**Psychological Ether Theory and the Problem of Consciousness**

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## 1. Introduction

It is an honor and privilege to contribute to this edited collection in tribute to Paul Draper, whom I regard as one of the most original and innovative philosophers of our time. His work has profoundly influenced me over many years.

In this chapter I focus on his novel theory of consciousness, which he terms "psychological ether theory," or "etherism" (Draper, forthcoming, REF). While he does not argue that this theory is definitively true, he maintains that it is more plausible than existing alternatives when evaluated in light of the relevant available data. Some may dismiss this theory given its radical departure from existing views, but it presents a unique and thought-provoking approach that warrants serious consideration. Fresh perspectives like this should be welcomed when tackling enduring and intractable philosophical challenges like the problem of consciousness.

Draper argues that psychological ether theory is relevant not only to issues in the philosophy of mind but also to problems in the philosophy of religion, because it leads to the view he calls "panpsychotheism," which offers a new alternative to traditional theism. In the present chapter, however, I limit my focus to psychological ether theory presented as a response to the problem of consciousness in the philosophy of mind. I assess the merits and shortcomings of the theory by situating it within the conceptual evolution of a diverse set of theories of consciousness—such as materialism, dualism, panpsychism, and cosmopsychism—a progression that underscores the philosophical challenges faced when formulating a coherent answer to this perennial problem. I argue that while psychological ether theory successfully avoids a specific problem faced by its immediate predecessor, cosmopsychism, it introduces a new, structurally similar problem. Moreover, it revives a problem that troubled its earlier predecessor, interactionist dualism. Furthermore, it presents unique difficulties not encountered by any of its predecessors I conclude that, given these difficulties, it remains unclear whether psychological ether theory is more compelling than its alternatives.

This chapter is organized as follows. In Section 2 I provide an overview of the development of the debate over the problem of consciousness in the philosophy of mind, focusing on various forms of materialism and dualism. I argue that each of these views fails to satisfy at least one of three key criteria for a successful theory of consciousness. In Section 3 I introduce panpsychism with a particular focus on Russellian constitutive panpsychism, situating it within the developmental narrative. I explain how it succeeds in meeting all three criteria. In Section 4 I argue, however, that panpsychism faces a significant challenge: the combination problem. To address this challenge, I introduce an alternative view, cosmopsychism, and demonstrate how it effectively avoids the combination problem. However, I also reveal that cosmopsychism gives rise to its own difficulty: the subject de-combination problem.

In Section 5 I outline Draper's psychological ether theory and in Section 6 I explain how this theory, as a successor to cosmopsychism, resolves the subject de-combination problem. In

Section 7, however, I critique psychological ether theory by arguing that it reintroduces an old challenge faced by interactionist dualism. I contend that, in this respect, psychological ether theory is less compelling than cosmopsychism, which does not encounter the same challenge. In Section 8, I further compare psychological ether theory and cosmopsychism, arguing that it remains unclear whether the former is overall more compelling than the latter. Finally, in Section 9, I compare psychological ether theory with interactionist dualism, because they both face the interaction problem. I argue that it is not evident that psychological ether theory holds a significant advantage over dualism either. Section 9 concludes.

## 2. The Conceptual Evolution of Distinct Theories of Consciousness

When we listen to calming music, savor smoky sausage, or behold colorful tulips filling a vast field, we experience distinct subjective sensations that capture the 'what it is like' quality of these moments. These subjective experiences are familiar aspects of daily life, arising almost every moment when we are awake. Yet they seem to be anomalous when compared with the ordinary physical objects and properties that surround us. How can phenomenal experiences, which seem fundamentally distinct from physical entities, be realized in the brain, a bodily organ composed entirely of physical parts? This is the thrust of the problem of consciousness.

The history of the debate over the problem of consciousness represents philosophers' enduring attempts to grapple with this intractable challenge as they endeavor to find a place for consciousness in nature. Let us then briefly review scholars' efforts to develop a compelling theory of consciousness by adopting David Chalmers's taxonomy and organizing each view to create a progressive narrative that reflects the evolution of (arguably) increasingly sophisticated theories (Chalmers 2002).[1]

Let us start our progressive narrative with materialism. Considering the abundance and familiarity of physical objects and properties around us and the fact that the brain—the basis of phenomenal experiences—is itself entirely physical, it seems reasonable, and ontologically parsimonious, to hypothesize that consciousness is also ultimately physical. The theory which Chalmers calls type-A materialism follows this reasoning, and holds that there is an a priori entailment from the set of all physical truths to any phenomenal truth, because, ultimately, nonphysical, phenomenal consciousness does not exist in an ontologically significant sense. One version of type-A materialism, eliminativism, says that consciousness should be eliminated from future scientific discourse, perhaps following a trajectory akin to the elimination of witchcraft or thunder gods from scientific consideration. Another version of type-A materialism, analytical functionalism, says that consciousness can be explained away in wholly functional terms.

