to fully grasp it.[7] Grounding then can be taken as a *primitive* concept—something which need not be defined in order to be understood.

Perhaps grounding can be better understood by looking at the everyday usage of the word. We often ask, "What is the *ground* for making your claim?" The ground here seems to be a base, a support of things such as reasons, thoughts, beliefs, etc. This ground does not do anything causally, but it enables us to provide explanatory reasons. Another way to envision grounding might be to look at the ground, *literally*. Does the ground or the floor or the earth cause you? But you are dependent on it. The ground provides the standing.

Thus, the physicalist claims, that the facts about something, such as an economy, are true in virtue of the physical facts. The facts about the economy are grounded in physical facts.

[5] Fine, 'Guide to Ground', 40.
[6] For example, Sara Bernstein argues that grounding is not causation. See Bernstein, 'Grounding Is Not Causation'.
[7] Rosen, 'Metaphysical Dependence'.

Notwithstanding, there is still a persisting problem which arises due to physicalism's association with physics. All was well with physics until the early 20th century, when, first, Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity showed a much more nuanced picture of gravity, and its repercussions on motion and time, than what was understood in the classical Newtonian physics. And second, several discoveries into the structure of the basic constituents of matter brought forth surprising results. It seemed that the so-called physical laws governing macro-objects did not apply to the micro-objects, such as electrons—which fell under the scope of enquiry of another branch of physics called quantum mechanics. Thus, there seemed to be two kinds of physics: one about the macro-objects, such as planets, satellites, cricket balls, and the second about the micro-objects such as electron, protons, and photons. To this day, we are grappling with the unification of the quantum mechanics and the general theory of relativity to form one, unified physical theory which explains both the micro and the macro-objects.

Now, by having physics as its base, physicalism as a metaphysical theory seems to be divided, much like physics. Moreover, if the physicalist points towards a complete physics of the future, then again it would be premature to theorize on something contingent. This was the problem raised by Carl Gustav Hempel: if physicalism is defined via reference to contemporary physics, then it is false, since contemporary physics is incomplete. But if physicalism is defined via reference to a future or ideal physics, then it is trivial—after all, who can predict what a future physics contains?[8]

[8] Hempel, 'Reduction'.

What then should one make of physicalism? For my purposes in this thesis I will define physicalism as it is understood generally, which Philip Goff calls "Pure Physicalism".[9] A pure physical fact is a fact which can be captured in the language of physics. A theory based on such facts is pure physicalism.

But, such kind of physicalism seems to be limited in scope, since it bases itself on the "mathematico-nomic vocabulary of physics".[10] Physical theories are framed in mathematics, and they rely on *nomic* terms like causation, laws of nature, etc. Note, that there is a presumption here that the language of physics will always be mathematics, or at least mathematics in its current form and understanding.

To summarize what physicalism is, I adapt from Goff's discussion.[11] Physicalism is the thesis that all facts are either physical or grounded in physical facts. This is a rough definition and further discussion is beyond the scope of my aim here. Nevertheless, let us just stick with this view of physicalism, taking the number of problems associated with it in stride.

1.2 The Missing Element

There is one thing missing in the physicalist universe or the reality as defined by the physicalist. That is consciousness. The word "consciousness" comes with a heavy historical baggage. It has been referred to by many people in many different ways. When I say that physicalism misses out on explaining consciousness, I refer to the prevalent use of the term—that of phenomenal

[9] Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, 29.
[10] Ibid., 30.
[11] Ibid., 54.

consciousness. According to Ned Block, "Phenomenal consciousness is experience; the phenomenally conscious aspect of a state is what it is like to be in that state."[12] This includes the experiences of sensations, feelings, emotions etc.[13]

Now, the problem with this is its definition. It is extremely hard, if not impossible, to define what phenomenal consciousness is without circularity. As Eric Schwitzgebel puts it, "phenomenal consciousness cannot be defined *analytically*, in terms of component concepts (as 'rectangle' might be defined as a right-angled planar quadrilateral). It is a foundationally simple concept, not divisible into component concepts."[14] But still, given that we all *experience*, we have an inherent sense of what is meant here.

Let me give an example. Imagine you are sitting on the beach on a sunny day and enjoying a glass of lemonade. You experience the warmth of the sun on your skin, while you experience the cold liquid coming in your mouth with each sip. A physicalist can provide the best possible explanation in the language of physics what happens when you experience something. In this example, photons from the sun, after travelling for about eight minutes are smashing themselves with your skin cells, and transferring their energy onto you, causing heat. Your nervous system then senses this heat, all made possible by neuro-chemical responses, and this results in another set of reactions causing you to sweat. Similarly, the molecules comprising the lemonade, come into your mouth and interact with the molecules of your biological cells.

[12] Block, 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness', 227.
[13] The status of thoughts remains controversial.
[14] Schwitzgebel, 'Phenomenal Consciousness, Defined and Defended as Innocently as I Can Manage', 225.

Nowhere in physicalism does one find anything about the *feeling* of the warmth by the sunshine, and the taste of the lemonade. This is what David Chalmers calls the "hard problem of consciousness."[15] On the one hand, the easy problems deal with the problems of cognition: the ability to discriminate, and react to a stimulus; the focus of attention, the accountability of mental states. While, on the other hand, the hard problem of consciousness is the problem of experience. The physical explanatory accounts capture only the structure and function, but leave out an explanation of consciousness. Thus, the physicalist explanations seem to present a picture of reality which is grayscale, yet it is our phenomenal consciousness which adds a million colours to it.

In a famous paper, Thomas Nagel argued that for an organism to have conscious experience means "…that there is something it is like to *be* that organism."[16] Taking the example of mammalian bats, he argued that one could study how a bat uses echolocation, observe its behavior, and predictions. Nonetheless, one would still be clueless about what it is like to be a bat—to fly around at night, using echolocation to supplement poor vision, and catch insects as prey.

In conclusion, not only are the "colours" missing in the grayscale reality of physicalism, but also the first-person subjective experience remaining outside the purview of external investigation. Without accounting for the reality of consciousness, the physicalist universe seems to be missing something almost entirely, which is closest to us—that is ourselves. Our first-person subjective

[15] Chalmers, 'Facing up to the Problem of Consciousness', 200.
[16] Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', 436.

experience makes it possible to know what it is like to be us, and to feel the sunshine, and taste the lemonade.

The physicalist universe, then, seems to be a poor, incomplete vision of reality, if not completely false.

1.3 Criticism of Physicalism

Even when the reality of consciousness seems hard to miss, strangely, physicalism remains the high orthodoxy. Philosophers, therefore, have to present arguments to show that physicalism misses the datum of conscious experience, and that consciousness resists any physical explanation.

There are two famous arguments which I will discuss here: the knowledge argument, and the conceivability argument.

1.3.1 The Knowledge Argument

According to this argument, there are some facts about consciousness which cannot be known from physical facts. In other words, physical facts do not completely capture phenomenal facts, that there are certain aspects of experience which cannot be derived from physical fact. For example the sweet-sour taste of the lemonade.

This is best explained in a thought experiment devised by Frank Jackson[17]. Let me explain it in a slightly different rendering than Jackson's.[18]

[17] Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia'.
[18] He now argues against the knowledge argument. See Jackson, 'Mind and Illusion'.

Imagine a scientist, Mary, who is, "…forced to investigate the world from a black and white room *via* a black and white television monitor."[19] To understand it better, imagine that she was born in a black and white room, and she has never left this room ever in her life. All she has seen are black and white objects. She specializes in neurophysiology, and using the most up-to-date book of physics, she gathers all the physical information about the visual experience of a red apple. She knows what the wavelength of red light does in the eye, what sort of neuro-chemical processes are involved when seeing a red object, and how in turn the brain analyses the sensory data, and its responses.

One day, she finds a red apple inside her black and white room—her first coloured object. For the first time in her life, she has an experience of seeing something red. Does she gain some new knowledge? It seems that she does gain some new information about what it is like to see red—the knowledge gained from the red experience. Yet, she had *all* the facts which physicalism (and physics) had to offer. Therefore, physicalism seems to not be capturing every aspect of reality. Physicalism's incompleteness in its ability to explain a certain phenomenon—in this case phenomenal consciousness, which is something not at all trivial—indicates that either physicalism needs to expand itself so as to include consciousness within its scope, or that the theory is just false. Thus, there seems to be an epistemic gap, as suggested by David Chalmers[20], between knowing all the physical facts about the universe, and knowing facts about phenomenal experience.

[19] Jackson, 'Epiphenomenal Qualia', 130.
[20] Chalmers, 'Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap'.

The above is generally represented in the form of an argument:

1. Mary knows all the physical facts.
2. Mary gains some knowledge not captured by the physical facts.

Therefore,

3. Physical facts are incomplete.

The knowledge argument can be used to argue for the falsity of physicalism in the following manner:

1. Facts about consciousness are not deduced from physical facts.
2. If there are facts about consciousness that are not deduced from physical facts, then physicalism is false.

