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# AN INTRODUCTION TO PANSPIRITISM: AN ALTERNATIVE TO MATERIALISM AND PANPSYCHISM

by Steve Taylor 

**Abstract.** This article is an introduction to a philosophical approach termed “panspiritism.” The fundamental principles of this approach are summarized, with discussion of how it links to earlier (mainly Eastern) philosophical perspectives, how it differs from panpsychism and its relationship to idealism and theism. Issues such as the relationship between mind and matter, the relationship between the mind and the brain, and the emergence of mind are discussed from a “panspiritist” perspective. There is a discussion of how panspiritism relates to mystical experiences. The article concludes by suggesting that this approach can help to elucidate a wide range of phenomena that appear anomalous or problematic from a materialist point of view.

**Keywords:** idealism; matter; mind; mystical experiences; panpsychism; panspiritism

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In recent years, panpsychism appears to have undergone something of a resurgence in the philosophy of mind (Skrbina 2017; Goff 2019). As dissatisfaction with physicalist approaches to consciousness has increased—and as the “hard problem” of how neurological activity might equate to or produce consciousness has become apparently more intractable—the alternative of presuming that consciousness is in some sense fundamental to the world has become more appealing. In panpsychism, the problem of how mind or consciousness could arise out of matter is resolved by positing that mind was *always* involved in matter. Simple particles have an intrinsic nature of consciousness (or consciousness is an irreducible property of particles, along with other properties such as mass and charge). So consciousness did not need to arise because it was already there.

However, panpsychism is certainly not the only alternative to materialism. In this article, I would like to propose another nonmaterialist perspective, which in my view has more elegance and explanatory

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potential than panpsychism. It is an approach that—in different variants—has a long and rich philosophical history. This is an approach that could be termed *panspiritism*. It is possible to see panspiritism as occupying the middle ground between monism and dualism, or between idealism and dualism. Indeed, this is how the Indian philosophy of *Bhedabheda Vedanta*—which is very similar to panspiritism—is often conceived, as an integration of monist and dualist traditions.

Panspiritism has some similarities with philosophical approaches such as idealism and cosmopsychism but there are also significant differences. The essential difference between panspiritism and both idealism and cosmopsychism is that panspiritism does not view matter as purely mental or spiritual in nature, but as having its own ontological status. Matter is at once a product of—and pervaded with—spirit, and of the same nature of it, but at the same it is distinct from spirit. As *Bhedabheda Vedanta* suggests, matter is both the same as and different to spirit. (Aside from *Bhedabheda*, the philosophical approaches that my form of panspiritism comes closest to are dual aspect monism and panentheism, as will be discussed below.)

It is this idea of being both “the same as” and “different to,” which is perhaps the most difficult aspect of my form of panspiritism. Perhaps you could compare it to a child and its mother. A child is produced by its mother and is genetically of the same nature (together with the father). Yet, at the same time, it is an independent being. This is analogous to the relationship between spirit and matter. In this sense, one could say that panspiritism—paradoxical though this may sound—is neither wholly monist nor dualist, but (like *Bhedabheda*) an integration of the two perspectives.

I find idealist approaches as unsatisfactory as materialism or panpsychism. The issue of how a universal mind (or mind at large) could manifest itself in (or generate) individual material forms seems to me almost as problematic as the “hard problem” is for materialism. In addition, when idealist approaches (e.g., Kastrup 2012) view material entities as projections or vibrations of a universal mind or consciousness, and suggest that there is no reality independent or outside consciousness, this seems to veer toward narcissism or even solipsism, and risks devaluing the phenomenal world to the status of a projection or mirage.

In this essay, I will set out some of the most salient features of panspiritism, then suggest how a contemporary panspiritist perspective conceives of the emergence of mind, the relationship of mind to matter, and the relationship between the mind and the brain. I will show how panspiritism relates to mystical experiences, then discuss in more detail the differences between panspiritism and approaches such as idealism, panpsychism, and theism. I will also suggest that panspiritism has a great deal of explanatory power, which also offers evidence of its validity.

## A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PANSPIRITISM

Panpsychism suggests that the most basic particles of matter have some form of inner being, and some form of experience, even if this is so basic that it is impossible for us to conceive of it. Panpsychism may literally mean that “mind is everywhere,” but usually this just means that mind exists in all material particles. However, panspiritism suggests that there is a fundamental quality, which is inherent in *all space* as well as in all material things. This quality—which could be called fundamental consciousness (or spirit)—is all-pervading. (For me, the terms fundamental consciousness and spirit are equivalent.) It is everywhere and in everything.

In contrast to panpsychism, my variant of panspiritism does not hold that *all* material particles have an intrinsic nature of matter. Panspiritism suggests that although consciousness is *in* all things, all things do not necessarily have their own *individuated* consciousness. Although fundamental consciousness pervades everything, all things are not conscious. Only structures that have the necessary complexity and organizational form to *receive and canalize* fundamental consciousness into themselves have consciousness as their intrinsic nature. There is a similarity here with cosmopsychism, which assumes one essential form of consciousness: cosmic consciousness. As in idealism, the individual consciousness of macrosubjects such as human beings somehow derives from cosmic consciousness (Nagasa and Wager 2016). My variant of panspiritism (or “contemporary panspiritism” as it might be called) suggests that this derivation occurs through organized groups of cells (in the form of brains in human beings), which act as a receiver and transmitter of fundamental consciousness.

According to panspiritism, the entire universe is animate and conscious, since all things are—and all space is—pervaded with fundamental consciousness or spirit. But there is a difference in the way that rocks and rivers are animate and the way that an insect or even an amoeba is animate. Rocks and rivers do not have their own psyche and are therefore not *individually* conscious or animate. Fundamental consciousness pervades them, but they are not conscious in themselves. (Note that I could equally have chosen *panconsciousnessism* as a term for this approach but rejected it as unwieldy and awkward.) Material forms are externally animated with fundamental consciousness; the bodies of life forms are also animated with fundamental consciousness, but life forms are also *internally* animated with some degree of individual consciousness. Interior consciousness does not go *all the way down*, as panpsychism suggests. It only goes as far down as the first simple life forms.

We might say that in contemporary panspiritism, there are two essential—and related—distinctions. The first is between material things and living things. The former are *pervaded with* fundamental consciousness, without possessing their own interior consciousness, while the latter

are pervaded with fundamental consciousness while also possessing an *interior* nature, with a certain degree of individual consciousness. (More on this a little later.) The second distinction is between individual conscious beings and fundamental consciousness.

