

Universal Consciousness as the Ground of Logic

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1. Introduction

Shortly after the Second World War, Aldous Huxley published a book defending what he called ›the perennial philosophy,‹ a metaphysical theory he argued had arisen 2,500 years earlier and had subsequently cropped up in many and varied cultures across the globe.¹ According to Huxley, the view did not emerge from abstract philosophical speculation but because its truth came to be directly known to various individuals whilst in altered states of consciousness, in many cases the result of intense meditative training.

What was the content of this view? In standard analytic philosophy of mind, we distinguish between the *subject* of a given experience and the *phenomenal qualities* which characterise what it's like to have that experience. In an experience of pain, for example, there is the thing which feels the pain (e.g. me) and there is the qualitative character of how the pain feels; the former is the subject of the experience, the latter is its phenomenal quality. In the altered states of consciousness discussed by Huxley, however, this division apparently collapses resulting in a state of pure or ›universal‹ consciousness: consciousness unencumbered by phenomenal qualities. More dramatically, people who achieve these states of consciousness claim that it becomes apparent to them, from the perspective of the altered state of consciousness, that universal consciousness is the backdrop to all individual conscious experiences, and hence that in a significant sense universal consciousness is the ultimate nature of each and every conscious mind. This realization allegedly undermines ordinary understanding of the distinctions between different people and leads to a conviction that in some deep sense ›we are all one‹.

This is not a view that has been explored a great deal in the context of analytic philosophy, which tends to proceed by building coldblooded rational arguments for a given position, rather than by intuiting its truth via altered states of consciousness. However, Miri Albahari has recently presented just such a coldblooded defence of the perennial philosophy, arguing that it offers a better solution to the problem of consciousness than rival theories.² I am fascinated, but ultimately unconvinced, by her argument. I would like here

¹ Huxley 1945.

² Albahari 2020.

to consider another coldblooded argument for the perennial philosophy, or something like it, rooted in its potential to account in a satisfying way for the metaphysics and epistemology of logical truth.

2. Logic and its Place in Nature

I take it for granted that empirical data, by which I mean the data of normal sensory observation and experience, should inform our best guess at what reality is like. But are there any other sources of data that must be taken into account when doing metaphysics? Methodological naturalists say no: once you've accounted for all of the data of observation and experiment, in the most theoretically satisfying way possible, your job as a metaphysician is done. I disagree. I have previously argued that there is at least one other datum that must be accounted for in addition to the data of third-person observation and experiment, namely, the reality of consciousness.³ Nothing is more evident than the existence of one's feelings and experiences. If a supposedly complete theory of reality can account for all of the data observation and experiment but cannot account for the reality of consciousness, that theory is thereby falsified.

Are there any other non-empirical data, in addition to the reality of consciousness? I think there is at least one more, one which arises from the need to account for the truth of the laws of logic and for our epistemological relationship with them. For the sake of simplicity I will mainly focus on the law of non-contradiction (LNC), which I will take to be the law that there aren't, and cannot be, any contradictory states of affairs. This law is known with a kind of certainty roughly similar to the certainty with which I know that my own feelings exist. One can perhaps debate whether our knowledge of LNC is more or less certain than our knowledge of the reality of consciousness, but it is clear that both are known with much greater justification than anything known on the basis of the senses. The sceptical doubts that terrorise our empirical knowledge of reality threaten to a much lesser degree, if at all, our knowledge of basic logical laws.⁴

What implications does this have for the task of metaphysics? In my earlier work, I expressed the datum of consciousness as a constraint on metaphysical

³ Goff 2017, Goff 2020.