Therefore,

3. Physicalism is false.

There are two points which I want to make here. The minor point first. It is generally claimed that, "Mary does not know (while living in her black-and-white environment) what it is like to see colours and she learns what it is like to see colours only after her release."[21] This is incorrect, as black and white themselves are colours, albeit achromatic colours. White is a colour which has the highest luminosity, while black has the lowest. All other colours lie in between black and white. So, Mary does have a sense of what it is like to see a colour. The issue, however, is what it is like to see a colour which she has not seen before. Mary gains something new about red—a colour she had not seen before, when she sees it for the first time.

[21] Nida-Rümelin, 'Qualia'.

For my second point, let me first briefly discuss the example of Marianna presented by Martine Nida-Rümelin.[22] Like Mary, Marianna has always been in a black and white environment (at t_1). Later on (at t_2), she gets acquainted with arbitrarily coloured objects, such as a *blue* apple, a *red* leaf etc. She now has a phenomenal concept of what it is like to see blue, and red. But, Marianna is however,

> …unable to relate the kinds of colour experiences she now is acquainted with to what she already knew about them at t_1. … At t_2 Marianna knows, in a sense, what it is like to have experiences of red, blue, etc. But she still lacks the relevant items of knowledge about what other people experience: there is a clear sense in which she still may not know *that* the sky appears blue to normal perceivers, she may even have the false [belief]…[23]

While at t_2, Marianna is able to know what it is like to have an experience of a coloured object—she can now dream and/or imagine about a particular colour, and ask questions about it; but it is only at t_3, when Marianna is released and sees the red apple (or the blue sky, or the green leaf), that she gains knowledge, in the form of phenomenal beliefs. Therefore, it can be the case that while both Mary and Marianna get to experience what it is like to see red, they still might not have knowledge about an apple being red.

Nonetheless, I argue that since Mary (or Marianna) knew all the physical facts, she should be able to identify an object of a particular colour. When Mary sees the red apple for the first time, she should be able to identify the apple as a red coloured object. After all, she has studied everything about the colour red,

[22] Nida-Rümelin, 'On Belief about Experiences. An Epistemological Distinction Applied to the Knowledge Argument against Physicalism'.
[23] Nida-Rümelin, 'Qualia'.

perception, neurology, and the like. It should be the case then that when she sees a red apple, she should be able to tell that it is red.

Is she able to do that? Does she know that the apple is red? Or, is it that she sees the apple, which to her seems to be of an entirely different colour of which she has no knowledge of, but she cannot tell if it is red? This seems to be a part of the epistemic gap. A corollary of this existing gap is that Mary would not be able to identify that the apple is red, even though she might exclaim that the apple is neither black nor white. Given that she knows all the physical facts about red experience, and yet she is unable to identify something as red, further shows the problem with physicalism.

The point I have raised above can be represented in an argument form in the following manner:

1. Mary has knowledge of all the physical facts about colour experience.
2. If, Mary has knowledge of all the physical facts about colour experience, then she should be able to identify the colour of a particular object.
3. But, Mary is not able to identify the colour. That is, she cannot say that the colour of the red apple she sees is red.

Therefore,

4. Mary's knowledge is incomplete.
5. But, Mary has complete knowledge of all the physical facts.

Therefore,

6. The physical facts are incomplete.

From above we can see that most physicalists will deny the premise (2), while others would rail against premise (3) and the conclusions derived thereof. Philosophers arguing for consciousness will deny their denial. At this stage we have a standoff.

1.3.2 The Conceivability Argument

Famously known as the "zombie argument", it is claimed that it is conceivable to think of a being which is identical to us conscious beings in every aspect, but is lacking any phenomenal consciousness. Such a system is a zombie, which is "…a system that is physically identical to a conscious being but that lacks consciousness entirely."[24] This kind of zombie is not the popular, blood-thirsty kind—the ones shown on TV. Here, a zombie is a complete physical duplicate of you or me. Your zombie twin will have the same physical identity as yours—you and it will be indistinguishable.[25] Except that it won't have any subjective experience. It would cry and shout when in pain, but it would not experience it.

Now, a majority of philosophers would not argue for the existence of zombies. Rather, the argument concerns their conceivability. Something can be conceivable if and only if its existence is logically coherent. For example, no matter how chimerical it might be, the existence of unicorns is *conceivable*. There is no logical reason to deny the possibility of their existence. This is similar to the claim that black swans do not exist, although their existence can be conceived.

[24] Chalmers, 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature', 105.
[25] For example, in the science-fiction classic movie, *Blade Runner*, the character Rachael is sort of a zombie, who seems to be in all aspects a biological woman, but who is actually a robot, without having consciousness, or any capacity to feel. Does she or does she not have consciousness is not entirely clear. But, a replicant of a human, without any consciousness is a zombie. Rachael can be imagined to be that.

Eventually, black swans were found to be existing. This is not to say that eventually we may find zombies! (Perhaps, with the rise of artificial intelligence, we might succeed in creating one.) On the other hand, the existence of a married bachelor is not conceivable, as it is not logically coherent.

Thus, it is conceivable to think that zombies exist; that is to say that zombies could have existed, maybe in some other universe. Now, the next move goes from conceivability to possibility. If zombies are conceivable, then they are metaphysically possible. This further implies that an entirely physical being can be possible without consciousness— that consciousness is something extra in a zombie. This means that consciousness would be non-physical. Therefore, consciousness is non-physical.

The above is generally represented in the following manner:

1. Zombies are conceivable.
2. If it is conceivable, then it is metaphysically possible that zombies exist.
3. If zombies are metaphysically possible, then consciousness is non-physical.

Therefore,

4. Consciousness is non-physical.

1.4 Responses from the Physicalists

The arguments against physicalism presented earlier can be summarized as the following:

Premise A: There is an epistemic gap between physical and phenomenal facts.

Premise B: If there is an epistemic gap between the physical and the phenomenal facts, then there is a metaphysical gap between the physical and the phenomenal facts, and physicalism is false.

Therefore,

Conclusion: Physicalism is false.

Now, I will discuss two responses from the physicalists to counter the criticism made in the previous section: Illusionism, and the Phenomenal Concept Strategy.

1.4.1 Illusionism

According to a few physicalists, there is no epistemic gap between physical and phenomenal facts. Chalmers calls this view as Type-A Materialism or Physicalism.[26] For Type-A Physicalism, there is no hard problem of consciousness, and the Type-A physicalists deny the premise (A) above. On the contrary, they claim that there is no epistemic gap between the physical and the phenomenal facts. Famous examples of philosophers holding this view are Gilbert Ryle,[27] David Lewis,[28] and Daniel Dennett.[29]

This position goes further into either eliminativism about consciousness—that consciousness does not exist—or, into functionalism, where consciousness is

[26] Chalmers, 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature', 108.
[27] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*.
[28] Lewis, 'What Experience Teaches'.
[29] Dennett, *Consciousness Explained*.

defined in functional terms, where "…to be conscious might be to have certain sorts of access to information, and/or certain sorts of dispositions to make verbal reports."[30] Physicalism in this manner either eliminates the reality of consciousness entirely, or explains it in terms that makes it irrelevant.

There is however another position held by a minority[31] of philosophers who claim that any feeling of what it is like to be something is at best an illusion. This is *illusionism* about consciousness. I call the philosophers holding this view, *conservative physicalists.* While the eliminitavists or functionalists deny or make consciousness irrelevant, illusionists on the other hand accept that phenomenal consciousness resists physical explanations. Now instead of being *realists* about consciousness, illusionists uphold physicalism. Therein lies their conservatism—instead of expanding physicalism, they defend it. Consequently, as Keith Frankish argues, if the phenomenon of consciousness "… resists explanation in physical terms or is detectable only from a certain perspective, then the simplest explanation is that it is illusory."[32] This is to claim that if something seems to be outside the purview of physicalism, then it would have to be illusory.[33] While on the one hand, the Type-A physicalists deny the epistemic gap, yet on the other hand, the illusionists accept the gap but claim it to be an illusion, a "mental-magic trick".

Conscious experiences by their very nature resist any third-person investigation. Because of this reason, Frankish claims that conscious experiences,

[30] Chalmers, 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature', 109.
[31] Perhaps only a minority in academic philosophy. I suspect that a substantial number of people in neuroscience, and other sciences in general may be resorting to some form of illusionist ideas.
[32] Frankish, 'Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness', 27–28.
[33] A more *liberal* approach would be to expand the horizons of physicalism. I discuss Russellian monism, one such liberal position in the next chapter.

"…through external inspection of our brain states, they appear to be non-veridical; the properties represented do not show up from other perspectives."[34] This feeds on *scientism*—that science offers the best possible method of investigation. Thus, if consciousness does not find any explanation from the third-person scientific method, it must be an illusion. This seems to be a big claim denying our first-person knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, just because it is not accessible to the third-person.