We can illustrate these distinctions by considering my own status in the world, at this very moment. I am sitting at a table in a cafe. According to contemporary panspiritism, the table, the walls, my cup, and all other material things around me are pervaded with fundamental consciousness. The material stuff of my body—my atoms and molecules and cells and muscles and limbs and skin and hair—is also pervaded with fundamental consciousness. At the same time, fundamental consciousness is pervading the space between all of these material things, and the space that fills the whole of this cafe (and outside it too). In this sense, all material things are immersed in fundamental consciousness. And I, as a sentient being, also have an *interior* consciousness. Primarily via my brain, fundamental consciousness expresses itself inside me, and becomes my individual consciousness, and my mind. This is the essential difference between me and the material objects around me. Because they are relatively simple physical forms, fundamental consciousness cannot be “canalized” into them, and so they lack an interior consciousness.

Alternatively, we could describe my situation using the term spirit. I am pervaded with and immersed in spirit. At the same time, spirit exists inside me, as the essential nature of my interior being. Spirit flows into my inner being, on an ongoing basis, like a fountain, via my brain. This inflow of spirit generates my individual consciousness. My body, my inner being, all matter, and all space are spiritual in nature—hence, *panspiritism*.

Briefly summarized, we could say that my variant of panspiritism highlights three ways in which living beings are related to fundamental consciousness: *pervasion*, *immersion*, and *subjective sentience* (or *internal animation*). Nonliving things are pervaded with and immersed in fundamental consciousness. Living things are also pervaded with and immersed in fundamental consciousness—but in addition, they are *internally animated* by fundamental consciousness, through the process of canalization (which will be discussed in more detail shortly), providing them with *subjective sentience*. And, since living beings exist in different levels of complexity, fundamental consciousness internally animates them to different degrees of subjective sentience. (This recalls Spinoza’s [2020] statement in his *Ethics* that all things are “though in different degrees, animated.”)

A metaphor would perhaps be useful here. Consider a sponge lying underwater in a bath. The sponge is immersed in water and also pervaded with—or soaked through with—the water. This is the situation of all material forms in the world. Every atom in the universe—and therefore all structures made up of those atoms—are “soaked” with and immersed in fundamental consciousness.

But—at the risk of mixing metaphor with reality—let us switch now to the example of a living sponge, under the ocean. This living sponge is also immersed in and soaked through with water, but at the same time, as a living being, it has some degree of intrinsic consciousness. Fundamental consciousness also internally animates it, providing it with subjective sentience. And this is the predicament of all living things in the world: they are immersed in, pervaded with, and internally animated by fundamental consciousness.

Why is it necessary to see matter as pervaded with spirit? Couldn't we simply see matter and spirit as wholly distinct, in dualistic terms? However, panspiritism is a philosophy of oneness (although at the same time it is not wholly monist). It is the all-pervading nature of fundamental consciousness that brings all phenomenal things into oneness—not simply the oneness of living beings who share the same essential internal consciousness, but also the oneness of all nonmaterial things, which are one because they are products of, and are pervaded with, fundamental consciousness. Certain interactions of the mind and the body (such as the influence of mental intentions over the form and functioning of the body, as illustrated by the placebo effect or healing under hypnosis) would be inexplicable without an intimate interconnection between the mental and physical (Kelly et al. 2007). A sense of unity—or at least intimate connection—between one's own being and the material world is also one of the core elements of mystical experiences. Significantly—as we will see shortly—mystical experiences also sometimes feature reports of a radiance or energy, which pervades all space and objects, bringing them into oneness.

One might also wonder how can matter have a different ontological status to fundamental consciousness and yet be pervaded with it. How can matter be both of the same nature as spirit and different to it? However, it is important to remember that matter consists primarily of *space*. Nuclei are around 100,000 times smaller than the atoms that contain them. All space is pervaded with fundamental consciousness, so the space within matter (strictly speaking, the space within atoms) is pervaded with fundamental consciousness too. (This is, of course, in keeping with the sponge metaphor I used earlier.)

We should also remember that, in the natural world, it is common for one phenomenon to generate another, in such a way that the generated phenomenon has its own ontological status but is also *of the same nature* as the generative phenomenon. The relationship of material particles to fundamental consciousness may be analogous to children created by parents, or plants that emerge from seeds, where a distinct phenomenon emerges from a preexisting one, but retains the essential nature of the latter.

## PANSPIRITIST PERSPECTIVES IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY

Of course, what I am here describing as panspiritism is by no means a novel perspective. Panspiritist ideas were put forward by many earlier philosophers. In fact, the idea that the essence of reality is a nonmaterial, spiritual quality (without necessarily adopting an idealist position that spirit is the *only* reality) seems to be one of the oldest and most common cross-cultural concepts in the history of the world. Of course, this does not necessarily enhance the validity of the approach, but I believe it is useful to consider the rich and wide variety of panspiritist perspectives that have emerged in different contexts, before I go on to discuss my own approach in greater detail.

In addition to their animistic beliefs in spirits that could inhabit and influence phenomena, many indigenous groups developed concepts of a fundamental spiritual principle, which has some similarity with panspiritism. For example, many native American groups developed concepts of a “great spirit” or “great mystery.” The Tlingit of the Pacific North-West referred to this spiritual principle as *yok*, the Hopi Indians called it *maasauu*, the Pawnee called it *tirawa*, the Dakota called it *taku wakan*, the Lakota called it *wakan-tanka*, while the Haudenosaunee called it *orenda*, the eastern Algonquians called it *manitou*, and so on. Elsewhere in the world, the Ainu of Japan—an indigenous tribal people of Hokkaido in Northern Japan—developed a similar concept of *ramut*, while in parts of New Guinea there was a similar concept of *imunu*. The Scottish anthropologist Neil Gordon Munro (1962)—one of the first Westerners to live with the Ainu—described *ramut* as a force that is “all-pervading and indestructible” and chose the English translation of “spirit-energy.” Similarly, British missionary J.H. Holmes translated *imunu* as “universal soul” and described it as “the soul of things...It was intangible, but like air, wind, it could manifest its presence” (in Levy-Bruhl 1965, 17). The similarity of these concepts with each other and with the panspiritist concept of a fundamental spiritual force is striking (and demands further investigation than I am able to devote to it here; see Taylor [2005] for an extended discussion).

In my view, it is therefore feasible to suggest that forms of panspiritism may be the human race’s most ancient and most common worldview, long before the advent of theistic religion. Skrbina has attempted to make a similar case for panpsychism, suggesting that “it is almost certainly the most ancient conception of the psyche” (2007, 5). However, in my view this is rather dubious. As noted above, there were two main aspects to indigenous worldviews: the animistic principle that the world is full of individual spirits who could inhabit phenomena, together with the panspiritist principle I have just described. Briefly summarized, one could say that their worldview included both Spirit and spirits (Taylor 2005). That is, the world was animated in two different ways: through the

all-pervading presence of Spirit, and also through the influence of individual spirits. However, neither of these aspects adhere closely to any pansychist perspective, except in the general sense of phenomena being animate. (This also makes it clear than panspiritism is not a form of animism.)

