

## *Book Review*

Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality*,  
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 304.

The book is a well-structured expedition into Russellian monism, with two main parts consisting of ten chapters (five for each part). The chapters themselves are further divided, which gives the reader a welcomed overview of thought progression and structure. In the first half, Goff develops a distinct version of physicalism and gives his critique of it. In the second half, he articulates different versions of Russellian monism and defends a particular version based on a panpsychist interpretation of Russellian monism. At the very start, he introduces the reader to his vision of philosophy and the overarching theme of the book. The reader is introduced to Goff's starting thesis about the datum of consciousness, and Goff spends some time arguing for it and sketching the historical context that shows how and why this datum was ignored. However, because the plausibility and legitimacy of Russellian monist views hinge on this datum, it is necessary to understand the contemporary context in which the claim "consciousness is a datum" calls for a defence.

In contemporary philosophy of mind, the discussion regarding the mind-body problem has been radicalized to the point where mainstream traditional physicalism is losing its proponents. We see fewer philosophers who are ready to maintain a compatibilist position that mental, phenomenal states are real and can be placed within the physicalist ontology. Instead, we see a rise in radical ideas and positions, which, one could argue, is only more beneficial for the dialectics of the problem-solving. On one hand, we have the so-called deflationists, who realized that one cannot be a realist about mental states and at the same time hold that physicalism is true—therefore, their physicalist position has been radicalised to the point where they deny the reality of mental states. Illusionists, for example, maintain that phenomenal states are illusory, that they are not in any way instantiated properties of any system, but that the appearance of phenomenality is somehow generated by our faulty introspective self-representational models. Their research focus is centred on cognitive mechanisms that give rise to these illusions of phenomenality. On the other hand, we have realists about mental states, one could call them inflationists, who maintain that the placement problem of mental states is indicative of their special nature, namely their non-physical nature. Since we cannot fathom how mental states (if real) can be placed within the physical framework, this means that the mental states must somehow be something extraphysical. In this sense, the peculiar epis-

temic situation about consciousness is an opportunity to speculate about the suitable metaphysical framework that could accommodate the reality of phenomenal consciousness. Both camps have something in common, which is that they subscribe to the conservative methodology that understands theoretical revisions as justified only when the existing theoretical resources have been exhausted. The mantra “first exhaust then propose” sums up this approach. For example, current physicalist metaphysics should first be exhausted, only then are we justified in making certain metaphysical revisions. However, the camps disagree at this point. Deflationists think that the existing naturalistic framework has not been exhausted, since we can try to dissolve the problem of consciousness by replacing it with the illusion problem. Their answer to the hard problem is thus that the hard problem is not really a problem since its main component is an illusion. They choose the existing theory and proclaim the anomaly as an illusion. Inflationists, on the other hand, are not committed to the existing naturalistic theories, and thus they see the anomaly as something real that could not in any way be an illusion. We are, after all, talking about consciousness, something that only a philosopher would dare to deny. For inflationists, consciousness is a given fact and there is no way around this; thus, since we cannot place consciousness in any physicalist ontology, we must make room in the ontology, we must modify it. Phillip Goff makes the case for this kind of modification in his recent book *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (2017).

In the first part of the book, Goff sets up pure physicalism (physical truths are entailed in logico-nomical terms) and addresses the main arguments against it, like the conceivability and knowledge argument. These arguments are usually employed by dualists and Goff recognizes that these arguments must be modified in order to threaten physicalism. However, he puts forward an argument based on revelatory powers of phenomenal properties. This means that phenomenal conscious states reveal their nature to us by virtue of us experiencing them. I know what pain is just by virtue of me being in pain. I do not know what part of my brain is activated when I am having such experiences, but I do, nonetheless, know what these experiences are. This revelatory angle is tightly connected to the previously mentioned “consciousness as a datum” thesis that Goff introduces at the beginning of the first chapter. Phenomenal states reveal to us something real, an aspect of a phenomenal subjective consciousness; moreover, this revelation produces something that is metaphysically unabridged and unrevised. As Goff writes: “My methodological starting point is that phenomenal consciousness is a hard datum that any adequate theory of reality must accommodate. Moreover, consciousness must be accommodated unrevised in the following sense” (3). His entire second part of the book and really any such metaphysical enquiry rests on similar propositions, and underlying it is a peculiar implication that “one of our ordinary pre-theoretical concepts gets the world exactly right” (3). Phenomenal experiences thus reveal something true about the world itself, at least in this sense that there is no reality/appearance distinction between our inner lives and the world itself. This is a striking claim that he is prepared to defend, even if it seems too good to be true, especially if we consider the fact that in the other camp the deflationists have the opposite implication to defend, namely, the proposition that the reality/appearance distinction is

present at the level of introspection. This is the best illustration of the current dialectic about the problem of consciousness—the disagreement occurs at the very beginning. Thus, for someone who has a deflationist inclination, Goff's starting point is moot. The same goes for inflationists; they consider any revision of the concept of consciousness to be unjustified. It seems important that the reader holds this dialectical context in mind when reading this book, the discursive stalemate is indicative of the vast chasm between the two contemporary approaches to the problem of consciousness.