Ultimately for Frankish, "Illusionism replaces the hard problem with the illusion problem—the problem of explaining how the illusion of phenomenalist arise and why it is so powerful."[35] The problem is not about explaining consciousness, but about explaining the *illusion* of consciousness.

We have a general understanding of what illusions are. For example, a mirage appearing on a hot day is an illusion. Similarly, mistaking a rope in a dark room for a snake is an illusion. It seems to me that an illusion has three constituting parts: first, there is an object; second, our knowledge of another object; and third, our superimposition of second on the first. In the illusion of the rope appearing as a snake, there is an object—the rope; then we have knowledge of snakes; and finally, we impose the knowledge of snakes on the rope. Will it be possible for someone to have an illusion of mistaking a rope for a snake, without actually having knowledge of snakes whatsoever? I do not think so. Thus, in the context of illusionism of consciousness, part of the illusion problem is to answer this problem: how do we have an illusion of consciousness, since if it does not exist,

[34] Frankish, 'Illusionism as a Theory of Consciousness', 28.
[35] Ibid., 37.

then we would not have any knowledge of it, thereby not forming the illusion in the first place.

Frankish considers several other problems with illusionism.[36] Let me discuss here one of the problems he discusses which I think is important—"who is the audience?"[37] Illusionism denies the claim that while typing these sentences I really feel the sensations of the keys by my finger-tips. But how can these sensations or the feeling of drinking lemonade on a sunny day at the beach be an illusion? More importantly, who or what is creating the illusion, who or what is the perceiver of this illusion? Frankish introduces this problem by asking, "Who is the audience for the illusion of phenomenal consciousness?"[38]

Frankish posits that the "illusionists may be committed (as many theorists are) to the existence of an inner *representer* of some kind: a system, or set of processes, which generates introspective representations of sensory states. But, this need not amount to an observer, still less a conscious one."[39] This means that even though there might be some processes which enable some representation of sensations, it does not mean that there is some conscious subject.

This does not answer the questions comprehensively. When a pin is pricked on my leg, in the illusionist picture, the brain senses the stimulus (pin prick), and a set of processes represent the sensation of feeling the pin prick.

But, *who* is it that feels these feelings?

Imagine yourself sitting. No, forget imagining, *do* it after reading this passage. Sit in a relaxed manner, take a few deep breaths, and be calm. Now, take

[36] Ibid., 29.
[37] Ibid., 34.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

a pin or a pen and press it against your skin. Do this slowly. You feel the cold metal, pointed tip pressing against your skin, which instantly creates sensations. Press it further against your skin. Do not react. Now, you have pain, and your mind has several responses buzzing—"stop this!", "there is pain." You don't have to use a pin to do this. Focussing on your breath, with the coming and going of each breath, and the sensations they cause in your nostrils, will be sufficient.

Now ask yourself—who is it that experienced the stimulus (pin prick, breaths), and the responses ("it's painful", "the air is cold")? Who is the experiencer? In effect, the question is—who are *you*?

When Frankish writes, "When we think about what an experience is like…"[40], or asks, "How do we acquire phenomenal concepts?"[41]—who or what does he refer to when he writes "we"? Who are we? Are we simply some set of brain processes which represent some sensory state? Frankish does not say much. At best, an illusionist (like Frankish) argues that a part of the brain creates the illusion, while the other part represents it. The one which represents, has the sense of "I", i.e. it has the illusion of being a representer, when it itself is just a neurological process. This is to claim that you and I are just brain processes. We are just processes representing processes, and in turn giving an appearance of something phenomenal, and all this comprises the magic theatre of nature.

Illusionists would deny that for a representation some experiencer of sorts is needed. There are just representations, without any subject or experiencer. There is only one brain state, which is hallucinating or having an illusion that it

[40] Ibid., 35.
[41] Ibid.

is experiencing. But it is hard to make much sense of this. Imagine a book, which has all the representations. We need some sort of an interpreter or a reader in order to understand what is written in the book. Similarly in the case of mental representations—we need some interpreter to make sense of these representations.

Do illusionists want to claim that not only consciousness is an illusion, but the subjects, we, are illusions too? If this is the case, i.e. the subject or the feeling of subjectivity is an illusion (or at least part of some illusion), then the illusionists' claim itself becomes illusory. Something can be said as illusory only when there is something which is not illusory. And only from the latter's point of view, it could be claimed that something else is illusory. For example, take A as something that is not an illusion. Take B as something illusory, such as a mirage. Now, A can claim that B is illusory—this would be a claim which would hold ground.

Further, suppose, both A and B are illusions. A has a belief that B is illusory. But, A itself is an illusion. Thus, the claim made by A would certainly not hold any ground whatsoever. That is, how can the illusionist say that something is an illusion, when the illusionist himself does not really exist? In my view, much needs to be clarified by the illusionists regarding their position on the relation between thought and consciousness. We believe consciousness exists. Since beliefs are propositional thoughts, it is hard to see why illusionists should argue that thoughts are real, while consciousness is not. If thought is regarded as a form of consciousness, then as Goff claims, that it would be contradictory to "…assert the

existence of thought but deny the existence of consciousness if thought just is a (highly evolved) form of consciousness."[42]

Finally, it seems that the illusionism about consciousness presents itself like a mirror image of another type of illusion—the illusion about matter—which is the thesis of idealism. To introduce it briefly, idealism is the thesis which claims that mind or spirit is the ultimate foundation of reality, that is, reality is mind dependent.

There is a famous passage about Samuel Johnson's *refutation* of Berkeley's idealism, which I quote here:

> After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus*."[43]

A passage mirroring the above can be presented to refute illusionism about consciousness in the following manner:

After we came out of the lecture, we stood talking for some time together of Professor Frankish's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of consciousness, and that everything in the universe is merely physical. I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Jameson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus*."

[42] Goff, 'Is Realism about Consciousness Compatible with a Scientifically Respectable Worldview?', 85.
[43] Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson*, I:471. Quoted in, Patey, 'Johnson's Refutation of Berkeley', 139.

Jameson's refutation of illusionism, like Johnson's to idealism, is in many ways a very relatable response. While we may not have arguments to prove illusionism wrong, we nonetheless have a strong intuitive understanding of finding it to be that.

In the end, the illusionist has as much an uphill task, if not more, to disprove consciousness, as does the person trying to prove it. The burden lies on the illusionist to convince us that our very basic belief about consciousness is false. Until then, illusionism cannot be the default philosophical position.

1.4.2 Phenomenal Concept Strategy

Previously, I mentioned that the arguments against physicalism presented can be summarized as the following:

> **Premise A**: There is an epistemic gap between physical and phenomenal facts.
>
> **Premise B**: If there is an epistemic gap between the physical and the phenomenal facts, then there is a metaphysical gap between the physical and the phenomenal facts, and physicalism is false.

Therefore,

> **Conclusion:** Physicalism is false.

A majority of physicalists accept the premise A, but deny the premise B. These are called Type-B physicalists.[44] They argue that there is an epistemic gap

[44] Chalmers, 'Consciousness and Its Place in Nature', 112.

between the physical facts and the phenomenal facts, but there is no metaphysical gap. Philosophers arguing for this include Levine,[45] Papineau,[46] Lycan.[47]

What this means is that Mary gets to know what she already knew, but in a different manner. She gains a new concept, which refers to a property (redness of apple) she already knew about. This is a phenomenal concept. These are "…special concepts of qualitative properties that we employ when thinking of our qualitative states from within the first-person point of view."[48] For example, a phenomenal concept "red sensation" is when you have the sensation while looking at an apple, or the red flag of a Leftist protestor.

Following Stoljar, the line of argument used by physicalists to show that the epistemic gap between phenomenal truths and physical truths is consistent with physicalism, is called the Phenomenal Concept Strategy (PCS).[49] The main contention of the strategy is that while there is a conceptual dualism—physical and phenomenal—there is nonetheless, an ontological monism in the form of physicalism. Both the physical and the phenomenal co-refer, but are different conceptualizations of the same thing.

In the knowledge argument, Mary knows everything about colour vision. But, she gains the phenomenal concept "red sensation" only when she sees a red apple. But, why did she not know about it beforehand, owing to her extensive knowledge about colour vision? This is because a phenomenal concept is conceptually isolated. No amount of physical knowledge about colour vision would

[45] Levine, 'Materialism and Qualia: The Explanatory Gap'.
[46] Papineau, 'Physicalism, Consciousness and the Antipathetic Fallacy'.
[47] Lycan, *Consciousness and Experience*.
[48] Levine, 'Qualia'.
[49] Stoljar, 'Physicalism and Phenomenal Concepts'.

make Mary know about the phenomenal concept. When she sees red, she gains the phenomenal concept of seeing red, which is just another way of knowing the physical concept of seeing red. Thus, the proponent of PCS denies the move from the epistemic gap to an ontological gap. Moreover, PCS does not seek to explain the phenomenon of consciousness itself, but it aims to give a physical explanation of the epistemic gap.