Some philosophers have suggested, more feasibly, that such indigenous perspectives can be seen as forms of panentheism. Callicott (1994) has suggested this of the Lakota, for instance, since they conceive of a spiritual force, which is both transcendent and immanent. However, a panentheistic interpretation would only be valid if such conceptions of spirit were theistic in nature, which I think is dubious. This may have been true of some later indigenous groups, who were influenced by the theism of western colonists, but earlier conceptions of spirit appear to be nontheistic.

Panspiritist ideas have clearly been a feature of certain Eastern philosophical traditions too. Chalmers (2020) has made a useful distinction between “anti-realist” and “realist” idealism, which will be useful here. Antirealist idealism assumes the world to be nothing more than appearance—or *maya*, in Hindu terms—while realist idealism assumes the world to have an intrinsically real nature. In these terms, Advaita Vedanta is “anti-realist,” since it tends to see the material world as an unreal manifestation of *brahman*. Since *brahman* alone exists, the world cannot truly exist. It is seen as only existing in the mind, as a consequence of *maya*, like a dream that only exists in the mind of a dreamer, or as images projected onto a screen. (Chalmers’ distinction is similar to the more traditional philosophical distinction between subjective and objective idealism.)

An Indian philosophical tradition, which takes a realist idealist approach is Kashmiri Shaivism. As with Advaita Vedanta, all things are seen as a manifestation of a fundamental spiritual principle (usually referred to as *Śiva* rather than *brahman*) but the difference is that all things are seen as *wholly real*, having their being in the absolute consciousness of *Śiva*. All material things come into existence because of the dynamic nature of absolute consciousness, which projects a subtle vibrational energy (known as *spanda*). This energy crystallizes into seemingly solid material things, so that all things literally *consist of* absolute consciousness. (This notion of crystallization is similar to Schopenhauer’s concept of matter as “objectified will” [Schopenhauer 1851/1969] and also to the cosmogenic aspect of Peirce’s [1891/1992] philosophy, as will be noted shortly.) The phenomenal world is therefore not an illusion—matter is as real as spirit itself, because essentially matter *is* spirit. In this way, Kashmiri Shaivism affirms the reality of the phenomenal world and the human body (Wallis 2013). In other words, Kashmiri Shaivism moves close to panspiritism, although there is a difference in that in the former, material things have an equal ontological status to fundamental consciousness,



whereas panspiritism suggests that the material world is not *just* of the same nature as fundamental consciousness.

The Indian philosophical tradition that allies *most* closely with panspiritism is Bhedabheda Vedanta. This approach can be seen as an attempt to integrate the monist and dualist traditions of Indian philosophy. The term *Bhedabheda* literally means “difference and non-difference,” suggesting that material forms are both identical and distinct to *brahman*. Like Kashmiri Shaivism, Bhedabheda Vedanta describes the phenomenal world as a *real* manifestation (or *parinama*) of a fundamental spiritual principle (*brahman*). But Bhedabheda goes further than Kashmiri Shaivism, by suggesting that material forms are *not* identical with absolute consciousness, but have their own distinct identity (while at the same time existing *in* *brahman*). In Bhedabheda Vedanta, various metaphors are used to illustrate the relationship between fundamental consciousness and material forms, including a wave and the ocean, a fire and the sparks that arise from it, the sun and its rays, and a father and his son. Individual subjects and material forms are of the same nature as *brahman*, but have their own distinct form and identity. This is an identical perspective to my form of panspiritism, which sees material things are distinct from fundamental consciousness, at the same time as being pervaded with it and grounded in it.

(Note that there are some panspiritist trends within the western philosophical tradition too—for example, the Stoics, Plotinus, the Italian sixteenth-century philosophers Bruno and Patrizi, and later figures such as Spinoza and Johann Gottfried Herder. Unfortunately I do not have space to discuss this here. See Taylor [2018] for a fuller discussion.)

### THE EMERGENCE OF MATTER

Let us now examine my own variant of panspiritism in more detail. One important aspect that needs clarification is the emergence of matter. I suggest that fundamental consciousness has a dynamic quality that enables it to generate material particles. My panspiritist perspective here is similar to some forms of “source idealism” (or “product idealism”), which see the world as an emanation of absolute consciousness.

Some forms of panpsychism imply that consciousness came into existence *with* the universe, as one of the properties of subatomic particles (alongside others such as mass and charge) or as the intrinsic nature of matter. But like idealism, panspiritism suggests that fundamental consciousness is *more fundamental* than the universe, in the sense that the universe came into being as an emanation of it. (Although unlike idealism, my form of panspiritism suggests that material things have their own ontological status and identity.)

There are many indigenous cultures and spiritual/mystical philosophies that have a similar perspective. Vedanta in general (including Advaita)

proposes that fundamental consciousness exists prior to the material world, while in Kashmiri Shaivism, the universe came into being through the primordial vibration of *siva*. Kashmiri Shaivism claims that *siva* has a dynamic impulse to express—in Wallis’ words—“the totality of its self-knowledge in action” (Wallis 2013, 55). Plotinus is also very clear that the One is the source of the world, as a dynamic force which is—in Plotinus’ own words—the “productive power [dynamis] of all things” (in Marshall 2019, 256).

Peirce (1891/1992)—whose “objective idealist” approach is similar to my form of panspiritism, as will be noted later—put forward a similar cosmogony, and even suggested the process by which matter arises from mind. According to Peirce, the universe originally existed in a state of pure, chaotic feeling. It slowly became solidified through patterns of recurrence and crystallized into material forms. Different material forms are mind in different degrees of solidification. This recalls the Kashmiri Shaivist idea that matter is a crystallization of absolute consciousness and also Schopenhauer’s (1851/1969) concept of “objectification.”

I also attribute a quality of dynamic creativity to fundamental consciousness. One can envisage fundamental consciousness (or spirit) as a subtle and dynamic nonmaterial principle or quality, which existed prior to the universe and gave rise to it. It enfolds and immerses the whole universe (and possibly other universes), pervading all space-time and matter and continually flowing into the inner being of life forms, via their cells. And once space-time and material particles came into existence, the dynamic nature of fundamental consciousness expressed itself in the tendency of particles to group together and develop into more complex forms, which eventually became sentient, at the point where they were complex enough to “transmit” fundamental consciousness.

The notion that fundamental consciousness is ontologically primary, and that the universe emanated from it, recalls the metaphors previously cited from Bhedabheda Vedanta, which describes the relationship of *brahman* to the world as equivalent to sparks from a fire, or a father and a son. (Strictly speaking, a mother would be more appropriate than father, due to the creative potential of *brahman*, or fundamental consciousness.) Matter emerges from fundamental consciousness and is pervaded with it, sharing in its nature.