⁴ This is of course not entirely uncontentious, and there are some philosophers happy to deny the law of non-contradiction (Priest 2000), just as there are philosophers happy to deny the reality of consciousness (Frankish 2016). I don't have an argument either for the truth of LNC or for the reality of consciousness. Metaphysical enquiry has to start somewhere, and the reality of consciousness and the truth of LNC seem to me the most solid starting points we have.

enquiry, something I called ›the consciousness constraint.‹ Roughly this is the constraint on the metaphysician to account for consciousness in her overall theory of reality. The metaphysical implications of logic can similarly be expressed as a kind of constraint, which we can call ›the logic constraint.‹ The logic constraint has two aspects, one metaphysical and one epistemological:

The Logic Constraint

1. *The Metaphysical Aspect*—The metaphysician is obliged to postulate entities sufficient to ground the truth of the laws of logic.
2. *The Epistemological Aspect*—The metaphysician is obliged to account for our knowledge of the laws of logic.

I call the second aspect ›epistemological‹ because it arises from the fact that we know about logical laws (and perhaps also, as I will presently discuss, from more specific facts about the *kind of knowledge* we have of logical laws). But this aspect of the constraint is also metaphysical in the sense that it imposes demands on one's overall theory of reality. In the epistemological aspect of the logic constraint, facts about our knowledge of logic are taken as data that must be accounted for.

This source of metaphysical data has been much neglected in recent philosophy, and is pretty much entirely unknown by the scientific community more broadly. To be a fair, there is much focus, at least in philosophy, on the need to account for the metaphysics and epistemology of mathematical truth, which raises very similar issues. However, it is an open question whether, in principle, mathematical discourse could be dispensed with, which renders plausible a variety of anti-realist theories of mathematical truth.⁵ It is much less plausible that logical discourse can be dispensed with, making it all the more pressing to account for the place of logic in reality.

I suspect that the neglect of this topic is due to a fairly widespread intuition in modern times that the truths of logic, such as LNC, are somehow ›trivial‹ or not really about the world. We find this in Hume's claim that a priori truths are mere ›relations between ideas‹ and the logical positivists' view that a priori truths are grounded in linguistic conventions or are ›true in virtue of meaning.‹ However, these days, this kind of view is largely rejected by metaphysicians.⁶ Linguistic conventions determine the *meaning* of a sentence, but whether or

5 Hartry Field (1980), for example, tries to construe Newtonian mechanics without reference to abstract entities.

6 Sider 2012; Hale 2013: Ch. 5.

not that sentence is *true* is determined by the nature of reality. When I say, ›There are no square circles anywhere in the universe‹, this is no less a claim about reality than when I say, ›There are no unicorns.‹

I'm inclined to think that the neglect of both the logic constraint and the consciousness constraint arise from a common source, namely the scientific intellectual culture that has emerged in the last two hundred of so years, inspired by the great successes of the physical sciences. There is an irony here in that the physical sciences have been so successful precisely because they have always been aimed at a limited task: roughly, modelling the behaviour of matter. But the incredible technology that such knowledge has produced has a visceral effect on one's metaphysical yearnings, and it's hard not to get carried away and to surrender all of one's ontological faith to the thing that has produced such wonders. Nonetheless, the realities of consciousness and logical truth are so evident that I feel confident that at some point society will emerge from this scientific phase of history and return to the task of formulating a theory able to account not only for what we can see with our eyes but also for what we know through intuition (logic) and introspection (consciousness).

3. The Hard Problem of Logic

There are extremely deep philosophical difficulties raised by the logic constraint, perhaps even harder than those raised by the consciousness constraint. One core difficulty is that there are considerations pushing in opposite directions: on the one hand there is pressure to put the ground of LNC outside of the contingent universe, and on the other hand pressure to put the ground of LNC inside of the contingent universe. Let me explain.

With regards to the metaphysical aspect of the logic constraint, there is strong pressure to hold that the ground of LNC is outside of the contingent universe. For suppose we grounded LNC in some contingent entity or collection of entities *E*. Given that *E* is contingent, there will be at least one possible world, call it *W*, in which *E* fails to exist. But if the ground of LNC does not exist in *W*, then presumably LNC will not be true in *W*. This is not a welcome result, as LNC is, I will assume, true in all possible worlds. We can put this argument as follows:

Argument for the Non-Contingency of the Ground of LNC

1. If the ground of LNC is contingent, then there will be some possible world in which it fails to exist.

2. If there is a possible world in which the ground of LNC fails to exist, then there will be a possible world in which LNC is not true.
3. There is no possible world in which LNC is not true.
4. Therefore, the ground of LNC is not contingent.