Type-A materialism is, however, challenged by the knowledge argument introduced by Frank Jackson (1982). If Mary, a scientist in the future who has always lived in a black-and-white room, knows everything there is to know about the physical world, then type-A materialism must accept that she does not learn anything new when she comes outside and sees colorful objects for the first time in her life. It appears obvious, however, that she does learn something new, namely, what it is like to see color. This seems to imply that type-A materialism is incorrect in saying that there is an a priori entailment from the set of all physical truths to any phenomenal truth. The knowledge argument suggests that type-A materialism fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of

[1] It is important to note that the progressive narrative I present here is not strictly chronological. For example, although I discuss materialism before dualism, one could argue that dualism predates materialism.

phenomenal consciousness, which stands in stark contrast to the explanatory ease associated with physical properties.

Type-B materialism is introduced as a response to the challenge faced by type-A materialism. According to type-B materialism, Mary does learn something new upon her release from her black-and-white environment because the entailment from the set of all physical truths to phenomenal truths is a posteriori rather than a priori. Just as the necessarily true statement that water is identical to $H_2O$ can be known only a posteriori, as type-B materialism says, the necessarily true statement that pain is identical to a certain neutral state can only be known a posteriori. Type-B materialism allows us to acknowledge the limitation of Mary's physical knowledge without compromising materialism as an ontological thesis. Many find type-B materialism unsatisfactory, however, because it fails to take the uniqueness of phenomenal consciousness seriously enough. It acknowledges this uniqueness only at an epistemic level, rather than granting it any ontological significance.

Acknowledging the ontological uniqueness of phenomenal consciousness appears to leave us with no choice but to embrace dualism.[2] In our progressive narrative, we therefore frame dualism as an attempt to refine materialism by recognizing phenomenal properties as ontologically unique, non-physical entities. According to type-D dualism, the world consists of two distinct types of entities, the mental and the physical, and they interact with each other causally. This view seems intuitive and aligns well with our commonsense beliefs about the distinction between the mind and the body as well as beliefs about their interaction. Critics claim, however, that type-D dualism faces an insurmountable challenge: how can the mental and the physical, or more specifically, phenomenal properties and physical properties, which are considered ontologically distinct, interact causally with each other? Type-D dualism seems untenable because it violates the causal closure of the physical.

Type-E dualism can be construed as a revision of type-D dualism. On the one hand, this view agrees with type-D dualism by affirming the ontological distinction between the mental and the physical. On the other hand, however, it allows for only a one-way causal relationship between the mental and the physical; it regards mental events to be byproducts of physical events. Phenomenal properties, such as pain and colorful sensations, are caused by physical entities but they are themselves causally inefficacious with respect to physical entities. In this way, type-E dualists can affirm the ontological uniqueness of the mental compared with the physical without compromising the causal closure of the physical. Unfortunately, however, this view is in conflict with what appears to be intuitively obvious: a mental event, such as the phenomenal experience of feeling the heat of a very hot surface, can cause a physical event, such as withdrawing a hand from that surface.

The above is a brief and simplified overview, but it indicates that the development of these views is rooted in philosophers' struggle to formulate a theory of consciousness that satisfies the following three conditions:

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[2] Chalmers' taxonomy places type-C materialism between type-B materialism and type-D dualism. According to this view, roughly speaking, while there are reasons to believe that materialism must be true we are cognitively closed with respect to understanding exactly how the set of all physical truths could entail any phenomenal truth. I set type-C materialism aside in this paper because, unlike other views, it represents a form of skepticism or agnosticism, a view that is primarily epistemic in nature.

(i) The causal efficacy of the phenomenal: phenomenal properties are causally efficacious on the physical.
(ii) The causal closure of the physical: the physical realm is causally closed.
(iii) The ontological uniqueness of the phenomenal: phenomenal properties are ontologically distinct from physical properties.

Type-A materialism successfully meets conditions (i) and (ii). According to this theory, phenomenal properties are ultimately physical, so there is no problem in affirming the causal efficacy of the phenomenal as well as the causal closure of the physical. Yet type-A materialism fails to meet condition (iii) because it denies the ontological uniqueness of phenomenal properties. Similarly, type-B materialism successfully meets (i) and (ii) but not (iii). The only subtle difference between type-A materialism and type-B materialism is that the failure to meet (iii) of type-B materialism is less radical than the failure of type-A materialism, because, unlike type-A materialism, type-B materialism allows for a relevant epistemic, but not ontological, distinction between the mental and the physical.

Type-D dualism succeeds in meeting (i) and (iii) but fails to meet (ii). According to this theory, phenomenal properties and physical properties are ontologically distinct yet they are mutually causally efficacious. This means however that by allowing phenomenal, that is, nonphysical, properties to causally impact the physical it violates the causal closure of the physical. Type-E dualism succeeds in meeting (ii) and (iii) but it fails to meet (i). According to this theory, phenomenal properties and physical properties are ontologically distinct, and causal closure can be maintained by stipulating that phenomenal properties are mere byproducts of physical events. Because it assigns byproduct status to phenomenal properties, however, the theory entails that phenomenal properties cannot causally affect physical entities.