I admit that the process by which fundamental consciousness generates matter is obscure (despite Peirce’s attempt at an explanation). One could term this “the generation problem” in comparison to the “combination problem” of panpsychism. At present, there are no viable panpsychist explanations of how single material particles combine to produce the more intense consciousness of larger beings. Likewise, in idealism, there are no valid explanations of how absolute consciousness manifests itself in material forms. In relation to Kastrup’s work, Chalmers (2020) terms

this the “fragmentation problem” of how universal mind divides into individual minds.

### THE EMERGENCE OF MIND

One of the attractions of panpsychism over materialism is that it avoids the “emergence problem” of how mind could emerge from matter. As Skrbina (2017) points out, there are three different aspects to the emergence problem: historical emergence (referring to the point in evolution when living beings first become “enminded”); the phylogenic question of which organisms alive today possess mind and which do not; and the ontogenic question of when human beings (or other “enminded” animals) acquire minds, in their development from conception onward. From all three of these perspectives, the emergence of mind appears miraculous. Is there really a certain point when mind suddenly switches on like a light in our evolutionary or developmental journey and experience suddenly comes into being? There seems to be no way of accounting for this miracle. In fact, it seems contradictory for materialists to assume that mind did emerge in this way, since they insist that the world functions according to rational mechanical laws, without the need for miracles.

Skrbina suggests that panpsychism is the only answer to the emergence problem. As he writes, “The bottom line seems quite clear: One is either an emergentist, or one is a panpsychist. There seems to be no middle ground” (2017, 20). However, this is not the case. Idealism offers one alternative to emergentism: mind did not emerge because all things (including material things) are, and have always been, aspects of mind. Panspiritism offers an alternative too, taking an intermediate position between materialism and “all-mind” approaches such as idealism or panpsychism, and holding that only organisms possess some degree of mind. Mind emerged when the physical structures became complex enough to *receive and canalize* fundamental consciousness into themselves. This occurred with the development of the first simple cells, which were the first physical structures to possess life and sentience.

In my formulation of panspiritism, the human mind is essentially an influx (or canalization) of fundamental consciousness. A distinction is made between fundamental consciousness and mind, with the former being primary, and the latter arising from—and dependent on—the interaction of fundamental consciousness with the brain (or any organized group of cells). In this sense, there are three essential elements. Rather than just thinking in terms of the spiritual and the material, or mind and matter, we should think in terms of fundamental consciousness, matter, and mind. Alternatively, in terms of an individual human being, we could think in terms of the triad of spirit, mind, and body.

This does not mean that mind and body—or mind and matter—are ontologically distinct, as in dualism. They are both expressions of fundamental consciousness or spirit. At the same time, while mind is a more subtle and fuller expression of spirit than matter. It is, you might say, a *higher order* expression of spirit. Matter is pervaded with fundamental consciousness, but it is not conscious *in itself*. (As already mentioned, this is one of the main differences between panpsychism and panspiritism.)

This begs for a fuller explanation of how mind—or individuated consciousness—arose. Since (unlike panpsychism) panspiritism does not hold that all material particles have mental properties, how can it account for the emergence of mind? Or to put it another way, how did an all-pervading fundamental consciousness give rise to individual conscious subjects?

As I have already noted, panpsychists struggle with the combination problem of how microcosmic conscious entities combine to produce larger conscious entities such as human being. The fragmentation problem is also a serious issue for idealists. In Kastrup's (2012) version of idealism, it is suggested that a cosmic subject is fragmented into individual macrosubjects via a process analagous to Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), where the sense of self fragments into different alters. But in panspiritism, neither combination nor fragmentation occur. Instead, there is a *transmission* of a cosmic subject into individual subjects, via the brain.

The transmission model of consciousness was put forward as long ago as 1897, by William James (1898/1992), who emphasized that, although it is clear that consciousness is a *function* of the brain, this does not necessarily entail that it is also a production of the brain. As James put it, “when we think of the law that thought is a function of the brain, we are not required to think of productive function only; *we are entitled also to consider permissive or transmissive function*. And this the ordinary psycho-physiologist leaves out of his account” (James 1898/1992, 1109, italics in original). James compared the brain to a “prism or a refracting lens,” which transmits a white light or invisible radiance. He also used the metaphor of air passing through the pipes of an organ. James did not attempt to describe the nature of the essential reality that is transmitted by the brain. However, in his view, the idea of the brain as a transmitter of consciousness provided possible evidence of human immortality since “the sphere of being that supplied the consciousness would still be intact; and in that more real world with which, even whilst here, it was continuous, the consciousness might, in ways unknown to us, continue still” (James 1898/1992, 1111).

Forman (1998) has described this process more specifically, speaking in terms of a “canalization” of consciousness. As he has put it, “Consciousness is more like a field than a localized point, a field which transcends the body and yet somehow interacts with it...Brain cells may receive, guide, arbitrate, or canalize an awareness which is somehow transcendental to

them. The brain may be more like a receiver or transformer for the field of awareness than its generator" (1998, 185). More recently, Eagleman (2012)—in support of the "brain as a receiver" hypothesis—has made a useful analogy of a Kalahari bushman who finds a radio set. After listening to it and examining its inner workings, he comes to the entirely logical conclusion that the sounds that emerge from it stem from its inner circuitry. If someone asked him to explain how music and voices are produced by loops of electrical signals, he would be unable to do so.

According to my form of panspiritism, this does just not apply to human beings, or human brains, but to the most basic forms of life. Physical structures became internally conscious and sentient when they developed sufficient complexity to *receive and canalize* fundamental consciousness into themselves. When matter is arranged in complex and intricate ways—such as in cells and organisms—it facilitates the canalization of fundamental consciousness. This may be one of the primary functions of cells: to facilitate the canalization of fundamental consciousness into individual beings. Cells act as a "receiver" of consciousness, so that even an amoeba has its own very rudimentary kind of psyche and is therefore individually alive. An individual cell can perform this role, as can groups of intricately connected cells.

This relates to the different degrees of consciousness in life forms. As living beings become more complex—as their cells increase in number and become more intricately organized in groups—they become capable of receiving more consciousness. The raw essence of fundamental consciousness is canalized more powerfully through them, so that they become more alive, with more autonomy, more freedom, and more intense awareness of reality. This is why human beings, with our incredibly complex and intricate brains, are one of the most conscious beings (perhaps alongside dolphins and whales) in existence. However, the simplest forms of matter, which do not have cells, are not capable of canalizing consciousness, and so they are not individually conscious or alive. Simple forms of matter do not have an interior and are not capable of experience or sensation. These qualities only emerge at the cellular level and above.

In my view, the correlation between the complexity of life forms and their degree of consciousness provides some basis for the theory of canalization. There is a clear relationship between the number of cells an organism contains and—most importantly—the complexity of the interactions between cells (that is, how intricately they are organized). If one traces the process of increasing complexity back far enough, one would conceivably reach a point of least complexity and lowest degree of consciousness, which would presumably be a single-celled organism. This would also be the point where the process of canalization (or transmission) began.