According to Chalmers, the PCS presents a thesis C, attributing psychological features to human beings.[50] It is then argued that:

1. C is true.
2. C explains the epistemic situation regarding consciousness. (This is to say that C explains why there is an epistemic gap.)
3. C can be explained in physical terms.

Chalmers presents, what he calls the "Master Argument" against PCS.[51] Take P to be the complete physical facts about the universe. And, take C as the aforementioned PCS thesis. Chalmers argues[52] that:

1. If P & ~C is conceivable, then C is not physically explicable.
2. If P & ~C is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation regarding consciousness.

Thus,

3. Either C is not physically explicable, or C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

[50] Chalmers, 'Phenomenal Concepts and the Explanatory Gap', 172.
[51] Ibid., 173.
[52] Ibid., 174.

Thus, the PCS is faced with a dilemma. Premise (1) above—the first horn of the dilemma—is similar to the first premise of the conceivability argument which I have discussed earlier. If we can conceive of zombies—our physical duplicates lacking consciousness—then this would be to say that P&~C is conceivable. It would be the case that something additional is required to explain C.

Additionally, Premise (2) entails that C cannot account for our epistemic situation regarding consciousness. If P&~C is not conceivable, then this would mean that zombies satisfy C. But, zombies do not share our epistemic situation—we have conscious experience; zombies do not. Now, if zombies satisfy C, and yet they do not share our epistemic situation, then C does not explain our epistemic situation. Therefore, if P&~C is not conceivable, then C cannot explain our epistemic situation.

Chalmers' master argument shows that the PCS is inadequate to close the epistemic gap about consciousness.

There is, however, one more problem with the PCS, which has not been discussed in the literature. As in the case with illusionism, one could raise the audience or the subject problem for the PCS. That is, the PCS does not say anything about the subject who is supposedly having the phenomenal concepts. PCS, therefore, is mute to the question—who is the "we"?—which I discussed earlier in the previous section.

A PCS strategist could argue that addressing this problem does not fall under the aims of the PCS. Its sole objective is to acknowledge that there is an

epistemic gap regarding physical and phenomenal fact, and further, to deny any ontological gap arising there such, using phenomenal concepts. The PCS strategist is silent about what the subject is. The whole project of PCS is to explain phenomenal properties in physical terms. But, how should we make sense of what the subject is gets neglected. Following PCS, how do we explain the subject in physical terms? Do we need a phenomenal concept for the subject?

Will the PCS strategist be towing the same line of argument as does the illusionist—that one brain process is having the phenomenal concept (another brain process)? If so, then he will have to address the same concerns discussed in the previous section.

In the end, the Phenomenal Concept Strategy, with its narrow aim to explain the epistemic gap in physical terms, does not present anything substantial about the reality of our conscious experience. The onus is on the PCS strategist to address the worries I have raised above.

Chapter 2: Towards a Complete Universe

In the previous chapter, I argued that the physicalist universe is missing something fundamental, which is consciousness. As I previously mentioned, the physical reality comes in grayscale, which the reality is obviously not. Consciousness gives a wide spectrum of a million hues to experience.

In this chapter, I will discuss an attempt made by a few philosophers to complete the picture of the universe called Russellian Monism.

Before I move further, I should mention one popular theory of consciousness which I will not be dealing with in the thesis: Dualism. Traditionally, the dualist understanding is that there is mind, and that there is matter (or body)—separate from each other. This kind of dualism is known as Substance Dualism, or Cartesian dualism, after Rene Descartes. A substance is that which has properties, and is more than its properties. It is which contains these properties, and itself endures. For example, the famous Aristotelian examples are man, horse etc. In substance dualism, mind and matter are two substances. Mind is not just the collection of thoughts, but it is the thing that thinks, or *res cogitans*, while the body is the extended thing or *res extensa*. Dualism as a thesis has its strengths and weaknesses. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I will forego an examination of this view. The main motivation behind this is that I prefer, for the sake of simplicity, a monist theory of reality, over a dualist. If a theory can explain using "one", then I see no point in creating a structure, which does the same using "two".

2.1 Russellian Monism

There is not one but many monisms. Nevertheless, the fundamental characteristic common in them is "oneness". The differences lie in where this oneness is attributed, and what this oneness is thought to be. For example, physicalism is a monistic thesis with the oneness defined in physical terms—recall the slogan, "Everything is physical." Physicalism is an example of what is known as *type* monism, which claims that all concreta are under the same highest "type"—there is only one type of entity; in physicalism's case, it is matter. *Existence* monism, on the other hand, argues for the existence of exactly one concretum or "token", in contrast to *Priority* monism which claims that there is exactly one *fundamental* concretum.

What then is *Russellian* monism? In 1918, Bertrand Russell in *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism,* he claimed the following:

> …I share the common-sense belief that there are many separate things; I do not regard the apparent multiplicity of the world as consisting merely in phases and unreal divisions of a single indivisible Reality.[53]

In the above passage, he argues against token monism. In the same work, he gives a partial endorsement to type monism:

> …I do not profess to know whether [neutral monism] is true or not. I feel more and more inclined to think that it may be true. I feel more and more that the difficulties that occur in regard to it are all of the sort that may be solved by ingenuity.

[53] Russell, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, 2.

As Jonathan Schaffer points out, Russell misinterpreted monism.[54] It seems that Russell took token monism to just existence monism, and ignored priority monism.

Later, in his 1927 work *The Analysis of Matter,*[55] Russell claimed that physics does not tell much about matter; physics only lets us know the relational or the functional aspects of matter. For example, an electron repels a positive charge, and follows a curved path under a magnetic field. What physics is silent about is what the intrinsic nature of, say, an electron is. What is matter constituted of?

This approach has inspired a theory of consciousness known as Russellian Monism. According to this, consciousness is or at least grounded in the intrinsic nature of matter. Consciousness then is not something superfluous, but is intertwined with matter. Goff explains the main thrust behind this idea,

> According to the Russellian monist, the reason we find it hard to accept that matter can explain consciousness—the reason it seems that zombies are conceivable—is that we conceive of matter in terms of its extrinsic dispositionsal nature. … The essence of the mind-body problem for the Russellian monist is rooted in our scientific ignorance about the deep nature of the material world.[56]

Russellian monism, thus, connects the hard problem of consciousness with the matter's intrinsic nature. Physics does not say much about what matter *is*—call it the hard problem of physics. Physics does not explain consciousness—hard problem of consciousness. Russellian monism claims that the two hard problems—

[54] Schaffer, 'Monism', 2010, 46.
[55] Incidentally, Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* was published in the same year. From where I stand, both works point in the same direction. The way they point, however, are very different.
[56] Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*, 144.

of physics and of consciousness—may be connected. The deep intrinsic nature of matter explains consciousness.

Russellian monism comes in two forms: panpsychism and cosmopsychism. In the following sections I will examine both positions.

2.1.1 Panpsychism

Panpsychism is increasingly seen as a middle-way between the two rival, orthodox theories of consciousness— physicalism and dualism. The main claim of its popular version is that the fundamental physical constituents are conscious, and that the fundamental physical constituents have phenomenal properties.

This is an ancient thesis. David Skrbina traces back to the works of the pre-Socratics.[57] Whereas, in the eastern philosophical traditions the elements of panpsychism can be found most prominently in Advaita Vedānta, and Zen Buddhism.

As the etymology of the word suggests, panpsychism is the thesis that everything has mentality— *pan* meaning all, and *psyche* meaning mind or soul in ancient Greek. However, not many people currently hold the literal view. Chalmers notes that modern day panpsychists are not committed to the view that, say, the Eiffel tower has a mind.[58]

Instead, the prevalent view of panpsychism, known as *constitutive panpsychism* (henceforth referred to as panpsychism), is the claim that "at least

[57] Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West*, 23.
[58] Chalmers, 'Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism', 2. This also indicates that "panpsychism" maybe a family resemblance. While Chalmers might mean differently as to what panpsychism is, Spinoza might differ, as would maybe a Zen Buddhist, while each of them claiming the term. This calls for a definitive explanation so that a common understanding can arise in the field.

some fundamental material entities—the physical ultimates—are conscious; facts about human and animal consciousness are grounded in the facts about the consciousness of their fundamental material parts."[59] In other words, the physical ultimates, such as quarks, are conscious. That is, they are subjects of experience. Animal level consciousness, both human and non-human, is then constituted by the consciousness(es) of these fundamental physical entities, or micro-subjects. These physical particles, which are micro-subjects, combine to make us as macro-subjects.

In this framework, consciousness is not explained away as some phenomenon caused by or grounded in complex physical processes. Neither is it something which is entirely separate from the material world, as is the case in dualism. Consciousness is a part of fundamental reality, just as an electron's charge and mass.