## 3. The Panpsychist Revolution

Let us move on to type-F monism, a novel theory that has recently garnered attention and popularity, in our conceptual development of distinct theories of consciousness. Here I focus on a specific version of type-F monism—Russellian constitutive panpsychism—which fits our narrative of theoretical development particularly well. We can construe this view as an attempt to make what appears to be the impossible possible: to establish a theory that can satisfy all of conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) simultaneously. Russellian constitutive panpsychism consists of, as the name suggests, three elements: Russellian, constitutive, and panpsychist.

The panpsychist element of this theory says that phenomenal or protophenomenal properties should be ascribed to fundamental physical entities, such as subatomic particles. We tend to assume that only specific macro physical entities, such as brains, can give rise to phenomenal properties, but, according to panpsychism, such properties are fundamental and ubiquitous, inherent to physical entities.

The constitutive element of the theory says that microphenomenal properties, that is, phenomenal properties or protophenomenal properties of fundamental microphysical entities, constitute macrophenomenal properties, that is, phenomenal properties of macrophysical entities, such as brains. The brain can give rise to phenomenal experiences because it is an appropriately structured aggregate of microphysical entities that are themselves phenomenal or protophenomenal. Macrophenomenal properties that the brain realizes are aggregates of microphenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute the brain.

Finally, the Russellian element says that microphenomenal properties not only constitute macrophenomenal properties but also represent particular quiddities of microphysical entities (rather than something that is fundamentally distinct from microphysical entities). The Russellian element implies that there is no complete physical explanation of consciousness which Mary could have acquired because the basic properties that physics describes are structural or relational whereas phenomenal properties are not entirely a matter of structure and relation. While the physical sciences excel at explaining natural phenomena, such as digestion and thunderstorms, through structure, function, and dynamics, phenomenal properties cannot be fully captured by these terms alone. The phenomena addressed by physical theories correspond to the structural, functional and dynamic aspects of reality, whereas consciousness represents its intrinsic aspects. Phenomenal properties, or protophenomenal properties, permeate nature on the fundamental level as the categorical underpinnings of basic physical dispositions.

Russellian constitutive panpsychism can be viewed as a fusion of materialism and dualism. Like materialism, it does not demand that we embrace dualism in the ontological sense of dividing reality into two types—physical and nonphysical. Like dualism, though, it acknowledges the ontological, not merely epistemic, uniqueness of phenomenal or protophenomenal properties as quiddities, which elude standard explanations offered by the physical sciences in terms of structure, function, and dynamics. Russellian constitutive panpsychism maintains a monistic perspective by integrating phenomenality into the physical.

Constitutive Russellian panpsychism seems to succeed in satisfying all of conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) simultaneously, which can appear revolutionary. Regarding (iii), it affirms that phenomenal properties are ontologically distinct from the physical insofar as they represent the intrinsic, rather than the structural and dynamic, nature of the physical. Although this distinction is ontological, it does not necessarily entail dualism in the traditional sense. Regarding (i), constitutive Russellian panpsychism accepts the causal efficacy of the phenomenal on the physical in the following way: macrophenomenal properties are causally efficacious in virtue of being grounded in microphenomenal properties, and microphenomenal properties are causally efficacious in virtue of their playing fundamental microphysical roles (Chalmers 2013, p. 261). This explanation allows constitutive Russellian panpsychists to also affirm (ii): the physical realm is causally closed because phenomenal/protophenomenal properties do not represent nonphysical properties (in the broader sense of the physical). Inasmuch as phenomenal properties represent the intrinsic nature of the physical, rather than obscure immaterial entities, we can affirm mental causation without violating the causal closure of the physical. In this way, panpsychism appears to liberate us from the persistent trilemma consisting of conditions (i), (ii), and (iii), which both materialism and dualism struggle to resolve. There are many versions of panpsychism, but, for the sake of simplicity, I use the term ‘panpsychism’ throughout the rest of this discussion to refer specifically to constitutive Russellian panpsychism.

## 4. The Combination Problem, Cosmopsychism, and the De-Combination Problem

As we have seen, panpsychism seems to provide a compelling solution to the trilemma consisting of conditions (i), (ii), and (iii). However, ironically, in solving the trilemma, panpsychism introduces its own formidable challenge: the combination problem.