Embedding the revelation argument into the overarching datum of consciousness thesis gives physicalists little room to manoeuvre and prepares the stage for the second part of the book, in which Goff explores theories based on Russellian monism. In brief, Russellian monism is the view that there is a distinction between two classes of properties, dispositional/structural ones and intrinsic ones. Sciences reveal structural properties about matter, yet they remain silent about its intrinsic nature. Considering we have at least one good idea about the intrinsic nature of matter (inner experiences of our brains) and if we think that there should be a continuity between large and small parts of the world, we can then posit that the intrinsic nature of matter is something akin to consciousness. This is the simple path to panpsychist considerations, and Goff is most sympathetic towards them.

Even if we grant that Goff has good enough reasons to reject physicalism, there are other problems ahead for the positions that he proposes in part two. One of the first reactions that panpsychists face is that of disbelief, because it just seems so unbelievable that the fundamental particles of matter are conscious in any way. The reluctance to accept this kind of reality might be mitigated by the theoretical benefits of these theories, or so Goff and other acolytes of Russellian monism claim when they defend their position against the objection of counter-intuitiveness—the same objection that they are also quite eager to throw at the physicalists who proclaim that there are no phenomenal properties.

Another, more serious and famous problem is the combination problem, or the subject-summing problem, as Goff calls it. He devotes up to three chapters to this problem, its variables, and possible solutions. This seems reasonable, as it is, after all, the central problem facing panpsychist theories. The problem is quite simple, and it entails our confusion when we are “trying to make sense of lots of ‘little’ (proto) minds forming a big mind” (165).

In developing all the viable responses to the problem, he makes a distinction between cosmo(macro)psychist and micropsychist versions of Russellian monism. The latter is a ‘smallest’ version that entails sub-atomic or other small regions of reality to be the (micro) subjects that have phenomenal properties. The former is the version about the whole cosmos having phenomenal properties. Continuing from this distinction, he makes an observation that the combination problem is a problem only for the micropsychist versions. At this point, Goff has in mind a special version of the combination problem, namely the subject irreducibility problem, which states that a conscious subject cannot be further analysed into facts that do not involve that subject.

To see how a cosmopsychist can avoid the subject irreducibility problem, we must make a distinction between analysis and subsumption. Goff

makes this distinction and argues that ‘grounding by analysis’ is different from ‘grounding by subsumption’. He introduces the notion of grounding by subsumption in Chapter 9, where he also articulates his view of cosmopsychism. The main difference is that in grounding by analysis,  $y$  entails the necessary requirements for  $x$  to be real; and in grounding by subsumption,  $y$  is thought of as whole of which  $x$  is merely an aspect. This distinction entails that a state of affair can occur in which  $y$  and  $x$  are real even if  $x$  is not grounded in  $y$  by analysis, as  $x$  can still be grounded in  $y$  by subsumption. He makes an effort in Chapter 9 to explain subsumption with four examples, but the important thing is that his argument for cosmopsychism rests on the importance of this distinction and on the theoretical fruitfulness of introducing the notion of grounding by subsumption. Goff goes on and articulates his version of Russellian monism, the constitutive cosmopsychism according to which the cosmos as a whole can be understood as a conscious entity and that we are conscious subjects by virtue of being subsumed in this greater whole. He goes on and links cosmopsychism to priority monism, according to which the cosmos is the only fundamental entity, explaining how such a view does not exclude material reality and is as such coherent with empirical sciences.

The book ends with the chapter on the possibility of analytic metaphysics or a manifesto, which is echoed in the title of the chapter. It is a suitable end to the metaphysically ambitious book. In this chapter, Goff discusses the state of cutting-edge metaphysics, he addresses some anti-metaphysical sentiments, and shows how phenomenality can be used to support metaphysical positions outside the mind-body problem. The broader picture he paints is that of analytic phenomenology: “Start with common sense, empirical data, and carefully considered intuitions concerning the nature of phenomenal consciousness, and move on by appeal to theoretical virtue” (271).

This project is built upon the “consciousness as a datum” thesis, and since science or Galilean metaphysics abolished consciousness in exchange for empirical progress, Goff concludes that there is no worry for metaphysics not progressing because the true post-Galilean metaphysics has not yet begun (273).

It might be that his book is one of the first ushering into the new era of phenomenally grounded metaphysics, but there are concerns that should be addressed. One concern comes from the idea that phenomenality should be thought of as metaphysically neutral, since there are examples that show how one phenomenal experience can support two different metaphysical scenarios. The other concern is at the very starting point of such a project and cuts at the heart of the contemporary dialectical setting of the mind-body discussion we mentioned earlier. What do we do with consciousness? Do we inflate it and start phenomenally inspired metaphysics with it, or do we deflate it and proclaim its nature to be illusory? Since these positions diverge at the starting point, maybe the best thing to do is to let them run their course and see which one bears more theoretical fruit.

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