This argument might naturally lead one to a Platonic view according to which the ground of LNC is an abstract object which necessarily co-exists with any possible universe.

However, there are also pressures in the other direction. Whether or not the laws of logic have implications for a Platonic realm, they certainly have implications for the physical world of space and time. Our universe is constrained not only by the laws of physics but also by the laws of logic. Suppose I know that two objects are a light year apart from each other. Assuming the truth of special relativity, I can infer that a signal cannot possibly get from one object to another in less than year. This is a way in which the laws of physics constrain what can possibly happen in this universe: things cannot travel faster than light. Similarly, if I know that Peter is in pain, I can infer that it's not the case that he is not in pain. This is a way in which the laws of logic constrain what can happen in our universe: there cannot be contradictory states of affairs. Of course, there is a crucial difference between the two cases. The laws of physics hold only in *this universe* whilst the laws of logic hold in *every possible universe*. But the fact that the laws of logic have greater modal scope than the laws of physics does not imply a dissimilarity between physical and logical laws in so far as they apply to this universe.

Putting the ground of LNC in the Platonic realm makes it hard to account for the constraining influence of logic on the physical universe. How exactly does the ›hand of logic‹ reach out from beyond space and time in order to ensure that there are no contradictory states of affairs? One possibility is to build the ground of LNC into the essential nature of universals, and then to account for the impact on the physical world in terms of the fact that universals are instantiated in the physical world. Thus, the Platonist could hold that it's in the essential nature of universals to resist being instantiated in a contradictory manner, e.g. it's in the nature of pain to resist being instantiated and also not instantiated by the same individual. However, this is a somewhat disunified view, and we would be left wanting to know why all universals share this essential feature. One possible way around this is to hold that LNC is grounded in the essential nature of the instantiation relation itself, i.e. the instantiation relation R is essentially such that, for any property P and any given individual I , R cannot both relate and not relate P to I .

Whether or not Platonism can account for the metaphysical aspect of the logic constraint, the real problems with the view arise from the epistemological aspect. There is a related and much discussed difficulty for the mathematical Platonist. If numbers are abstract objects outside of space and time, how on earth do we physical creatures get to know about them? The epistemological challenge raised by the logic constraint is a little bit less straightforward: my starting point is not that there are *logical entities*, analogous to mathematical entities like numbers and sets, such that we need to account for how we know about those entities. Still, there's clearly still a very deep difficulty accounting for our knowledge of logical truths, especially if the ground of those truths exists outside of space and time and hence is not something we have empirical access to. We could of course observe that LNC holds in *our* universe, in something like the way we observe that the laws of physics hold in our universe. But it's hard to see how we could know that LNC holds in all possible worlds without having some kind of access to nature of the entity that explains why LNC is necessarily true. And how could we know the nature of that entity if it exists outside of space and time? Thus, by a slightly more scenic route, we have arrived back at essentially the same epistemological difficulty we find in the mathematical case.

This is a familiar challenge, at least in its mathematical guise, and I will not here trawl through all of the solutions which Platonists have offered in response. However, I would like to emphasise a particular aspect of the epistemological challenge, one that I think holds in both the mathematical and the logical case and which has not been focused on a great deal in recent philosophy. It seems to me incumbent on metaphysicians not only to account for the bare fact that we know that LNC is true, but also for the specific form of this knowledge. As already remarked, my knowledge of logical laws, or at least basic ones like LNC, comes with a much greater degree of certainty than my knowledge of empirical facts. It's very easy to entertain the skeptical hypothesis that I am in the Matrix being deceived by the evil computers to think there's a table in front of me when in fact the world I seem to experience does not exist. It is much harder to entertain the hypothesis that the evil computers are making me think that LNC holds when in fact it doesn't. And this psychological difficulty seems to reflect the different kinds of justification that hold in these cases. It is just *obvious* to me, upon reflection—I can, as it were, *just see*—that there couldn't possibly be a contradictory state of affairs, in such a way that the truth of LNC cannot rationally be doubted. As Descartes put it, I have a clear and distinct perception of the truth of LNC.