The combination problem arises from the apparent discrepancy between, on the one hand, highly complex, structured aggregates of microphenomenal properties and, on the other hand, smooth, uniform macrophenomenal properties. Panpsychism says that our phenomenal experiences correspond to macrophenomenal properties, which are aggregates of

microphenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute our brains. Our introspections indicate, however, that phenomenal experiences exhibit properties that appear contrary to what panpsychism suggests: our visual, auditory or tactile experiences are smooth, uniform and continuous; they do not seem like aggregations of 'smaller' experiences. This suggests that a successful theory of consciousness has to meet not only conditions (i), (ii), and (iii), but also the following:

(iv) The non-combinatory nature of macroconsciousness: macrophenomenal properties are not aggregates of microphenomenal properties

At this point, in response to the combination problem, a view that might be called 'Russellian de-constitutive *cosmopsychism*' can be introduced as a revision of panpsychism. Henceforth, for the sake of simplicity, I call this view simply 'cosmopsychism.'

We can think of cosmopsychism as an 'upside-down' version of panpsychism, consisting of the cosmopsychist element, the Russellian element, and the de-constitutive element. The cosmopsychist element of cosmopsychism says, like the panpsychist element of panpsychism, that phenomenal or protophenomenal properties should be ascribed to fundamental physical entities. Unlike panpsychism, however, cosmopsychism considers the top level, that is, the cosmic level, rather than the bottom level, or subatomic level, to be fundamental. Here, cosmopsychism incorporates priority monism, according to which the whole is ontologically prior to its parts. According to the cosmopsychist element, phenomenal properties are ubiquitous not because subatomic entities on the bottom level are fundamentally phenomenal but because the whole cosmos on the top level is fundamentally phenomenal.

The de-constitutive element says that macrophenomenal properties, that is, phenomenal properties of macrophysical entities such as the brain, are small segments of cosmophenomenal properties, that is, phenomenal properties of the cosmos. The brain can give rise to phenomenal experiences because it is an appropriately carved segment of the cosmos that is itself phenomenal. Macrophenomenal properties that the brain realizes are segments of phenomenal properties of the cosmos. It is important to note here that microphenomenal properties do not constitute cosmophenomenal properties because cosmophenomenal properties are more fundamental than macrophenomenal properties. The cosmos gives rise to cosmophenomenal properties, with macrophenomenal properties, such as our sensations of pain, pleasure and color, representing specific segments of these broader, more fundamental properties.

The Russellian element says that cosmophenomenal properties not only represent the whole from which macrophenomenal properties obtain but also represent quiddities of the cosmos (rather than something that is fundamentally distinct from the cosmos itself). As the Russellian element of *panpsychism* says, phenomenal properties correspond to the categorical grounds of fundamental physical dispositions. In this way, cosmopsychism can remain a version of monism while acknowledging that the distinction between the phenomenal and the physical are more than epistemic. Cosmopsychism can be viewed as a fusion of materialism, dualism, panpsychism, and priority monism. Like panpsychism, cosmopsychism successfully satisfies conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) simultaneously, but unlike panpsychism it also satisfies condition (iv), avoiding the combination problem.

Cosmopsychism avoids the combination problem because, according to this view, macrophenomenal properties are not aggregates of microphenomenal properties. Instead, macrophenomenal properties are smaller segments of cosmophenomenal properties. There is no

problem in thinking that macrophenomenal properties are smooth, uniform, and continuous, because cosmophenomenal properties themselves are smooth, uniform, and continuous. This point can be illustrated in the following analogy. Imagine a medium-size painting that is, like macrophenomenal properties, perfectly smooth, uniform, and continuous. According to a view that is analogous to panpsychism, medium-size paintings are aggregates of discrete small dots. The combination problem says here that the view in question is untenable because it is impossible to obtain a perfectly smooth, uniform, and continuous medium-size painting from discrete dots. A view analogous to cosmopsychism says that the combination problem does not arise for it because it does not postulate that the medium-size painting is an aggregate of small discrete dots. Instead, it is a smaller segment of a very large painting that is perfectly smooth, uniform, and continuous. There is no problem in thinking that the medium-size painting is smooth, uniform, and continuous because the very large painting is already smooth, uniform, and continuous. It seems therefore that, while panpsychism faces the combination problem, cosmopsychism does not face an analogous problem—the de-combination problem.

The above painting analogy fails, however, to demonstrate that cosmopsychism can avoid all versions of the de-combination problem, because while paintings are a matter of quality and structure, phenomenal experiences are a matter of quality, structure, *and* subject. This point can be made clearly by distinguishing three versions of the combination problem for *panpsychism* introduced by Chalmers (2017, pp. 182–184): (a) the quality combination problem, which is concerned with how microphenomenal qualities combine to give rise to macrophenomenal qualities; (b) the structure combination problem, which is concerned with how microphenomenal structures combine to give rise to macrophenomenal structures; and (c) the subject combination problem, which is concerned with how micro subjects combine to give rise to macro subjects (Chalmers 2017, pp. 182–184).