A similar notion of the relationship between complexity and consciousness was put forward by Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote that the

“involution of complexity is experientially bound up with a correlative increase in interiorisation, that is to say in the psyche or consciousness” (1959, 301). However, Teilhard’s conception was more panpsychist than panspiritist, in the sense that he believed that interiorization went all the way down to the most basic particles of matter.

The panpsychist view that that consciousness goes “all the way down” to the most basic material particles may elegantly remove the problem of the emergence of mind in matter, but there is no indication that material particles possess any degree of consciousness. They show no signs of awareness of—or sensitivity to—their environment, or of the ability to respond to environmental changes. On the other hand, the simplest organisms clearly display indications of a rudimentary consciousness, or interiority. For example, amoebae will move toward sources of food, light, or heat, showing some sensitivity to (and awareness of) their environment.

The clear distinction between purely material entities and life forms has to be accounted for. There is a gulf in consciousness between the prebiotic and the biotic world, which can be explained in terms of the canalization theory. In theory, one could suggest that the transmission of consciousness goes all the way down. Why shouldn’t consciousness be transmitted into atoms too? (This would equate to a form of panpsychism). However, since there is no evidence that atoms are conscious, and since there does appear to be a clear distinction between living and nonliving beings, it makes sense to suggest that the transmission of consciousness depends on a certain level of complexity in physical forms, and that it arose with the first simple life forms.

The ability to transmit fundamental consciousness (and consequently the emergence of some degree of internal consciousness or interiority) should be seen as one of the qualities that distinguish biological entities from prebiotic entities, along with characteristics that are conventionally identified by biologists such as reproduction, growth, regulation, homeostasis, and energy processing. (Another quality that is conventionally seen as characterizing life is responding to the environment. This suggests a rudimentary subjective consciousness, which in my view is made possible by the transmission of fundamental consciousness.)

One of the biggest issues with dualism is how immaterial minds can interact with a material body, usually termed “the interaction problem.” In panspiritism, this would be reframed as the issue of how fundamental consciousness interacts on an *ongoing* basis with the brain and body to produce and sustain individual consciousness. Again, I will not pretend that panspiritism has a clear answer to this. I have suggested that this is one of the functions of cells, and that as cells become increasingly numerous and are interconnected, they are able to canalize fundamental consciousness more intensely. But as yet there is no clear explanation of the mechanism by which cells perform this role. This might be termed the “transmission

problem” or perhaps the “canalization problem”—again, echoing equivalent issues such as the combination and fragmentation problems, and also the generation problem of how fundamental consciousness gives rise to matter.

Materialism has two main aspects of emergence to explain: the original evolutionary point where mind emerged from matter, and the ongoing emergence of consciousness in the brain (that is, the hard problem). In a similar way, there are two aspects of panspiritism’s transmission problem. We cannot yet explain the process by which transmission *originally* occurred in simple life forms, and also how the human brain transmits fundamental consciousness on an *ongoing* basis.

However, in relation to the interaction problem, it is perhaps significant that, in panspiritism, we are dealing with two different aspects of the same fundamental principle rather than two essentially different substances. Since the matter of the body is pervaded with the same essential quality as the mind, the problem of interaction—or how matter can transmit or canalize fundamental consciousness—is perhaps not so intractable. As Hartshorne (1977, 93) put it, in arguing for his variety of panpsychism, “The mind-body relation...is a relation of sympathy; it is the most instinctive of all forms of sympathy, the form we are born with and do not have to learn. I seriously believe, and not alone I, that this is the key to the influence of body upon mind. There is mind on both sides of the relation, but mind on very different levels.”

Another point is that the connection between fundamental consciousness and individual consciousness can be *experienced*. As will be seen presently, the identification of individual consciousness with fundamental consciousness is an important—perhaps the most essential—aspect of mystical experiences, to the point where some mystical experiences could even be termed “interaction experiences.”

### THE ROLE OF THE BRAIN

I have suggested that, in human beings and other animals, the canalization of fundamental consciousness takes place primarily via the brain. (I say “primarily” because the cells of the rest of the body are also presumably able to canalize fundamental consciousness. This means that our individual consciousness is, to some degree, spread throughout the whole body, rather than just associated with the brain.) But this is not the brain’s only role. Utilizing the “raw material” of consciousness, the brain enables and organizes the various psychological functions and processes that constitute the mind, including memory, information processing, intention or will, concentration, abstract and logical cognition, and so on. In this way, the brain is the *facilitator* (but not the causal generator) of mind.

In relation to this, it is not surprising that conventional scientific approaches have had so little success in explaining consciousness in terms of the brain's electrochemical processes. Since the brain does not directly produce consciousness, it is fruitless to try to locate it in the brain. The ultimate source of our subjective experience is beyond the brain, not inside it. At best, we can only hope to find the functional correlations of consciousness (including, perhaps, the parts of the brain that play in role in receiving and canalizing consciousness).

The relationship of fundamental consciousness to mind is like the relationship between a raw food ingredient and a meal that is prepared from it. Fundamental consciousness constitutes the essence of mind, but it is not equivalent to mind. Mind is what happens when fundamental consciousness is filtered through neural networks. This recalls James' suggestion that individual mind, cognition, or mental awareness is the result of the essential reality of the universe being transmitted through the "receiving station" of the brain (James 1898/1992, 1111).

I have already suggested that this is an ongoing process. Life forms *continually* receive and canalize fundamental consciousness, for every moment of their lives till death. For me as a human being, fundamental consciousness is continually flowing into me like a fountain (to use Plotinus' metaphor) via my brain and through the cells of my body, generating my inner life. But obviously, the nature of my individual consciousness changes in relation to my mental and neurological states. Fundamental consciousness only provides the essence of individual consciousness, which is subject to filtering and conditioning. From this point of view, death can be seen as the point where the brain and body are no longer able to receive and canalize fundamental consciousness. Due to a process of decay, or an accident or injury, their organism can no longer perform the canalizing role.

In certain states of mind, fundamental consciousness may express itself more intensely and purely. For example, in states of deep meditation, a person may enter a state of mental stillness and quietness, in which the processes and functions of the mind apparently become inactive (or at least significantly less active than normal). It may be that in these moments a person experiences fundamental consciousness in its pure (or at least a purer) form, prior to its organization into mental functions. In other words, in this state one experiences fundamental consciousness *directly*, as it is canalized into us. (Significantly, Forman [1998] refers to this state as the pure consciousness event.) Or as noted above, this may also be seen as a mystical experience of the interaction of fundamental consciousness with individual consciousness.