To satisfy the epistemological aspect of the logic constraint we must account not only for the fact that we know LNC but the fact that we know it

through a clear and distinct perception of its truth. Acknowledging this casts doubts on the adequacy of a fairly popular way of accounting for our knowledge of logic (and mathematics) in terms of its indispensability for scientific theorising.⁷ We can perhaps imagine a race of alien creatures, call them ›the Quineans‹, who are able to represent the truths of logic and mathematics but do not have clear and distinct perceptions of their truth. The Quineans may find out that scientific enquiry is possible only on the assumption that certain logical and mathematical propositions are true, and, in virtue of their knowledge of this fact, they may come to have justification for believing those logical and mathematical propositions.

If those logical and mathematical propositions are indeed true, then the Quineans may count as knowing them. But the Quineans' knowledge of logic and maths is very different from our own. They would find it very easy to entertain skeptical doubts concerning LNC and basic mathematical truths like $2+2=4$.⁸ To be sure, such skeptical doubts would be sweeping and radical, threatening the foundations of their empirical picture of reality. But, for Quineans, it would be as easy to entertain logical doubts as it is for us to entertain empirical doubts. The reason we find it much harder to doubt LNC, for example by entertaining the possibility that there are square circles, is that it is directly apparent to us that LNC must be true and hence that a square circle could never be. The explanation of logical knowledge outlined above may be adequate to account for the epistemological situation of the Quineans but it cannot fully account for our situation.

The ground of LNC, by definition, explains the truth of LNC. It follows that if one understood the essential nature of the ground of LNC, and one had sufficient powers of rational reflection, one could thereby come to know the truth of LNC. Compare: the chemical properties of H_2O molecules explain the fact that water boils at 100 degrees, and by understanding the chemistry one can come to see that water, given its essential nature, must have this boiling point.⁹ This all suggests a natural way of accounting for our knowledge of LNC. On the view I have in mind, we are somehow acquainted with the essential nature of the ground of LNC, in something like the way we are acquainted with the

7 Quine 1980; Putnam 2012.

8 Presumably, like us, the Quineans wouldn't be able to imagine scenarios in which there are square circles or in which $2+2=5$. But we cannot imagine four-dimensional objects and this does not convince us that such things are impossible. Merely being unable to imagine that P is true is not sufficient for a clear and distinct perception that P is false.

9 I am here assuming that the causal powers of H_2O molecules are part of their essential nature. On a contingentist view of laws, we would also have to know the laws in order to make such a deduction.

essential nature of our own conscious states, and in virtue of this acquaintance the truth of LNC is rendered apparent to us. In other words, I am directly in contact with the thing that grounds the truth of LNC, and I am thereby directly aware that LNC must be true.

The problem is that it is difficult to square this explanation with Platonism. I am acquainted with my conscious states in virtue of the fact that my mind is constituted of those states. How could I possibly bear this same relationship to something outside of space and time? How can we account for the fact that, at some point in evolutionary history, creatures of flesh and blood somehow became hooked up in an acquaintance relationship with something outside of the physical universe?

What we need is something in between the Platonic heaven that Plato pointed towards and the physical world that was Aristotle's focus. We need an entity that transcends the physical universe and yet is intimately involved with it. Universal consciousness, I will suggest, fits the bill.

4. Universal Consciousness

Albahari explains the relationship between ordinary consciousness and universal consciousness by means of a thought experiment involving a >cognisensory deprivation tank.< Upon immersion, one is to imagine, all of the phenomenal qualities of one's consciousness are snuffed out one by one: not only the phenomenal qualities involved in sensory experiences, but also those involved in conscious thoughts and emotions. Consciousness ceases not only to represent, but to instantiate any phenomenal character whatsoever. It might be assumed that the determinate of consciousness could not exist without having some determinate phenomenal character, just as the determinate *shape* could not be instantiated without the instantiation of some specific determinate of that determinate, such as *sphericity*. Albahari acknowledges that this possibility cannot be ruled out a priori. However, it is also possible that with the removal of all of its qualities, consciousness itself—pure awareness—remains. This is what is meant by >universal consciousness<: consciousness stripped of phenomenal qualities.