However, this thesis suffers from a serious difficulty, known as the *combination problem*. The term was coined by Seager[60], who described it as, "the problem of explaining how complex conscious states emerge from the primitive mental states ascribed to… fundamental entities."[61] To better understand the combination problem, the following formulation by William James (which may well be the oldest) would be helpful—

> Take a hundred [feelings], shuffle them and pack them as close together as you can (whatever that might 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

[59] Goff, 'Panpsychism'.
[60] Seager, 'Consciousness, Information and Panpsychism'.
[61] Seager, 'Panpsychism, Aggregation and Combinatorial Infusion', 172.

> 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.[62]

While we understand how the smaller constituents of something, say a computer, give rise to the complex functions it exhibits, we do not have a clue about how combination might work with respect to our consciousness. In a computer, we know how the silicon atoms work together to give rise to the user interface of the operating system, which is grounded in micro-processes of the order of a billion per second. The analogous picture does not seem clear enough: how do micro-subjects, or micro-level consciousnesses come together to give rise to macro-subjects like us, with macro-level conscious experiences?

Many philosophers regard this as a knockout blow to panpsychism while others take it as a point to support other versions of Russellian Monism, which I will discuss in the next section. This is because the combination problem poses a challenge for the panpsychist to give a comprehensive explanation of the macro-level consciousness we are most aware and interested in—the human consciousness.

In addition to the above, there is one more problem associated with panpsychism which has not been hitherto discussed in the literature. I call this the "Binding Aspect of the Combination Problem". Following Albert Einstein's energy-mass equivalence theory, two important findings were made.[63] First, in a composite physical object, say an atomic nucleus—the total mass of the nucleus is

[62] James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 162.
[63] Einstein, 'Does the Inertia of a Body Depend upon Its Energy-Content?'

less than the sum of the masses of its constituting nucleons (protons and neutrons). Second, this difference in mass, also known as *mass defect*, transforms into energy which holds the nucleons together to form the nucleus. This energy which binds the neutrons and protons together is called the *binding energy*.

Let me give an example to illustrate the above.

A nucleus in an atom is a stable, composite entity. For or example, in the nucleus of a Helium atom, there are two protons and two neutrons. But why don't they fall apart? What is the reason for the stability of the nucleus? Further, why is some amount of energy required to break it up? This is because some amount of mass (from the nucleons: protons and neutrons) converts into energy, which binds the constituents together. This is the binding energy, which as the name itself suggests *binds* the nucleons together to form a unified entity—the nucleus. The nucleus is stable because of this binding energy, which is few million times greater than the chemical bonds which keep two or more atoms together.

To summarize, there are two points to be kept in mind:

1. Small constituents come together to form a bigger composite object, and a fraction of the constituents gets converted into a stabilizing factor (binding energy in the case of nuclei), which adds to the overall stability of the bigger complex (nuclei).
2. At least in the case of nuclear physics, the whole can be less than the sum of its parts. The mass or energy of the nucleus is less than the sum of the masses or energies of its nucleons. (Mass defect.)

What would be the analogous case to nuclear physics in the panpsychist framework? Quarks—the micro-subjects in the panpsychist model—would come together to form a bigger complex. In the process, some of their consciousness would transform into what I call the *binding consciousness*, which would keep the

consciousnesses of the quarks together, bringing stability to the system and making it more unified. This would also be the reason for the entity not to fall apart, or disintegrate. Finally, the consciousness of the macro-subject will be smaller than the sum of the consciousness of the micro-subjects. This is because some of the consciousness of the quarks is involved in the binding process. I call this the "consciousness defect", analogous to the mass defect in physics.

Thus, there are two main aspects of the problem.

First, in the atomic nucleus, particles combine to form a larger entity (the nucleus) by transforming a fraction of the mass to binding energy which holds them together. What is the case in panpsychism? Do the quarks combine their consciousnesses, by transforming a fraction of it into binding consciousness, which would keep the macro-level consciousness together? What exactly would this binding consciousness be? In what ways is it different from the quark-consciousness? Is it just consciousness itself, without any physical constituent associated with it, which keeps everything together? Thus for the panpsychist, the challenge is to tell us more about the intrinsic nature of this binding consciousness. What is going on at the deepest level of reality?

Second, the whole is smaller than the sum of its parts. My consciousness is smaller than the sum of the consciousness of the quarks I have. Somehow this seems to be less appealing, even though it might be true. Generally, in the existing understanding of panpsychism, the macro-subject is regarded as the sum of the micro-subjects. In an ordinary sense, we have the opposite understanding of how things are – the whole is bigger than the sum of its parts. The sum of the wooden legs, and a flat wooden board, make up something extra—a table. Just the sum of

the legs and the flat surface themselves do not constitute a table. Otherwise, a large bag containing the constituents (four legs and a wooden board), should be called a table. But this may not be the case. Macro-subject may actually be lesser than the micro-subjects.

Therefore, a constitutive panpsychist, in addressing the combination problem, needs to respond to the binding aspect of the problem. The onus is on the panpsychists to come up with a solution. As such, panpsychism does not look impressive as a theory of explaining consciousness.

Nevertheless, there is another version of panpsychism, according to which the physical ultimates have protophenomenal properties. As Chalmers writes,

> …*protophenomenal* properties are special properties that are not phenomenal (there is nothing it is like to have a single protophenomenal property) but that can collectively constitute phenomenal properties, perhaps when arranged in the right structure.[64]

Constitutive Panprotopsychism is the thesis that macro-level phenomenal experience supervenes on micro-level protophenomenal properties of the physical ultimates. In other words, there is nothing like it to be a single quark. While a quark possesses some proto-phenomenal property or properties, by itself it is not conscious, it does not have experiences. But, when situated in more complex arrangements, the quark and other entities (other quarks), together give rise to phenomenal experiences, from their proto-phenomenal properties.

I do not think that this version of panpsychism is any better. It avoids the claims that, say, the Eiffel Tower is conscious—perhaps, because the protophenomenal properties of the physical ultimates making up the tower, were

[64] Chalmers, 'Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism', 31.

not arranged in the structure, so as to give rise to phenomenal properties. But, in so doing panprotopsychism falls into problems of its own.

The primary advantages of panpsychism as a theory is that it avoids the problem of emergence. But if the physical ultimates have protophenomenal properties, then the question arises: *how* do these protophenomenal properties give rise to phenomenal properties? How do the unconscious/proto-conscious properties give rise to conscious mental states?

Moreover, *when* do the protophenomenal properties give rise to conscious states and in *what*? Let us suppose that quarks are the fundamental physical particles and they have proto-mental properties. Now, let us move to more complex arrangements. Quarks make up protons and neutrons. Do these particles still have proto-phenomenal qualities or are these now conscious? If it is the latter, then the panprotopsychist has to explain this emergence. Even so, he has not answered the difficult problem. If it is the former then let us take the next complex system, the atom, or even the next complex system, the molecule. We can continue doing this until the point the panprotopsychist claims that the system is conscious. He has to draw the line somewhere and without giving adequate reasons, it would be arbitrary to wherever he draws the line.

Thus, panprotopsychism not only has to deal with the combination problem (and the binding aspect), but also has to address the problem of emergence. The burden is on the panprotopsychists to respond to what I have said above before developing the thesis further.

2.1.2 Priority Cosmopsychism

The most recently discussed theory of cosmopsychism is called priority cosmopsychism. According to priority cosmopsychism:

> …phenomenality is prevalent because the whole cosmos instantiates phenomenal or protophenomenal properties. It says, moreover, that the consciousness of the cosmos is ontologically prior to the consciousness of ordinary individuals like us.[65]

Henceforth in this chapter, I will refer "priority cosmopsychism" and "cosmopsychism" interchangeably.

The cosmos is *prior* to everything, including us. It will be good to explain this a bit more. In recent times, Jonathan Schaffer has defended the view that only one *basic*, maximally concrete object, the cosmos, exists.[66] The priority monist acknowledges that the world (or the cosmos) has proper parts, but that the whole is basic, and the proper parts are its derivatives. The cosmos comes prior to its parts. Schaffer clarifies that when he talks about the cosmos, he is only concerned with concrete objects, such as planets, particles, tables, and trees.[67]

What is this notion of "basic"? It is that which is fundamental and which grounds everything else. The derivatives are grounded on this basic thing, and exists in virtue of the basic. Schaffer gives the example of a circle. The circle is fundamental, and its derivatives or parts—semi-circle, arcs etc.—are grounded in the circle, without which they would not exist. The circle—the whole—is prior to its parts.[68] Similarly, the cosmos is prior to its objects. The objects are the way they are, because of how the cosmos is.

[65] Nagasawa and Wager, 'Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism', 113.
[66] Schaffer, 'Monism', 2016.
[67] Schaffer, 'Monism', 2010, 33.
[68] Ibid., 31.

Priority cosmopsychists take their cue from priority monists like Schaffer, in arguing that exactly one consciousness, that of the cosmos, exists, and is prior to all else. Moreover, while priority monism is concerned with only concrete objects, thus ignoring phenomenal properties, priority cosmopsychism's main concern is with phenomenal and protophenomenal properties.