## PANSPIRITISM AND EVOLUTION

I have suggested that the material world came into existence due to the dynamic creative nature of fundamental consciousness. However, fundamental consciousness is also creative in the sense that it impels preexisting material forms to move toward greater complexity. In other words, once the universe had been generated, the creative and dynamic quality of spirit continued to operate in material structures. Once material particles arose from fundamental consciousness, they began to group together into more complex material structures, and eventually into structures that were complex enough to enable the “canalization” of fundamental consciousness into themselves, so that these structures became animate and sentient. From that point on, the creative and dynamic nature of fundamental consciousness was an important factor in evolution, impelling life forms to develop greater complexity over time, which allowed those life forms to canalize consciousness more intensely, and so to develop a more intense and expansive internal consciousness. Living beings became more sentient and autonomous, while still immersed in and pervaded with fundamental consciousness.

Again, this is a similar conception to Teilhard de Chardin (1959), who believed that the tendency of material structures to move toward greater complexity and organization is not random, but teleological. Teilhard referred to evolution as a process of the “spiritualization” of matter. (In fact, many philosophers have suggested that evolution is a purposive process of the unfolding and intensification of consciousness, including Hegel, Fichte, Bergson, and Sri Aurobindo.)

One could think in terms of two different stages of evolution. The first stage, at the beginning to the universe, was the emergence of matter, when elementary particles emerged out of fundamental consciousness. The second stage, millions of years later, was the emergence of mind *within* matter, which began with the first simple life forms. To use a crude analogy, this was the point when matter became *impregnated* with consciousness. We know that this process occurred on Earth millions of years ago, but for all we know, it may have happened (and be happening) on other planets too, at earlier or later dates.

Clearly, this is a very different perspective to conventional neo-Darwinism. However, I believe it is becoming more and more evident that the standard neo-Darwinist model of evolution—which suggests that natural selection working on random mutations can approximate to a creative principle—is problematic (Taylor, 2018; 2019). A growing number of contemporary biologists now doubt that evolution can be explained wholly in these terms, as illustrated by the Third Way in Evolution movement (the first and second ways being creationism and conventional neo-Darwinism (Müller 2017)).

## MYSTICAL EXPERIENCES AND FUNDAMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The previous description of meditative experiences illustrates that fundamental consciousness is not simply an intellectual or philosophical concept, but—at least potentially—an *experiential* phenomenon.

One way of interpreting mystical experiences is to see them as experiences when an individual becomes consciously aware of fundamental consciousness in the world and/or within their own being. Here, I will use a distinction of mystical experiences, which has been used by scholars of mysticism such as Underhill (1960) and Stace (1960). Underhill (1960) made a distinction between “outgoing” and “ingoing” mystical experiences, while Stace spoke in terms of extravertive and introvertive mystical experiences. I will refer to these types as “mystical experiences of awareness of fundamental consciousness in the world” and “mystical experiences of awareness of fundamental consciousness within one’s own being.”

Mystical experiences of awareness of fundamental consciousness *in the world* may feature an aware of the *presence* of fundamental consciousness in material forms and in living beings (including ourselves). Fundamental consciousness may seem to animate and illuminate material forms (making them appear more real and beautiful) or appear as a kind of radiance or force pervading all things and all space. There may also be an awareness of *oneness*—the oneness of all things in the world, with fundamental consciousness pervading them and bringing them into unity. A person may have a sense of their own oneness with the world. Their normal sense of separation may fade away, and they may realize that they share the same essence as all things and all other beings.

Mystical experiences of awareness of fundamental consciousness *within our own being* are the type of deep meditative experiences described earlier. At a certain point, when the mind has become still, a person may feel an expansion of inner consciousness, with a loss of individuality and separateness. There may be sense of freedom and inner peace and radiance. At a deeper level, there may be an experience of a formless dimension beyond time and space, which the person’s own being seems to emanate from, and which they feel united with. In panspiritist terms, such an experience can be seen as simply an experience of the fundamental nature of reality. The quality of boundary-less oneness is a direct experience of the fundamental consciousness that we share with all other things, and the whole universe itself.

Mystical experience can be termed “interaction experiences” when they involve the experience of individual consciousness sensing or uniting with its source of fundamental consciousness. In a sense, this is a reversal of the process by which individual consciousness is produced. The outward process is that fundamental consciousness moves into complex material forms, to produce individual consciousness. But in mystical interaction

experiences, individual consciousness moves back—retraces its steps, you might say—into fundamental consciousness. (This is what Kashmiri Shaivism refers to as “recognition.” In fact, many mystical traditions describe the loss of the individual’s awareness of their spiritual source as a process of forgetfulness, and the reversal of this process as a remembering. In a similar way, the process of regaining awareness of our true spiritual nature is sometimes described as a homecoming.)

One could also possibly highlight a third type of mystical experience, which is not directly categorized by Underhill or Stace (although it could be seen as a type of extravertive or outgoing experiences.). This is what might be called an “intersubjective” mystical experience, when an individual specifically experiences an intense intersubjective connection with other beings. (Marshall [2005] refers this as a “communal mystical experience.”) This usually happens with other human beings, accompanied with intense feelings of love and compassion. We feel our fundamental oneness with others, since we are all expressions of the same fundamental consciousness. We realize that our differences—or biology, personality, or ideology—are superficial and insignificant, since we share the same essence. From a panspiritist perspective, we could categorize this experience as a mystical experience of fundamental consciousness in other beings.

We could also say that mystical experiences provide evidence for the existence of a fundamental consciousness, or spirit. It is very difficult to account for the experiences without positing the existence of fundamental consciousness.

#### PANSPIRITISM AND IDEALISM

Since panspiritism literally means “all is spirit” or “spirit is everywhere,” one could—strictly speaking—see idealism is a form of panspiritism. And, it is true that there are some similarities between idealism and the variant of panspiritism I am presenting—most notably, that the world is seen as the product of a more fundamental or transcendent source. I have already suggested that what Chalmers (2020) refers to as “realist idealism” (an example of which is Kashmiri Shaivism) is not far removed from contemporary panspiritism.

There are also commonalities between what Chalmers (2020) refers to as “cosmic idealism” and panspiritism. Cosmic idealist approaches assume a fundamental spiritual or mental principle, which is transcendent to and independent of the world, and from which material things emanate. This is certainly true of panspiritism too, which suggests that spirit is ontologically more fundamental than the universe.

However, in cosmic idealism (and idealism generally), the material world is usually viewed as identical and *indistinguishable* from a

fundamental mental or spiritual principle (or consciousness). But this is not the case with panspiritism. As previously noted, panspiritism sees material entities as both identical and distinct—both the same as, and different to. Fundamental consciousness generates and pervades matter (and expresses itself as mind), but there is a distinction between them. The nature of matter is not viewed wholly in experiential, perceptual, or mentalistic terms. Material things are not seen as the contents or subjects of fundamental consciousness, even though they arise from it. Material things have their own distinct ontological status, as products of fundamental consciousness.