We can parallel these three problems and apply them to cosmopsychism: (a') the quality de-combination problem, which is concerned with how macrophenomenal qualities de-combine from cosmophenomenal qualities; (b') the structure de-combination problem, which is concerned with how macrophenomenal structures de-combine from cosmophenomenal structures; and (c') the subject de-combination problem, which is concerned with how macro subjects de-combine from cosmic subjects. The painting analogy illustrates how cosmopsychism can address both the quality de-combination problem and the structure de-combination problem, but it fails to explain how cosmopsychism might resolve the subject de-combination problem, which I believe is its most significant challenge. Phenomenal subjects are not known to de-combine; there is no known instance in which a single subject is de-combined into multiple subjects, just as there is no known instance in which multiple subjects combine into a single subject.[3]

In sum: Cosmopsychism, as a revision of panpsychism, seems to be the most compelling theory in our developmental narrative because it satisfies not only all three of conditions (i), (ii), and (iii), some of which dualism and materialism fail to meet, but also satisfies condition (iv), which panpsychism fails to meet. However, cosmopsychism remains problematic because it faces its own problem, the subject de-combination problem, failing to meet the following condition:

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[3] Cosmopsychists might attempt to avoid the subject de-combination problem by denying the existence of a cosmic subject. It is difficult however to conceive how any phenomenal experiences could exist without an appropriate subject. To save space, in this paper I set aside versions of cosmopsychism that reject the existence of a cosmic subject.

(v) The non-de-combinatory nature of subjects: macro subjects are not de-combined segments of the cosmic subject.

This means that our developmental narrative cannot conclude at this point. We need a new theory capable of addressing the shortcomings of cosmopsychism.

## 5. Psychological Ether Theory

What we have seen so far is the following. Philosophers have attempted to develop a compelling theory of consciousness which can satisfy three conditions: (i) the causal efficacy of the phenomenal, (ii) the causal closure of the physical, and (iii) the ontological uniqueness of the phenomenal. Type-A materialism succeeds in satisfying conditions (i) and (ii) but not (iii); type-B materialism also succeeds in satisfying conditions (i) and (ii), and it also succeeds in accommodating the epistemic uniqueness of the mental; however, it cannot satisfy condition (iii). Type-D dualism succeeds in satisfying conditions (i) and (iii) but not (ii); type-E dualism succeeds in satisfying conditions (ii) and (iii) but not (i). Panpsychism has shifted the dynamic of the debate by finally succeeding in satisfying all three conditions, but it raises an additional condition (iv), the non-combinatory nature of macroconsciousness, which a successful theory must satisfy. Cosmopsychism, which can be considered a revision of panpsychism, succeeds in satisfying condition (iv) as well as the three other conditions; yet it raises an additional condition (v), the non-de-combinatory nature of subjects, which a successful theory must satisfy.

Draper's psychological ether theory can be construed as a new addition to the developmental narrative, offering a revision of cosmopsychism that enables it to satisfy condition (iv). To clarify Draper's theory, I will examine it in detail, highlighting both its similarities to and differences from its immediate predecessor, cosmopsychism.

Let us start with the features that cosmopsychism and psychological ether theory share. First, both assert that phenomenality is immanent throughout the universe. Second, they endorse a top-down, rather than bottom-up, structure of mental reality, where "the properties of the whole explain the properties of the parts" (Draper, forthcoming, REF). Third, both theories posit a cosmic subject, or bearer of cosmic consciousness, which Draper terms the universal mind. Finally, they agree that human perspectives correspond to distinct sets of relevant macrophenomenal experiences.

What then differentiates cosmopsychism and psychological ether theory? First, while psychological ether theory postulates a universal mind, it does not attribute that mind to a physical entity, such as the cosmos. The universal mind is more like an expansive, cosmic field of phenomenality, which is distinct from ordinary physical objects and properties. Psychological ether theory takes consciousness to be part of nature yet considers it to be distinct from the physical part of the world. This means that, contrary to cosmopsychism, which incorporates the Russellian monistic picture of the physical intertwined with the phenomenal, psychological ether theory embraces a dualistic picture of the universe consisting of the cosmic mind and the cosmos.

Second, psychological ether theory implies monopsychism, the thesis that there is only one subject, the universal mind. Cosmopsychism, on the other hand, implies polypsychism, the thesis that there are many subjects, such as individual human and animal subjects, as well as the cosmic subject. The claim that no subjects other than the cosmic subject exist is likely the most radical assertion made by psychological ether theory. To show that the monopsychist thesis is not as extraordinary as it may sound initially, Draper distinguishes the following two notions of the self:

(1) The subject-self: the self that is the subject of our consciousness
(2) The agent-self: the self that performs our actions. (Draper, forthcoming, REF)

In our ordinary understanding, this distinction is unnecessary because both notions of the self refer to the same thing. We ordinarily consider that there is only one self—myself—with respect to my consciousness and actions. I am the self that is the subject of my consciousness and the owner of my actions, just as you are the self that is the subject of your consciousness and the owner of your actions. This view is accepted by cosmopsychism and nearly all alternatives to psychological ether theory. In contrast, psychological ether theory maintains that these two notions of the self do not coincide. While the self associated with my actions and the self associated with your actions correspond to two distinct agent-selves, the self associated with my conscious experiences and the self associated with your conscious experiences are the same subject-self, that is, the universal mind.