As I explained in the previous section, according to panpsychism, phenomenal properties are instantiated by the physical ultimates, at the micro level. This grounds the macro level consciousness experience. Take this as the bottom-up view of conscious reality. In contrast to this, priority cosmopsychism claims that, "…phenomenal properties that the cosmos instantiates are more fundamental than phenomenal properties of ordinary individuals. In fact, according to priority cosmopsychism, the cosmic consciousness is the most fundamental form of phenomenality."[69] Take this as the top-down view of conscious reality.

In this sense, panpsychism and cosmopsychism point to one of the most fundamental metaphysical problems—do parts constitute the whole, or the whole constitute the parts? Panpsychism claims that the parts make up the whole, whereas cosmopsychism argues that the whole is prior to its parts; the parts get constituted by the whole.

A few contemporary philosophers favour cosmopsychism over panpsychism because of the latter's intractable combination problem, which I discussed at length in the previous section. However, cosmopsychism has a problem of its own, similar to panpsychism. This is the *Decombination problem*. The question raised

[69] Nagasawa and Wager, 'Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism', 117.

by the problem is this: how does a whole conscious unity—the cosmos—decombine into smaller conscious entities? Or, in other words, how does the big One, give rise to many smalls?

Thus, the decombination problem mirrors the worries raised in the combination problem. The fundamental problem comes from the part-whole worry of mereology. While panpsychism takes the parts to be prior of fundamental, cosmopsychism, on the other hand, takes the whole to be prior. The cosmopsychist needs to explain the multiplicity of the parts and how does one entity decombine into many. Unless he does that, cosmopsychism, like panpsychism, remains troublesome.

Chapter 3: The Conception of Brahman in Advaita Vedānta

In the first chapter, I began with the claim that the physicalist universe leaves out phenomenal consciousness. Further, I argued that the responses given by the physicalists—illusionism and the phenomenal concept strategy—suffer from problems. Illusionism does not give a convincing enough response to the subject problem. Neither does the phenomenal concept strategy, which only deals with phenomenal concepts, but is silent about the subject having these concepts.

In the second chapter, I discussed an attempt made to complete the physicalist universe by accounting for consciousness. This attempt, namely Russellian Monism, and its versions, panpsychism and cosmopsychism, are credited for bringing consciousness to the centre of the debate. Although attractive propositions, they nevertheless have problems of their own. I discussed what is known as the combination problem, which Chalmers claims to be the "…hardest problem for any sort of Russellian view."[70] I also introduced what I call the *binding aspect* of the combination problem. Lastly, I contended that cosmopsychism as a theory suffers from the decombination problem.

So far it can be seen that while physicalism does not have consciousness in its scope, the theories which do involve consciousness suffer from many problems. In this chapter, I will introduce the conception of Brahman in the Advaita Vedānta system of Indian philosophy. Taking the ideas from Vedānta, I will present the *manifestation relation* from an ontological point of view. The ultimate reality, i.e.

[70] Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 307.

Brahman, *manifests* itself as different entities. This ultimate reality, being consciousness in nature, also grounds the phenomenal experience of the different entities. I will then show how it helps to solve the combination and the decombination problems. Lastly, I will respond to the criticism to my proposals.

3.1 Historical Background

Vedas are considered the oldest scriptures of the Indo-Aryan civilization, dating may be as far back as 1500 BC. The word *Veda* comes from the root *vid*, which means "to know" in Sanskrit, and from which comes *videre* in Latin, meaning "to see". Vedas, therefore, are the knowledge which the ancient people, who called themselves *Aryans*—the cultured, or the civilized—which was composed, and transmitted orally. They gained this knowledge in their intuitive visions, In other words, the knowledge was based on what they saw.

Vedānta comes from two words: *Veda* and *anta*, meaning the end of the Vedas. This *end* is both literal and metaphorical in the sense that the main philosophical discussions which Vedānta comprises of is at the end of the Vedic corpus. In addition, Vedānta is the end, or the *telos* of the Vedas. It is the final goal, the climax of the previous rites and rituals described in the Vedas.

The textual corpus which Vedānta refers to is called the Upaniṣads, which literally means "to seat down near to". A student would approach the teacher and sit near him to gain knowledge—mainly about the ultimate reality, and liberation from the bondage of the world.[71] Thus, the Upaniṣads also came to mean as "the

[71] This interpretation is now the "old" view which Olivelle thinks is untenable and that the term denotes the relation between two things. (See, Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*, 24.) I do not fully agree with this view. While sitting near the teacher, a student would gain the knowledge of inter-connectedness of things. Thus, the word co-refers to both

esoteric doctrine, secret doctrine, [with] mysterious or mystical meaning."[72] There are over two hundred Upaniṣads, out of which scholars identify twelve to thirteen as the principal Upaniṣads.

The system of philosophy based on Vedānta is called *Vedāntamīmāṁsā*, or an enquiry into Vedānta. It is a philosophical tradition, "which intends to base itself on the Vedānta in the primary sense, the Upaniṣads."[73] Classical Vedānta recognizes three foundational texts. The first are the Upaniṣads, the second is the Bhagavad Gītā—the song of the Lord—which comprises of seven hundred verses from the epic Mahabharata; and the third, Brahmasūtras—the aphorisms related to Brahman—also called the Vedāntasūtras.

Advaita Vedānta is a hermeneutic system of Vedānta. Advaita means non-dual. This system is a non-dual interpretation of Vedānta, which is inspired by the passages in the Upaniṣads suggestive of non-duality. For example,

> …this world was simply what is existent—one only, without a second.[74]

Nevertheless, the Upaniṣads contain passages which can have both non-dualist and dualist interpretations. The Advaita tradition, under its principal explicator, Śaṅkara, became a system of a non-dual reading of the texts. He used the texts of Vedānta as the basis to elaborate his vision of non-dual, transcendental reality, which forms the basis of the Advaita tradition.

sitting and gaining this particular knowledge. But for the purpose of this thesis, this particular disagreement does not matter.

[72] Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary*.

[73] Deutsch and Dalvi, *The Essential Vedānta*, 2.

[74] Olivelle, 'Chāndogya Upanisad', 6.2.1.

3.2 Main Tenets of the Advaita Vedānta System

3.2.1 Brahman

A standard dictionary of Sanskrit explains the meaning of Brahman as "the one universal Soul or one divine essence and source from which all created things emanate or with which they are identified and to which they return, the Self-existent, the Absolute, the Eternal…"[75] The word Brahman comes from the root, *bṛh*, which means to grow or to expand.

The Upaniṣads identify Brahman as the unifying reality in the apparent multiplicity of things. It underlies all objects and experiences. Brahman is limitless. Since the limitless cannot be two, there can be no other than Brahman. Thus, Brahman is non-dual, that is a "…state of being where all subject/object distinction is obliterated."[76]

Brahman is designated as *Being (Sat), Consciousness (Cit), and Bliss (Ānanda).* Brahman alone *is*. As Eliot Deutsch writes, it "…points to the ontological principle of unity, to the oneness not constituted of parts, to the existential substratum of all subjects and objects."[77] Brahman is being itself, which cannot be compared with the being of other entities. Let me use the concept of being in Martin Heidegger to explain this briefly. Heidegger's main concern in *Being and Time*, was to bring the question of being into discussion.[78] Being is "…that which determines entities as entities…"[79] Thus, Being is what makes a being *be*, but being itself is not an entity. Brahman is being. It grounds the

[75] Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English dictionary*.
[76] Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 225.
[77] Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta*, 10.
[78] Heidegger, *Being and Time*.
[79] Ibid., 25.

existence of entities. The Upaniṣads on several occasions proclaim similar statements to "Brahman is this whole world."[80] This is not to establish any identity relation between the apparent reality and the ultimate reality—Brahman. Rather, it is to emphasize that the apparent reality is dependent on Brahman, but not vice-versa—Brahman is not dependent on anything.

Brahman is also consciousness. This consciousness, which Miri Albahari calls "universal consciousness"[81] grounds the individual conscious experience. It is not an attribute of the universe, but what grounds it. Thus it is also beyond space-time. However, consciousness is not a property of Brahman, but its essential nature. Otherwise, this would amount to bringing internal divisions in Brahman—that of substance and its properties. Rather, Brahman is beyond any duality, or subject/object divisions. It is also without any properties. Therefore, Brahman is existence, which is consciousness. In other words, "existence is consciousness, and consciousness is bliss."[82] However, this is not phenomenal consciousness. By claiming that Brahman is consciousness, is to say first that the two terms 'Brahman' and 'consciousness' can be used interchangeably. Second, the consciousness is not of any object. It is not the consciousness of drinking a lemonade, or seeing a red apple. But, it is objectless, beyond space-time, and non-dual.

