Abstracts and Keywords

Abstract
A core philosophical project is the attempt to uncover the fundamental nature of reality, the limited set of facts upon which all other facts depend. Perhaps the most popular theory of fundamental reality in contemporary analytic philosophy is physicalism, the view that the world is fundamentally physical in nature. The first half of this book argues that physicalist views cannot account for the evident reality of conscious experience, and hence that physicalism cannot be true. However, I also try to show that familiar arguments to this conclusion — Frank Jackson’s form of the knowledge argument and David Chalmers’ two-dimensional conceivability argument — are not wholly adequate.

The second half of the book explores and defends a radical alternative to physicalism known as ‘Russellian monism.’ Russellian monists believe that (i) physics tells us nothing about the concrete, categorical nature of material entities, and (ii) it is this ‘hidden’ nature of matter that explains human and animal consciousness. Throughout the second half of the book various forms of Russellian monism are surveyed, and the key challenges facing it are discussed. Ultimately I defend a cosmopsychist form of Russellian monism, according to which all facts are grounded in facts about the conscious universe.

Keywords: Consciousness, physicalism, Russellian monism, panpsychism, combination problem, grounding, fundamentality, knowledge argument, zombies, mind-body problem

Chapter 1 – The Reality of Consciousness
In this chapter I present my ‘big picture’ approach to the issues of this book. I argue that the reality of consciousness is a datum in its own right, a starting point for metaphysical enquiry that sits alongside the data of observation and experiments. I defend this perspective against neurofundamentalism (my word for the view that the only way to make progress on explaining consciousness is to do more neuroscience) and methodological naturalism (the view that we should look to — and only to — the third-person scientific method to tell us what reality is like). This partly involves attributing the success of physical science to the fact that Galileo limited its domain of enquiry, by supposing that sensory qualities are not located in the physical world. I then introduce the two views that I focus on in the book: physicalism and Russellian monism. I explain briefly how I understand these views, and the main claims I will make about them.

Keywords: Methodological naturalism, phenomenal consciousness, consciousness, methodology, metametaphysics, Galileo, Russellian monism, physicalism, the mind-body problem

Chapter 2 – What is Physicalism?
In this chapter I define physicalism, the view I will spend the first half of the book arguing against. All are agreed that physicalism is the view that fundamental reality is entirely physical. But this definition requires clarification in two respects: (A) what is it for something to be physical?, and (B) what is it for something to be fundamental? My answer to (A) is that physical facts concern entities at low levels of complexity, and do not involve mentality or value-laden causation. I defend an answer to (B) in terms of a specific form of the grounding relation — constitutive grounding — which is by definition such that grounded facts are nothing over and above their grounds.
Keywords: Physicalism, Hempel’s dilemma, grounding, emergentism, materialism, essence, analysis, fundamentality, truthmaking

Chapter 3 – The Knowledge Argument
In the first half of the book I argue that physicalism cannot account for consciousness, and hence must be false. One of the most well-known arguments that tries to show this is Frank Jackson’s form of the knowledge argument. In this chapter I argue that the knowledge argument successfully demonstrates an epistemic gap between the physical facts and the facts about conscious experiences, but does not (in and of itself) have the resources to show that this implies a metaphysical gap of the kind that is inconsistent with physicalism.

Keywords: Knowledge argument, consciousness, physicalism, phenomenal concept strategy, qualia, ability hypothesis

Chapter 4 – The Conceivability Argument
In this chapter I discuss the conceivability argument against physicalism. I argue against David Chalmers’ ‘two-dimensional’ version of the conceivability argument, on the grounds that it relies on highly contentious semantic assumptions that Chalmers has not adequately defended. I offer an alternative conceivability argument, rooted in an alternative view of the relationship between conceivability and possibility. According to my Transparency Conceivability Principle, conceivability entails possibility when your conception involves only transparent concepts, where a concept is transparent just in case it reveals the essence of its referent. The crucial premise of my conceivability argument is Phenomenal Transparency: the thesis that phenomenal concepts are transparent. The defence of Phenomenal Transparency itself is postponed until the next chapter.

Keywords: Conceivability argument, two-dimensional semantics, zombies, possible worlds, physicalism, phenomenal concept strategy

Chapter 5 – Revelation and the Transparency Argument
This chapter complete my argument against physicalism. I defend the thesis of Revelation, roughly the thesis that we stand in a special epistemic relationship to our conscious states such that (i) their nature is introspectively revealed to us, and (ii) we know with something close to certainty that they are instantiated. I argue for Revelation on the grounds that it is the best explanation of Super-Justification, roughly the thesis that truths about our conscious experience can be known with something close to certainty. Revelation implies that we grasp the essences of our conscious states, and hence secures the crucial premise of the ‘transparency conceivability argument’ outlined in the last chapter. However, it also suggests a more straightforward argument against physicalism: the transparency argument. Assuming Revelation, if our conscious states had a physical nature, then that physical nature would be introspectively apparent to us; given that the supposed physical nature of our conscious states is not introspectively apparent to us, it can’t in fact be the case that our conscious states have a physical nature.