Third, psychological ether theory and cosmopsychism differ in their views on the role that the brain plays in relation to consciousness. Cosmopsychism says that the brain gives rise to macroconsciousness by virtue of being part of the cosmos, which in turn gives rise to cosmic consciousness. In this framework, distinct subject-selves like you and me correspond to our respective brains. These brains are understood as parts of the cosmos 'carved' in an appropriately complex manner, realizing distinct macroconsciousnesses. On the other hand, psychological ether theory does not ascribe such a role to the brain because it posits that "consciousness exists quite independently of the brain" (Draper, forthcoming, REF). According to psychological ether theory, the universal mind and brains are distinct entities, but brains play a crucial role in understanding consciousness because agent-selves and first-person perspectives 'demerge' from interaction between the universal mind and human or animal nervous systems (Draper, forthcoming, REF). The brain functions as an 'instrument' for interacting with the universal mind, facilitating the demergence of agent-selves, rather than serving as the producer or source of consciousness. The agent-self is the human or animal organism that interacts with the universal mind. While it utilizes the mental states of the universal mind to make its own decisions as agents, it is not identical with the universal mind itself.

Regarding the psychological ether as "a sort of field of phenomenal consciousness," we can understand demergence as a process that generates multiple local first-person perspectives, such as my perspective and your perspective, through the excitement of various nervous systems (Draper, forthcoming, REF). Draper considers the demergence of local first-person perspectives 'weak' rather than 'strong' because the universal mind is more fundamental than these perspectives. Psychological ether theory does not entail polypsychism because, according to Draper, the existence of multiple first-person perspectives does not entail multiple minds; again, there is only one subject of phenomenal consciousness: the universal mind.

Draper offers several arguments for psychological ether theory but I do not discuss them here, because I am interested in the comparative advantage of the theory in contrast to its alternatives—such as varieties of materialism, dualism, panpsychism, and cosmopsychism—when it is placed in our developmental narrative.

## 6. Solving the De-Combination Problem

We observed in Section 4 of this chapter that, despite its explanatory advantages over its predecessors, cosmopsychism fails to satisfy the following condition:

(v) The non-de-combinatory nature of subjects: macro subjects are not de-combined segments of the cosmic subject.

This condition, again, represents the subject de-combination problem. By situating psychological ether theory in our developmental narrative, we can construe it as an attempt to revise cosmopsychism to satisfy condition (v), that is, to circumvent the subject de-combination problem.

Psychological ether theory does not face the subject de-combination problem because it does not require the de-combination of macro subjects from the cosmic subject. More fundamentally, the theory bypasses the combination problem entirely, because it does not posit any macro subjects to begin with. According to the theory, there is only one subject in the world—the cosmic subject—and individual minds are identical with the universal mind. Only first-person *perspectives* demerge from the universal mind as a result of the brain's interaction with it. Draper argues that fragmenting the universal mind in terms of individual first-person perspectives is more plausible than dividing the cosmic subject into smaller macro subjects. He defends this point by drawing on empirical evidence, such as the phenomenon of dissociative identity disorder, which suggests that a single mind can encompass multiple first-person perspectives. Draper's fragmentation view also finds parallels in theological doctrines, such as single-self theories of the Trinity, which proposes that God is a single mind that leads three distinct lives, rather than three distinct minds that are proper parts of a larger unified mind.

## 7. The Interaction Problem for Psychological Ether Theory

To recap the discussion in the previous section: Cosmopsychism successfully satisfies conditions (i) through (iv), which its alternatives—such as various forms of materialism, dualism, and panpsychism—have struggled to achieve. Cosmopsychism succeeds in satisfying these conditions by positing fundamental cosmic consciousness. Unfortunately, however, it falls short of meeting a new condition (v), which pertains to the subject de-combination problem. Draper's psychological ether theory circumvents this problem by proposing the novel thesis that only one subject—the cosmic subject—exists. Does this mean we have finally arrived at a compelling theory of consciousness that satisfies all five conditions other theories fail to meet? Unfortunately, the answer is no.

Psychological ether theory represents the latest development in our evolutionary narrative of theories of consciousness, positioned as an immediate successor to cosmopsychism. The fact that psychological ether theory builds on cosmopsychism does not however automatically guarantee that it satisfies all the conditions that cosmopsychism satisfies. In fact, while the theory satisfies condition (v), which, again, cosmopsychism fails to satisfy, it inadvertently falls short of satisfying condition (ii), the requirement of the causal closure of the physical.