Brahman, being limitless and non-dual, cannot be identified with anything. This means that there can be no positive description of Brahman, since any such description would be limiting what is limitless. The Upaniṣadic sage Yājñavalkya

[80] See for example, Olivelle, 'Chāndogya Upanisad', 3.14.1.
[81] Albahari, 'Beyond Cosmopsychism and the Great I Am'.
[82] Quoted from Indich, *Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta*, 4.

introduces *neti-neti* or not this-not this to define Brahman.[83] Thus Brahman can only be defined *via negativa*—by explaining what it is not. Brahman is not fire, it is not brown, nor is it the solar system. If you say that Brahman is brown, then the question would arise, is it not pink? Similarly, if you say that Brahman is the solar system, then you would limit its scope by setting a boundary condition—that of the solar system. Brahman is neither brown, nor pink. Neither is it the solar system, nor a thing. It is thus not captured by any thought, since by its nature thought is limiting. A definition can be made only by defining the boundaries to point out something from other things. Brahman is not a thing. It grounds the existence of entities but it itself is not an entity. Brahman can then be viewed as *nothingness.*[84]

At this point, one may say that already some characterization of Brahman had been made, when it is declared that Brahman is consciousness. Is it not a positive characterization?

I do not think so. By its very nature, we characterize something by imposing limits on it and separating it from other things by creating boundaries. Something is green when some other thing is *not* green. But, what if everything were to be green? Brahman is limitless and non-dual. There is nothing outside Brahman. Therefore, there *cannot* be any characterization of it in the manner in which we characterize other objects. Further, Brahman and consciousness can also be taken to as co-referential.

[83] Olivelle, 'Brhadāranyak Upanisad', 2.3.6.
[84] This is not the standard view. From my standpoint, Śaṅkara and Buddha say similar things. While Śaṅkara focuses on the infinite, Buddha likes the zero. But, they stand close together, treading the circle, just in opposite directions. The zero is the infinite.

3.2.2 Ātman

Ātman is translated as "self". The Upaniṣadic seers engaged with the enquiry of self-knowledge. Several passages indicate towards an innermost self, which is different from the body, clothes, and kin—objects we generally assign as parts of the self. This innermost self is claimed to be the *real* self. A famous passage in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad illustrates this. Prajāpati becomes aware, and declares,

> The self (ātman) that is free from evils, free from old age and death, free from sorrow, free from hunger and thirst; the self whose desires and intentions are real—that is the self that you should try to discover, that is the self that you should seek to perceive. When someone discovers that self and perceives it, he obtains all the world and all his desires are fulfilled.[85]

Indra and Virocana, representing the deities and the demons respectively, go to Prajāpati to seek the knowledge of this self. After living as celibate students for thirty-two years, Prajāpati asks them to look at themselves in a pan of water and tell what they see. They reply that they see their entire bodies. He then asks them to adorn themselves with beautiful clothes, look into the water and tell what they see. They reply that they see their bodies beautifully adorned. Prajāpati declares, "That is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is Brahman."[86] Contented, both Indra and Virocana leave Prajāpati. Virocana announces that the body is the self that everyone should care for. But Indra returns to Prajāpati, after having doubts over accepting the body as the self, as the body can get handicapped, and that at death, the self would die too.

[85] Olivelle, 'Chāndogya Upanisad', 8.7.1.
[86] Ibid., 8.8.3.

After another thirty-two years, Prajāpati tells him that the self in the dreams is the real self. But Indra finds this dissatisfying, as the self in the dreams experiences unpleasant things. After spending another thirty-two years, Prajāpati says, "When one is fast asleep, totally collected and serene, and sees no dreams—that is the self; that is the immortal; that is the one free from fear; that is Brahman"[87] However, Indra is again not contented with this, since if the self does not perceive itself in deep sleep, then it has become annihilated.

Finally, after another five years Prajāpati reveals the truth about the self to Indra. The real is self is *pure awareness* which enables the awareness of an object. This inner self is objectless awareness, hence *pure.* This pure awareness is undifferentiated consciousness, which has itself as its object.

Perhaps the most remarkable claim of Vedānta is the relation that the individual self is Brahman. In the passage above, Prajāpati declares that the Ātman is Brahman. In fact, the Upaniṣads use the two words: ātman and Brahman, interchangeably. Thus, the core self of you and I, is "…not different from ātman or consciousness. This pure consciousness, the being that is the ground of all existence, also underlies empirical consciousness."[88]

3.3 The Universe as the Manifestation of Brahman

The Chāndogya Upaniṣad has a famous story. Uddālaka Āruni finds his son, Śvetaketu, to be arrogant, after he returns from his *guru*. Āruni asks him if knows the teaching by which one "…thinks of what has not been thought of before,

[87] Ibid., 8.11.1.
[88] Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 36.

and perceives what has not been perceived before?"[89] Śvetaketu replies that he does not know the teaching. Āruni then explains that by knowing the lump of clay one could know everything that is made of clay. While the reality remains of clay, the transformations of the clay are "verbal handles"—or just names. Similarly, by knowing something made of clay, one could know all the things made of clay. Āruni wants to show that the "…self of Śvetaketu is not different from the being or the essence, the ground of entire existence."[90]

Later on, Āruni asks Śvetaketu to bring a banyan fruit and cut its seeds. Śvetaketu does so, and finds nothing in the seeds. Āruni explains that the finest essence of the seeds, which Śvetaketu could not see, is the basis for the banyan tree to grow and stand. Āruni says, "The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (ātman). And that's how you are, Śvetaketu." Āruni gives several more similar examples to tell Śvetaketu, *"Tat tvam asi*." Or, "You are that." This is known as one of the *mahāvākyas* or great sayings in the Upaniṣads.

Āruni's repeated declaration that Śvetaketu is identical with the ultimate reality is one of the most remarkable feature of the entire Upaniṣads. This is the claim that Ātman = Brahman. The same message is also conveyed in other mahāvakyas, such as, *aham Brahmāsmi*—I am Brahman[91]*; ayam atmā brahmā*—this ātman is Brahman.[92]

How are we to interpret this relationship between Brahman and everything else? In what sense is Śvetaketu, or for that matter, you and I, identical with the

[89] Olivelle, 'Chāndogya Upanisad', 6.1.3.
[90] Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy*, 36.
[91] Olivelle, 'Brhadāranyak Upanisad', 1.4.10.
[92] Ibid., 2.5.19.

ultimate reality, Brahman? On the face of it, this seems to be a literal numerical identity. But can we make sense of this? While this identical relation has supposedly been intuitively grasped by the philosophers in the East, and they have ignored the various implications arising from it; in the West this seems to be a most problematic thesis.

The problem arises because identity is generally taken to be a transitive relation. Consider the following case:

If,

1. András = Brahman
2. Béla = Brahman

Then,

3. András = Béla

In what sense are András and Béla identical? On the contrary, András and Béla seem to be completely different persons. Both are always located in different spatio-temporal locations. Both have always different experiences. Both are made up differently.

This identity relation becomes even more absurd if we consider the following:

If,

1. Béla = Brahman
2. Rock = Brahman

Thus,

3. Béla = Rock

The proponents of Vedānta, *Vedantins*, should not have any reason to argue against the above identity relation, since in the Upaniṣads it is mentioned several times that the whole world is Brahman.[93]

Certainly, I am not identical to a rock. I am also not identical with András. To get out of this conundrum, I propose a different interpretation of the above. Instead of an identity relation, a *manifestation relation* could be used in understanding Āruni's declaration, and this dissolves a lot many issues with the former.

With all due respect to the Upaniṣadic seer, Uddālaka Āruni, instead of saying "You are that" to Śvetaketu, that is, the Ātman is Brahman, it would have been a less problematic assertion to say that Śvetaketu is a *manifestation* of Brahman.

Thus, instead of claiming Śvetaketu = Brahman, I suggest the following:

Brahman → Śvetaketu

Similarly,

Brahman → András

Brahman → Béla

Brahman → Rocks

In other words, Brahman manifests as Śvetaketu, as András, as Béla, and as rocks. The problem persisting with the numerical identity relation goes away as the manifestation relation is *not* transitive. Now, while the same fundamental reality that is Brahman is manifesting into different things, the manifestations

[93] Olivelle, 'Chāndogya Upanisad', 3.14.1.

themselves are not quite the same things. Consider the clay example in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, which I mentioned earlier. Different objects, such as, a cup, a spoon, a toy, can be made from the same lump of clay. The clay manifests itself as a cup, as a spoon and as a toy. Now, are these manifestations the same? In the fundamental sense they indeed are the same, since they all are manifestations of the one thing—clay. Yet, in another sense, these manifestations, no matter manifested by the same stuff, remain different. This also explains the multiplicity and the difference of the things. Brahman *manifests* itself into a variety of entities, and into different things.

How does this manifestation relation help with the aims of this thesis? Recall the combination and the decombination problems faced by panpsychism and cosmopsychism respectively. The conception of reality as the manifestation of Brahman avoids both of these problems.