Another way of looking at this is to suggest that, in cosmic idealism, the world exists *in* mind. Whereas materialism insists on an objective world “out there,” which would exist even if we were not here to perceive it, idealism suggests that there is no inside or outside. In Kastrup’s idealist approach, for instance—which has echoes of Kashmiri Shaivism—all other living beings and material things are “excitations” within fundamental mind (Kastrup 2012).

In regard to the question of whether the world exists within or outside mind, panspiritism once again takes an intermediate position, between materialism and idealism. The world does have its independent existence—but at the same time, it is of the same nature as its subjects, as a child is of the same nature as its parents, or a plant is of the same nature as its seed (while having its own ontological status). Every subject who perceives the world “out there” is one with it, since the spiritual essence of our being is the same spiritual essence that pervades the world and all the material things in it, and which infuses all living things with being. The world is therefore both independent and interdependent, in the same way that it is both identical and distinct to fundamental consciousness.

Perhaps the form of idealism, which comes closest of all to panspiritism is the “objective idealism” put forward by Peirce. Peirce accepts the common sense material reality of the world but holds that matter is derived from mind. Matter is independent of, and at the same time of the same nature of, mind. In Peirce’s words, “The one intelligible theory of the universe is that of objective idealism, that matter is effete mind, inveterate habits becoming physical laws” (1891/1992, 293)

#### PANSPIRITISM, COSMOPSYCHISM, AND DUAL ASPECT MONISM

We have seen that one of the most problematic issues with panpsychism is the combination problem of how particles of matter combine to produce larger conscious entities. However, there is one form of panpsychism, which is not affected by the combination problem. This is cosmopsychism, which is the form of panpsychism most similar to panspiritism. Cosmopsychism suggests that the universe as a whole is a conscious entity.

Indeed, it should be conceived as “the one and only fundamental entity” (Goff 2017, 118), which is *inhabited* by microcosmic conscious entities. Although this viewpoint avoids the combination problem (since larger conscious units do not arise from combinations of smaller conscious entities), it involves an equivalent *decombination* problem of how the larger conscious entity of the universe gives rise to smaller conscious beings, such as human beings. Goff (2017) suggests that we should think in terms of “a conscious universe which contains other conscious subjects as partial aspects” (110) but this offers no account of how the consciousness of smaller objects relates to—or is derived from—the consciousness of the whole universe.

In a sense, the decombination problem could apply to panspiritism too, but is easily dealt with. As we have seen, the consciousness of macro-subjects is seen as an influx of fundamental consciousness. As I have suggested, one of the functions of cells is to receive and transmit fundamental consciousness, so that it becomes canalized into individual forms. So there is a very direct relationship between fundamental consciousness and the consciousness of individual subjects. At the same time, this still leaves the “transmission problem” of exactly *how* consciousness enters into individual subjects, via organized clusters of cells.

Panspiritism overlaps with dual aspect monism to a large degree, in the sense that matter and mind are seen as different aspects of fundamental consciousness. Contemporary panspiritism could justifiably be seen as a variety of dual aspect monism. For example, Atmanspacher’s (2012) dual aspect monism posits a fundamental oneness which produces both mind and matter. In panspiritism, matter is an emanation of fundamental consciousness (and is pervaded with it), while mind is an inner manifestation of fundamental consciousness within matter, resulting from the interaction of fundamental consciousness with the brain. But both mind and matter are of the same nature (although not identical). This is what makes mystical “interaction” experiences of oneness with the phenomenal world or with other beings possible (as in nature mysticism or intersubjective spiritual experiences). They are both products of a fundamental oneness.

At the same time, dual aspect theories normally require the mental and physical to be interdependent and inseparable—two aspects of the same substance—which is not the case in panspiritism. In panspiritism, the physical is independent of the mental in the sense that it existed before the mental and could (and does) exist without it. But the mental cannot exist without the physical, in the sense that a physical form has to exist (and to become sufficiently complex) before fundamental consciousness can be canalized. It is only at the point that the mental comes into existence.

## PANSPIRITISM AND THEISM

Is it possible that the term “fundamental consciousness” is interchangeable with the term “God”? Could one argue that I have simply been avoiding the issue of theism by referring to fundamental consciousness in neutral, impersonal terms? Perhaps a concept of a personal deity would work just as well?

It is true that there are aspects of fundamental consciousness as I have described it that would fit to a concept of a deity. For example, I have suggested that fundamental consciousness has a quality of dynamic creativity, which led to the emanation of matter, and which impels an evolutionary movement toward greater complexity and more intense consciousness within life forms. I have also suggested that the life forms generated by fundamental consciousness have a degree of separation from their source, since they are at once identical and distinct with it. These conceptions fit with Judeo-Christian ideas of creation. So why not simply ascribe these qualities to a deity?

However, from a panspiritist perspective, it seems impossible to equate fundamental consciousness to a God who is a subject, because subjects only came into existence at a fairly late stage in the evolution of the universe, when fundamental consciousness was canalized into complex material entities. Subjects evolved *from* fundamental consciousness, but fundamental consciousness itself does not possess subjective qualities. Fundamental consciousness is more like a dynamic ocean of spiritual energy and potential, which is essentially neutral and impersonal—an “it” rather than a he or she. In many of the Upanishads (1990), *brahman* is described in this way, as an impersonal, nontheistic phenomenon.

Perhaps the strongest argument for associating fundamental consciousness with God comes from reports of mystics. Many mystics do not speak in terms of an impersonal fundamental spiritual force, but in terms of a personal God, whose divine radiance pours out into the world, and with whom it is possible to attain union. The Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross spoke of a state of “spiritual marriage” with God, while Sufi mystics spoke of “abiding in God” (*baqa*). In mystical Judaism, the ultimate aim of the Kabbalah is union with the divine, or *En Sof* (literally, “without end”), where one lives in a state of *devekut*—literally translated as “cleaving to the divine.” However, it is important to remember that Christian, Sufi, and Kabbalistic mystics lived in cultures that were completely saturated with theism, where the existence of a personal God was taken for granted. It was therefore inevitable that when mystics had encounters with fundamental consciousness, they interpreted them in theistic terms. For mystics affiliated with monotheistic traditions such as Christianity or Judaism, it would have seemed logical to conflate this all-pervading spiritual force with the concept of God within their traditions. In other words, mystical

concepts of a deity were the result of an *attribution* of theistic concepts to fundamental consciousness.

One theistic conception which needs some discussion in relation to panspiritism is panentheism. In panentheism, God is essentially transcendent, and is the source of the world, but also informs and pervades it. Or from a slightly different panentheistic perspective, God can be seen as the soul of the universe, while nature (or the physical universe) is its body. Panentheism is, in fact, equivalent to the perspective described by many mystics from monotheistic traditions, where God is described as both transcendent and immanent.