Psychological ether theory regards the universal mind as the "psychological ether," which is considered a "field of phenomenal consciousness" (Draper, forthcoming, REF). This cosmic non-physical field is understood to be 'free floating' because, contrary to what cosmopsychism says, it does not have any concrete physical bearer, such as the cosmos or the brain. This requires psychological ether theory to imply a form of interactionism, assigning a special role to the brain. While the brain does not *produce* phenomenal experiences, according to Draper, the nervous systems in it "interact with this universal mind in ways that causally contribute to the biological goals of survival and reproduction" (Draper, forthcoming, REF). Evolution has enabled the brain to develop as a highly complex physical system that effectively utilizes the universal mind. A first-person perspective, such as *my* perspective, demerges through the interaction between nervous

systems in the brain and the psychological ether. In sum, psychological ether theory posits causal interaction between the physical (the brain as a physical organ) and the mental (the psychological ether as an independent field of phenomenal consciousness).

The interaction problem for psychological ether theory that I raise here should not surprise Draper because he himself remarks that "etherism might have some of the same disadvantages as dualism (namely, an interaction problem)." However, he also adds that psychological ether theory "seems less poisonous" than other versions of dualism, such as type-D dualism, because it does not have the others' disadvantages. He writes:

> In addition to being consistent with the purely material nature of human agents, no supernatural beings are required to create the universal mind: it is a purely natural entity, subject to natural laws just like any other part of nature. Further, that entity is located in space (which mitigates the interaction problem) and so is compatible with one sort of physicalism, namely, the view that all stuff is physical stuff in the sense of being located in, or coextensive with, space. Also, worries about how individual souls get paired with individual bodies do not arise if there is only a single omnipresent world soul. (Draper, forthcoming, REF)

Nineteenth-century proponents of ether theory in physics believed that the ether filled all of space and served as the medium through which electromagnetic waves propagated. Draper appears to suggest similarly that the psychological ether fills all of space but, unlike ether itself, it is inherently psychological in nature, as the term implies. Inasmuch as psychological ether theory rejects any physical bearer of the universal mind, such as the cosmos or the brain, it is difficult to understand how it can claim that the psychological ether occupies physical space.

At this point we could interpret psychological ether theory as a variant of ether theory itself, rather than as a distinct theory that is merely analogous to it, positing the ether as a psychological, rather than physical, entity. In this view, while the psychological ether is psychological and not involved in the propagation of electromagnetic fields, it still occupies physical space like the material ether. The material ether was conceived as occupying space while being weightless, odorless, and invisible, and, Draper might claim, the psychological ether can be similarly conceived as being weightless, odorless, and invisible. In this way, he might argue, psychological ether theory is no more implausible than the original ether theory. This does not however strengthen psychological ether theory, as the original ether theory was rejected because of these unfalsifiable and implausible characteristics of the ether among many other problems inherent to the theory. An appeal to a theory that is universally rejected seems to make psychological ether theory rather weak.

## 8. Psychological Ether Theory versus Cosmopsychism

Draper might insist that, even though psychological ether theory faces the interaction problem, it remains more compelling overall than cosmopsychism because it successfully satisfies condition (v), that is, it avoids the subject de-combination problem, which is a significant challenge for cosmopsychism. Let us then compare the theoretical advantages of psychological ether theory and cosmopsychism more closely. I argue that, even if psychological ether theory avoids the de-combination problem itself, it raises an analogous problem.

Again, psychological ether theory says that there is a universal mind and that the brain utilizes it to give rise to multiple agent-selves or first-person perspectives. In other words,

metaphorically speaking, the brains can 'frame' or 'mask' the universal mind in such a way that it enables the demergence of first-person perspectives. According to Draper, "etherism neither denies that there are many agents, nor that are many first-person perspectives, all of which 'demerge' from the interaction of the universal mind with human and animal nervous systems." This means that, although psychological ether theory might avoid the de-combination problem, it faces the problem of explaining how the universal mind can be framed or masked in such a way that first-person perspectives corresponding to macro agent-selves are realized—this may be called the demergence problem of first-person perspectives. It is not obvious that this problem is easier to resolve than the de-combination problem for cosmopsychism—the problem of explaining how macro subject/macrophenomenal experiences can obtain from cosmic subject/consciousness. Cosmopsychism posits that the spatiotemporal universe itself is the bearer of cosmic consciousness; hence, cosmopsychists can try to explain the process of de-combination—dividing cosmic consciousness into distinct macrosubjects/macroconsciousnesses in terms of the process of carving the cosmos into smaller physical entities, such as the brain. A similar explanation is not available, however, for proponents of psychological ether theory, because they explicitly deny the existence of a physical bearer of the psychological ether. In this sense, one could argue that the demergence problem for psychological ether theory is more intractable than the de-combination problem for cosmopsychism.