Take the universe. One common way to look at it is through the part-whole relation. There are several parts of the universe, viz. humans, animals, planets, stars, tables, etc. You could divide the parts further into smaller units, say molecules, and ultimately into the physical ultimates—quarks. These small parts come together to constitute a whole—the universe. In this manner, the parts are fundamental to their whole. This line of thinking is behind constitutive panpsychism—the micro-subjects come together to form a macro-subject. On the other hand, a few people take the opposite approach. They consider the whole to be prior to its parts. The universe (or the cosmos) is prior to the various parts. Cosmopsychism, as discussed in the previous chapter, is motivated by this view.

Now, the part-whole relation presents a mereological worry which seems to be without any convincing solution. Are the parts fundamental, or is it the whole? If the parts are fundamental, then why do they form a unified, continuous whole? And so on.

Instead of the part-whole relation, I suggest thinking about the issue through my proposal of a manifestation relation. The parts are not *parts* but manifestations of the same, unified entity. For example, the saucer manifests itself into the green-ness of its surface, and into its circular shape. The green-ness and the circularity are not its parts which make up the saucer. However, they are its *manifestations*. The saucer is manifesting as green, and as circular.

The micro-subjects then, are just manifestations of Brahman. Together, they do not constitute Brahman. But they are Brahman as quarks, Brahman as electrons and so on. In this manner, the combination problem is rendered harmless.

Further, the saucer is not the Whole, but an abstraction of it. The Whole would be the entire universe. Thus, the saucer is but a manifestation of the universe. This universe is further the manifestation of Brahman—the limitless, ground of the existence of entities, which itself is not an entity. Brahman, then, manifests itself as saucers, mountains, planets, moons, oceans, animals, plants, you, and me. In like manner, the decombination problem can be neutralized. Brahman does not decombine into any parts. Rather, it manifests.

At this point reader might think that this manifestation relation is nothing but the grounding relation, which I explained in the first chapter. I argue that the manifestation relation is a form of grounding relation *but* it is a non-mereological

grounding relation, different from the standard mereological grounding relations. But, one might raise a worry that I have not defined what manifestation is. This is similar to worry of definition which I discussed in the case of grounding in the first chapter. As is the case with grounding, manifestation could be taken as a *primitive* notion, for which I do not require to give the sufficient and the necessary conditions. I can appeal to our basic understanding of what manifestation is.

As a corollary of this manifestation relation, Advaita Vedānta gets interpreted as a priority monist thesis. But, while in Schaffer's case, as discussed in the last chapter, the cosmos is fundamental, in Vedānta, Brahman is the fundamental reality prior to all things. In addition to that, Schaffer appeals to a mereological grounding relation in which the cosmos mereologically grounds everything. Rather, I appeal to a non-mereological grounding, i.e. without the part-whole relation.

Lme summarize the claims I have made:

1. Brahman is the fundamental reality, prior to all things.
2. The universe is the manifestation of Brahman. The manifestations are not identical, but manifested by Brahman.

3.4 Criticism

3.4.1 Scientific verifiability

A response which scientists and "scientistic" philosophers would make would be: what is the empirical evidence of Brahman? Since there is none, it seems to be a religious doctrine. And hence, this is either nonsense, or under the fanciful scope of the religious studies departments.

This thesis has been a criticism of physical science. Physics does not capture consciousness. It has no say whatsoever about you and I as first-person experiencing subjects. Moreover, physics itself is not complete. Not only are there two theories for the micro (quantum mechanics), and the macro (general relativity), physics is silent on the intrinsic nature of matter. It only tells how stuff behaves, not what it *is*.

Therefore, if one would want to restrict oneself within the boundaries set by physics, then one would miss out on many things. This thesis is an attempt to expand these boundaries by discussing consciousness, and fundamental reality.

Moreover, can consciousness ever be an object of scientific study? An object is an object by virtue of an experience of a subject. It is like using a flashlight: whatever objects can be seen become the objects of your flashlight. Similarly, you can only study the objects which fall under the purview of your consciousness. Now, science can study the objects which are "lighted" upon. But, can the flashlight shine its light upon itself? Can the flashlight make its own self its object? I do not think so.

For example, think about your consciousness. Try finding it. Is it the thoughts? Is it the voice at the back of your head? Try pointing your consciousness out. You will not be able to do so. Puligandla calls this the "impotency principle", which is "…a statement that something cannot, in principle, be done. Examples of the impotency-principle are the second law of thermodynamics, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, Gödel's second incompleteness theorem etc."[94]

Consciousness cannot in principle then, be studied scientifically.

[94] Puligandla, 'Consciousness, Cosmology, and Science', 150.

Brahman which is pure consciousness, is beyond space-time, and it transcends subject-object division. Moreover, it is not an entity. Science, by its very nature, is limited to *objects*, which are in space-time. Physical science deals with matter, and its behavior, not its essence.

At this point, there can be two responses. First, if you are a fanatic about physical science and its method, and are happy to limit your thought within the boundaries it sets, then you would argue that all this is nonsense. On the other hand, if you are scientifically grounded, but open minded, then you may think about the proposals I have made all along. As is the case with matters related with consciousness, you just need to investigate yourself, your own *self*.

3.4.2 Different Degrees of Consciousness

Our general understanding dictates that rocks are not conscious. We are divided on whether plants or simple organisms like amoeba have consciousness. And some of us may regard the apes, and other mammals like dolphins, and elephants to be having consciousness. Finally, we do not have any doubt about our own consciousness.[95]

However, in the Vedāntic conception, Brahman, which is the fundamental reality and consciousness, is the essence of all phenomenon. Further, as I have argued, all things and beings, from chairs to amoebae, are manifestations of Brahman.

[95] Caveat: As we have seen in the first chapter, many people do not believe that consciousness exists. For example, illusionists regard it as an illusion.

Does this mean that all entities, whether things or beings, are conscious? Moreover, do they have the same degree of consciousness?

The claim made in the Upaniṣads that the self (ātman) = Brahman, which establishes a numerical identity is problematic, as I have argued before. Now, does this entail that all the objects have the same degree of consciousness? That is, do amoebae, dolphins and humans have the same "amount" of consciousness, so to speak? Is an amoeba conscious in the same manner as you and I are?

I can argue that Brahman is manifesting in different ways in different entities. In these different manifestations, there are some entities which have more consciousness than others. We can plot the entities with their degrees of conscious experiences—stones would come at the bottom, with apes, and other mammals including humans on the top. Thus, the manifestation of Brahman can be taken to be coming in "degrees", which would explain the difference in consciousnesses.

But is it possible for Brahman to manifest into something which does not have any consciousness? This would not be the case, as Brahman cannot negate itself. It is limitless and the ground for all entities. Therefore, this approach does advocate for a sort of panpsychism—that everything has consciousness, quite literally—albeit, Brahman manifests differently in different entities. Perhaps the *light* shines brighter in some objects than in others.[96]

[96] Thanks to Philip Goff for suggesting this sentence.

3.4.3. Mystical or Religious Doctrine

Some might charge that the notion of Brahman is from a particular religion, in this case Hinduism. Further, they might protest that this is perhaps some mystical nonsense.

I protest against these allegations which are founded less on reason but more on ignorance. First of all, one does not have to cling onto the terminologies of Brahman and Ātman. If the basic idea of a non-dual, limitless, fundamental consciousness is grasped, then one may designate it with anything—One, Absolute, God, Dao, Buddha-nature, etc.

This is the fundamental tenet of what is known as *perennial philosophy*, which according to Aldous Huxley is,

> …the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and mind; the psychology that finds in the sould something similar to, or even identical with, diving Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being—the thing is immanent and universal.[97]

Since the ancient times, individuals in different regions of the world, at different times have expounded very similar philosophical ideas, which have come to be known as the perennial truths. It seems that the *manifestations* of the ultimate reality (call it Brahman, Dao, or God) have the potential to realize that they are manifestations of this ultimate reality. This may be taken as a spiritual/mystical/religious/enlightenment experience.

[97] Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, 1.

While it would be easier to ignore these experiences as hallucinatory and non-veridical, nonetheless there is no good ground to sweep away these first-person reports as nonsense from a third-person perspective.

In the end, for the purpose of philosophical argumentation, Brahman need not be taken as something religious. The concept when grasped, can be used in secular terms, or better, several other terms could be used in place of Brahman. The fundamental reality would nevertheless remain indifferent.

Concluding Remarks

In this thesis, I have shown that there is no room for consciousness in the physicalist universe. Moreover, Russellian monism as a theory to explain consciousness has its own problems. I have suggested a radical proposal: the fundamental reality, called Brahman in Advaita Vedanta, which is non-dual consciousness, is at the very centre of reality.

I offered a manifestation relation as a non-mereological grounding relation and argued that Brahman manifests itself into various objects. While these manifested objects are the manifestations of Brahman, they themselves in a sense remain different.

My proposal paves the way for further research into its implications. For example, how does the mind-body problem get answered in this framework? Also, how is intentionality to be explained?

Without doubt, there may be challenges to my proposal of a fundamental relity manifesting itself. Yet, it achieves what a physicalist does not—placing consciousness at the centre of reality.

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