There are certainly strong similarities between panentheism and panspiritism. One could justifiably see my form of panspiritism as a type of panentheism. Panentheism implies that the world both is and is not God, just as Bhedabhedā Vedānta implies that the world is both the same as and different to *brahman*. However, as noted above in relation to indigenous perspectives, to see panspiritism and panentheism as equivalent approaches would only be viable if one conceives of God as an impersonal spiritual force, without the qualities of intervention and omnipotence, which are often ascribed to a deity.

#### ALIENATION FROM FUNDAMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS

It was mentioned earlier that as life forms become more complex, there is a danger that they may become alienated from fundamental consciousness. As individuation increases, and as life forms gain more sentience and autonomy, they may develop a sense of *separation* to the world. A heightened sense of individuality may lead to the development of strong psychological boundaries, creating a sense of isolation. You could compare this to a wave forgetting that it is part of the ocean and thinking of itself as an autonomous, independent entity.

It could be argued that one of the primary goals of many of the world's spiritual traditions is to overcome this sense of alienation. (The myth of a "Fall" from a primal state of harmony is common to many of the world's cultures and these seem to refer symbolically to the development of a new kind of individuality and self-consciousness, leading to a loss of a sense of participation in, and connectedness to, the world [Taylor 2005]). Traditions such as Yoga, Taoism, Sufism, and mystical Christianity and Judaism emphasize a process of transcending separation and becoming connected or unified with an overriding or underlying spiritual principle. The traditions emphasize the need to undo the sense of separateness, so that a person's center of gravity—or sense of identity—can shift away from their own narrow personal self, and become part of a wider and deeper expanse of being, without duality or separation. In the Taoist tradition, the term *ming* is used to describe a state in which the individual

no longer experiences duality and separation, and realizes their true nature as Dao, and so becomes one with it. As the Indian Upanishads (1990) conceive it, liberation equates with the union of the individual self, the *atman*, with the spiritual force, which pervades the universe (*brahman*). Liberation means transcending the seeming separation between the self and the world, and the seeming separateness of phenomena in the world.

As noted above, in Kashmiri Shaivism, there is a similar notion that suffering arises from falsely identifying with the limited, individuated self, instead of with the essential pure consciousness of our true nature. Some individuals feel an impulse to transcend this suffering, which leads them to seek spiritual knowledge or to follow yogic practices. These have the effect of “dis-identifying” them from the separate self, and revealing their essential nature, moving toward a final goal where separation dissolves away and one experiences the radiance of pure universal consciousness (Wallis 2013). In Kashmiri Shaivism, this process of moving toward unity is called Recognition, emphasizing that our oneness with the divine is a natural state, which we have always possessed but forgotten, due to ignorance.

Plotinus’ perspective is very similar to that of Kashmiri Shaivism. Because our being ultimately emanates from the One, we feel a strong impulse to return to it, like a traveler who longs to return home. Plotinus recommends a life of self-surrender, contemplation, and simplicity, so that we can strip ourselves down to the essence of our souls. In doing so, we return to the original source that we have become alienated from. We “ascend” to the One, in a state of ecstatic union, which is both the culmination of our lives and a recovery of our most primal state (Marshall 2019).

In this way, spiritual traditions and practices may perform an important role in correcting an imbalance (or aberrational development) that can easily occur in the process of increasing individuation. They help individual life forms to retain individuality and autonomy and at the same time experience a sense of connection to and participation in fundamental consciousness. In terms of the metaphor used earlier, you could compare this to a wave possessing its own individual identity at the same time as sensing its union with the whole ocean.

## CONCLUSION

One area I do not have space to examine fully here is the explanatory power of panspiritism. In order to be viable, a metaphysical framework has to have qualities of inclusivity and explanatory power. It has to offer a sound structure through which human experience and the nature of reality can be coherently interpreted, understood, and interrelated. Whereas the explanatory power of materialism is inadequate (Kelly et al. 2007; Taylor 2018), contemporary panspiritism is extremely inclusive and has a great deal of explanatory power. In addition to possibly contributing to the



understanding of phenomena such as the nature of consciousness, and the relationship between mind and matter, panspiritism has explanatory potential in areas such as evolution, altruism, the influence of the mind over the body, and psi experiences (see Taylor 2018 for more details).

Of course, contemporary panspiritism is not without its problems. I have mentioned the generation problem of how matter arises out of fundamental consciousness, and the canalization problem of how cells canalize fundamental consciousness. One might argue that I am simply reversing the hard problem: that is, the mystery of how consciousness might arise from matter is replaced by the mystery of how matter might arise out of consciousness. But I do not think that these problems are any more serious—or any more intractable than—the similar combination problem of panpsychism and the fragmentation problem of idealism or cosmopsychism.

It seems that every approach has to invoke some form of miracle. Materialism has the miracles of consciousness arising at a certain point in evolution, and out of individual brains; panpsychism has the miracle of how conscious particles combine to produce larger conscious entities; idealism and cosmopsychism have the miracle of how material forms and conscious entities arise out of mind at large, or universal consciousness; and panspiritism has the miracles of how matter emerges from fundamental consciousness, and how cells transmit fundamental consciousness into individual beings.

In my view, the problems of panspiritism do not necessarily have remain miracles. Unlike the hard problem, they are not in principle insoluble. Perhaps now—after the longstanding failure to explain consciousness in purely neurological terms—researchers should begin to investigate consciousness from the standpoint of transmission instead of production. Perhaps some theories and findings of quantum physics may support the notion of matter emerging from fundamental consciousness.<sup>1</sup>

Since every approach in the philosophy of mind (including materialism) has roughly equivalent problems (or has to invoke roughly improbable miracles), we should perhaps assess the viability of the approaches by other criteria, such as internal coherence and consistency, inclusivity, and explanatory potential. In these terms, I believe that panspiritism is a very viable and fruitful approach. A wide range of different issues can be coherently viewed through a panspiritist perspective, and a wide range of problematic phenomena can be understood and explained. I believe that such an approach—which has, after all, been prominent throughout human history—deserves to be influential.

As a final factor, I believe that one of the main attractions of panspiritism lies in the *value* it places on all phenomena. Materialism denies the reality of mind, and at the other extreme, some forms of idealism deny the substantiality—and even the reality—of matter. However,

panspiritism sees both mind and matter as real and valuable, since both are seen as expressions of fundamental consciousness. Whereas materialism leads to a vision of the world as an inert, soulless machine, and idealism may lead to a vision of the world as a mental projection or mirage, panspiritism sees the world as a vibrant, interconnected whole.

Perhaps most importantly, in panspiritism, human beings are not seen as individuated and separate biological machines, but as manifestations of the same essential consciousness. At the most fundamental level, we share the same being, and are therefore not really separate or distinct from one another. Neither are we separate or distinct from other living beings, the natural world, or the whole universe itself. We are pervaded with consciousness, and our own being partakes of the fundamental consciousness, which gave rise to the universe.

## NOTE

1. The relationship between panspiritism and quantum physics is too large an area to investigate here, but see Taylor (2018) for further discussion.

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