It is important to note that psychological ether theory comes with additional costs that cosmopsychism does not incur. First, it requires rejecting the commonsense view that there are billions of distinct subject-selves in the world, each corresponding to one of us. Again, according to the theory, there is only one subject-self: the cosmic subject. Second, the theory requires rejecting the widely accepted view about the self. To accept psychological ether theory, we must dismiss the common belief that the existence of distinct first-person perspectives—mine and yours—entails the existence of two separate subject-selves. Third, psychological ether theory faces challenges in explaining the coexistence of concurrent, contradictory phenomenal experiences, such as the phenomenal experience of hating everyone in the world and the phenomenal experience of loving everyone unconditionally. It is difficult to conceive how such opposing experiences could exist simultaneously within the unified, coherent structure of the universal mind. Fourth, Draper asserts that the universal mind "is a purely natural entity, subject to natural laws," and that it "is located in space" and "omnipresent." This could suggest further complications, particularly if the brain needs to utilize distant parts of the psychological ether. Because the psychological ether is bound by natural laws and cannot exceed the speed of light, this presents a significant delay in realizing appropriate phenomenal experiences from a specific first-person perspective.

In sum, whether or not psychological ether theory ultimately proves to be tenable, it is far from clear that it offers any theoretical advantages over cosmopsychism. The theory faces the interaction problem, which cosmopsychism does not face. Also, while the theory avoids the subject de-combination problem for cosmopsychism, it does so by replacing it with a comparable problem: the demergence problem of first-person perspectives. Finally, there are further significant costs associated with the theory.

## 9. Psychological Ether Theory versus Type-D Dualism

I have compared psychological ether theory with cosmopsychism because it serves as an immediate successor to cosmopsychism. However, the theory can also be seen as a variant of type-D dualism because, as I explain above, it raises, like Type-D dualism, the interaction problem. It

is, therefore, also worth examining the strengths of psychological ether theory in comparison with those of Type-D dualism.

As versions of dualism, both psychological ether theory and Type-D dualism can accommodate the causal efficacy of the phenomenal and the ontological uniqueness of the phenomenal. In other words, both views satisfy conditions (i) and (iii). As versions of interactionism, though, neither meets condition (ii), which requires the causal closure of the physical.

Earlier I explained that psychological ether theory can successfully avoid the combination problem associated with panpsychism and the de-combination problem associated with cosmopsychism, thereby satisfying conditions (iv) and (v). Type-D dualism similarly meets these conditions, because, unlike panpsychism and cosmopsychism, it does not posit micro subjects, which panpsychism hypothesizes to combine into macro subjects, or a cosmic subject, which cosmopsychism hypothesizes to de-combine into macro subjects. Thus, with respect to conditions (i) thorough (v), psychological ether theory and type-D dualism are on equal footing. Type-D dualism seems however to hold an advantage over psychological ether theory in that it does not face the demergence problem of first-person perspectives. Type-D dualism posits the independent existence of multiple subject-selves so it does not require a process of demergence to explain how individual first-person perspectives or agent-selves demerge from the universal mind.

Type-D dualism appears to offer further advantages over psychological ether theory. First, regarding the concept of subjects, type-D dualism is intuitively more plausible. Unlike psychological ether theory, it does not require postulating the existence of a universal mind or psychological ether—an unfamiliar and speculative entity. Dualists are thus spared the need to explain what a universal mind or psychological ether is, or to make sense of its connection to the macrophenomenal experiences we have in everyday life. Second, type-D dualism aligns with the commonsense assumption that there are billions of individual subject-selves corresponding to each of us. In contrast, psychological ether theory must contend with the counterintuitive claim that there is only a single subject: the universal mind. Third, type-D dualism does not require the unusual view that the subject-self and the agent-self do not always coincide. Consistent with commonsense assumptions, type-D dualism maintains that we, as macro phenomenal subjects, possess unique first-person perspectives and can be responsible for our actions. As a result, this view is not burdened with explaining such issues as the problem of contradictory concurrent phenomenal experiences for the cosmic mind.

Admittedly, type-D dualism faces the challenge of explaining how the brain can interact with phenomenal properties, which are considered nonphysical. While this is undoubtedly a difficult problem, it is unclear whether it is any more challenging than the problem that psychological ether theory must address: explaining how the brain can interact with the psychological ether in a way that enables first-person perspectives to demerge from the cosmic mind. In both cases, proponents must attribute an unusual and highly specific function to the brain, a function not shared by other organs or possibly any other physical entities.

While the above observations do not necessarily establish type-D dualism as more plausible overall than psychological ether theory, they do suggest that, in many respects, the latter incurs significant theoretical costs that dualism avoids.

**10. Conclusion**

Draper does not argue that psychological ether theory is definitively proven true. As is typical of his approach, he evaluates competing theories by carefully weighing their advantages and

shortcomings against the available evidence. Draper presents psychological ether theory as a speculative hypothesis worthy of serious consideration, arguing that the available evidence is more compatible with it than with its existing alternatives. As I have argued in this chapter, however, this conclusion is far from obvious. In particular, I have highlighted the significant theoretical costs associated with psychological ether theory, which appear to be quite high when compared with the costs associated with both its immediate predecessor, cosmopsychism, and its variant, Type-D dualism. Whether or not psychological ether theory ultimately succeeds, it seems reasonable to conclude that, at this point, it does not stand out as the most compelling account of consciousness.

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