

Galen Strawson, "Realistic monism: why physicalism entails panpsychism"

Essay sections

1. Physicalism
2. "It seems rather silly ..."
3. Emergence
4. "Proto-experiential"
5. Micropsychism
6. Appendix: On the Sesmet Theory of Subjectivity"

- 1) Physicalism:
 - a) Definition: "every real, concrete phenomenon is physical"
 - i) Concrete = spatio-temporally or at least temporally located
 - ii) Phenomenon = any sort of existent
 - b) Consequences:
 - i) All "mental goings on" (I'll use "mental events" here) are concrete phenomena
 - (1) Concrete bcs temporally located
 - (2) Phenomena bcs existent
 - (a) Hence GS will have to confront eliminativists, who deny existence of mental events; we are enthralled by language that falsely claims that its referents exist; rather, they do not, but are illusions, which will eventually be able to be eliminated in favor of neuroscience talk.
 - (i) Some, like the Churchlands, are concerned with propositional attitudes ("I believe that p," "I'm afraid that p" etc.), and find that since there's nothing neuroscience shows that has sentence structure like PAs, that PAs are just what will turn out to be old-fashioned mistakes like phlogiston is now regarded.
 - (ii) Others, like Dennett, deny the existence of qualia; for example, our "pain" talk is so deeply confused that it will eventually be able to be eliminated in favor of more precise neuroscience talk.
 - (b) By contrast, reductionists don't think mental language is false, that is, they don't think it points to non-existent things; they think that we will be able to duplicate mental talk with more precise neuroscience talk, that is, we will "reduce" mental talk to neuroscience talk without losing any of the real phenomena that mental talk points to.
 - ii) Thus all mental events are physical
 - iii) You can't be a real physicalist if you deny existence of "most certain" phenomenon, "experience," (long list of synonyms)
 - c) Contrast with "physicSalism" – or scientific naturalism, which goes by the name of "physicalism" in most philosophy

- i) Physicalism suffers from a mistake: the idea that we know enough about the physical to know that experience cannot be physical.
 - ii) Thus, ironically, those who deny existence of experience, thinking they are monistic materialists, are actually dualists, bcs dualism claims to know that the physical can have nothing to do with that other realm, the mental.
 - iii) What GS says is that there is an excess to neurons – which are the basis of our experience – that can't be captured by physics, bcs of the basic characteristics of physics as a science, to which we will turn in section 2.
 - d) But before we get to what physics can and cannot do, GS drops his bombshell: “real physicalism doesn't even rule out *panpsychism* ... the view that the existence of every real concrete thing involves experiential being even if it also involves non-experiential being.” (As we will see, it's more than not ruling it out: physicalism *entails* panpsychism.)
- 2) “It seems rather silly ...”
- a) What does physics tell us about the world?
 - i) Per Russell, is limited to mathematical treatment of “abstract features of space-time structure.”
 - ii) Eddington thinks we know nothing about the “nature” of objects – as opposed to the structure:
 - (1) All we know are the readings on our instruments, so we can, if we wish, refer to an experiential background for those things of which we can access instrumental readings of their structure.
 - (2) Now we do have access to the background of the pointer readings for our brain, and there we find thought, consciousness, experience, etc.
 - (3) Thus, because physics is limited to structure, and because we are ignorant of the background of pointer readings, and because we have experience, if we accept an experiential background, we avoid the “silliness” of accepting that non-experiential matter can give rise, when properly arranged, to experience. (This is the thesis of *emergence*, which will occupy a lot of the paper.)
 - b) The conflict of NE and RP
 - i) NE = non-experiential nature of physical stuff
 - ii) RP = experience is a real concrete phenomenon, and hence physical
 - iii) This conflict can be handled by emergence, to which we now turn.
- 3) Emergence
- a) GS thinks that emergence as something holding together NE and RP – that is, that properly arranged NE matter can give rise to E – is incoherent
 - b) Physics examples:
 - i) Water is liquid but H₂O molecules are not. Liquidity is thus an emergent property
 - ii) Bénard convection cells are also emergent.
 - c) GS replies, but are these good analogies to E emergence from NE?
 - i) No: these examples are homogeneous: it's all about space-time-shape-size ...
 - ii) So these are *wholly dependent* on underlying phenomena lacking the emergent property
 - (1) GS's formula: for Y's emergence from X must be bcs of the way X is
 - (2) But we have no sense in which E is wholly dependent upon NE bcs this is “the most fundamental divide in nature” (46)
 - (3) That is, there's nothing in NE (by definition) by which E can emerge
 - (4) Whereas the emergence of liquidity from H₂O molecules has everything to do with the properties of H₂O molecules
 - d) Because of this NE vs E divide, NE to E emergence is “brute”
 - i) It violates the homogeneity that we see in physics emergence of liquidity and so on
 - ii) It's actually a miracle, even a contradiction in terms

- iii) It came about due to the contradiction in the commitments to both NE and RP
 - e) So, if you commit to NE
 - i) You need non-evidence-based commitment to non-experiential nature of physical stuff
 - ii) And belief in miraculous brute emergence of E from NE
- 4) "Proto-experiential"
 - a) You can't escape from the charge of miracle-believing brute emerge by claiming there is "proto-experiential" aspects to fundamental reality
 - i) Either it's inherently experiential, so that emergence is no longer brute, but more like the admitted kinds of emergence of liquidity from H₂O molecules, since there is a homogeneity there of physical properties at fundamental and emergent levels whereby the physical properties of H₂O wholly explain, by themselves, liquidity
 - ii) Or it's not really experiential and we're back to brute emergence
 - b) "neutral monism" doesn't help either
- 5) Micropsychism
 - a) RP must give up NE and at least accept micropsychism
 - b) This isn't yet panpsychism, but that might be true; but why not go all the way
 - c) RP entails panpsychism qua "panexperientialism"
 - d) Problems:
 - i) Many subjects of experience
 - ii) The composition problem: are tables, qua tables, subjects of experience
 - iii) What about mental causation?
 - e) Back to emergence: if you are panpsychist, then the analogy of emergence of our cness from micropsychic elements with that of liquidity from H₂O holds, because of homogeneity
 - f) We need to start thinking about process philosophy, even if it conflicts with subject-predicate structure of our experience
- 6) Appendix: On the Sesmet Theory of Subjectivity
 - a) Three types of "subjects of experience"
 - i) Thick: humans and some other animals, considered as wholes
 - ii) Traditional: subject is a persisting inner presence
 - iii) Thin: a subject of experience implies experience having itself
 - b) Sesmet: "subject of experience that is a single mental thing"
 - i) Panpsychists say "these are the only things that exist"
 - ii) They are "portions of energy-stuff" (thus = what physics says about matter)
 - iii) All ultimates are sesmets, but not all pluralities of sesmets are sesmets (this is the composition problem - tables are made of sesmets, but may not be sesmets qua tables)