Keywords: Revelation, acquaintance, physicalism, phenomenal concept strategy

Chapter 6 – The Elegant Solution
In this chapter I introduce and precisely define the view I will explore and defend in the second half of the book: Russellian monism. I explore various categories of the view – panpsychist, panprotopsychist, constitutive, emergentist, panqualityist – ultimately distinguishing seven kinds of
Russellian monism. The chapter begins with an argument against causal structuralism (the view that the complete essence of a property is given by its causal profile), which leads into the motivation for Russellian monism. My superficial target of the first half of the book was pure physicalism: physicalism in conjunction with the view that fundamental reality can in principle be captured in the vocabulary of the physical sciences. In this chapter I show how someone can be a physicalist without being a pure physicalist, and how the arguments of the first half of the book apply to all forms of physicalism.

Keywords: Russellian monism, panqualityism, panpsychism, panprotopsychism, causal structuralism, dispositional essentialism, physicalism, causal closure

Chapter 7 – Panpsychism versus Panprotopsychism, and the Subject-Summing Problem

I argue in this chapter that panpsychist forms of Russellian monism are to be preferred over panprotopsychist forms, as panpsychism is the most simple and elegant theory of reality consistent with both empirical data and the reality of consciousness. Panprotopsychism threatens to lead us to noumenalism: the view that human beings, by their very nature, are unable to understand the concrete, categorical nature of matter. However, panpsychism faces a profound challenge: the subject-summing problem: the difficult making sense of how micro-level conscious subjects combine to produce macro-level conscious subjects. I consider a number of responses on behalf of the panpsychist, ultimately arguing that the panpsychist can plausibly attribute our lack of understanding of subject-summing to our lack of understanding of the concrete categorical nature of spatial relations. This introduces an element of noumenalism into panpsychism, but the view is still to be preferred over panprotopsychist alternatives. I finish by considering and responding to an argument against the coherence of subject-summing due to Sam Coleman.

Keywords: Panpsychism, panprotopsychism, the combination problem, the subject-summing problem, Kantian humility, Ramseyen humility

Chapter 8 – Top-Down Combination Problems

In this chapter I discuss three forms of the combination problem for Russellian monism: the palette problem, the structural mismatch problem, and the subject irreducibility problem. I group these together as ‘top-down combination problems’, meaning that they start from reflection on the nature of ordinary human consciousness/conscious subject. Top-down combination problems provide challenges both to panpsychist and to panprotopsychist forms of Russellian monism. I suggest responses to the first and second problems. The third is in my view the most profound challenge for the Russellian monist, and I postpone its resolution to the next chapter.

Keywords: Combination problem, palette problem, structural mismatch problem, grain problem, panpsychism, panprotopsychism, Russellian monism

Chapter 9 – A Conscious Universe

In this chapter I explore and defend a form of cosmopsychism: the combination of panpsychism and priority monism (the view that there is only one fundamental individual). The crucial advantage of cosmopsychism is that it offers a solution to the subject irreducibility problem, discussed at the end of the last chapter. I develop the view in response to the three specific problems that have been raised against it. I then examine an empirical argument for the disjunction of smallism (the view that all facts are grounded in the micro-level facts) and priority monism. If this argument is sound (I am
agnostic about one of the premises), then it leads cosmopsychism, as the only form of constitutive Russellian monism that can solve the subject irreducibility problem. Finally I respond to ‘the incredulous stare’: the sense that cosmopsychism is just too crazy to be believed. I suggest that this reaction is due to cultural associations, and that when looked at plainly, the motivations that lead to cosmopsychism are continuous with key motivations for physicalism.

Keywords: Cosmopsychism, Russellian monism, panpsychism, revelation, causal closure,

Chapter 10 – Analytic Phenomenology: A Metaphysical Manifesto
In this chapter I outline a consciousness-based approach to metaphysics, which I call ‘Analytic Phenomenology’. In chapter 5 I argued that introspection reveals the essential nature of our conscious states. Analytic phenomenology builds on this, taking our introspective grasp of the nature of consciousness as a crucial source of data for metaphysical enquiry. I discuss this methodology in relation to contemporary debates on composition, and also outline a phenomenological argument for presentism, to show how Analytic Phenomenology might be applied outside of the mind-body problem. I argue that the datum of consciousness is hugely neglected in contemporary philosophy, and that proper appreciation of it has the potential to revolutionise analytic metaphysics.

Keywords: Metametaphysics, methodology, analytic metaphysics, metaphysics of composition, presentism, perdurantism, endurantism, four-dimensionalism, metaphysics of time, David Lewis.