Thus, whilst the relationship between universal consciousness and specific conscious minds is something like the relationship between a lump of clay and individual figures formed from that lump, this is a peculiar kind of clay that can exist without forming any shape at all. And there is another respect in which the clay analogy fails: whilst a hunk of clay that forms a specific cube at a given time must be distinct from the hunk of clay that forms a specific sphere

at the same time, the universal consciousness from which my mind formed is numerically identical to the universal consciousness from which your mind—and every other mind—is formed.

One might worry that this commits us to contradiction. Suppose we have two individuals, one of which feels pleasure but not pain, the other of which feels pain but no pleasure. The view currently under consideration seems to entail that: (A) universal consciousness feels pleasure but no pain, and (B) universal consciousness feels pain but no pleasure. This would clearly be incoherent. But, as I understand it, the view is not that universal consciousness is itself a subject that instantiates phenomenal properties. The view is rather that distinct subjects *arise* from universal consciousness (more on this in a moment).

We have not so far discussed another aspect of the perennial philosophy, one that might seem to put in the shade the theses so far discussed. Proponents of the perennial philosophy claim that not only each mind, but all of reality, is formed of universal consciousness. In a physicalist or dualist worldview, this is a radical claim. But in a panpsychist world view, according to which all fundamental entities are conscious subjects, this final thesis of the perennial philosophy follows trivially from the others. If each conscious subject is formed of universal consciousness, and each fundamental entity is a conscious subject, it of course follows that each fundamental entity is formed of universal consciousness. All aspects of the perennial philosophy will be essential to my account of logic, and hence I will present the resulting view as a form of panpsychism. I don't take this to be a disadvantage of the view. Panpsychism is a view that has considerable independent support as one of the most promising solutions to the problem of consciousness; and, as I have argued elsewhere, it is no less parsimonious than any other theory of fundamental reality.¹⁰

I will not here get into the details of Albahari's argument, but the conclusion of that argument is more radical still. Ultimately, Albahari defends the thesis that fundamental reality is *exhausted* by universal consciousness: that everything that exists is somehow grounded in universal consciousness. This commitment brings considerable challenges. It is, as Albahari acknowledges, hard to understand how many distinct subjects with their many and varied phenomenal properties might emerge from the single and undifferentiated universal consciousness. This is the ›Problem of the One and the Many‹ that Albahari wrestles with in her work, as did Parmenides, Plotinus, Spinoza and Schelling before her.

One easy way to avoid the Problem of the One and the Many altogether is to think of the relationship between universal consciousness and a specific

10 Goff 2017, Goff 2019.

conscious mind as *partial grounding*, rather than complete grounding. In complete grounding relationships, at least as I think of them, the grounded entity is nothing over and above its ground; a party, for example is nothing over and above the fact that people are partying. The problem is that it's hard to see how the totality of experiential facts, concerning a vast number of subjects instantiating an unfathomable variety of rich and complex phenomenal characters, could be nothing over and above the fact there is a single, undifferentiated form of consciousness. Albahari does a fantastic job of trying to square this circle, but at the end of the day it seems to me plainly unintelligible.

On an alternative model, my conscious mind is *partly* grounded in universal consciousness—universal consciousness is an essential constituent of my conscious mind—but the fact that universal consciousness is formed into this specific conscious mind with this specific phenomenal character is something over and above the reality of universal consciousness per se. Subject arise, we might suppose, from the *interaction* of universal consciousness with discrete bundles of phenomenal properties. Thus, my mind is not wholly identical with universal consciousness, but rather contains it as a metaphysical constituent.

This position aims to respect both the claims of mystics and the Cartesian certainty each of us has of the reality of one's own mind. Perhaps some, probably including Albahari herself, will take this to be inconsistent with careful analysis of the claims of those who have directly experienced universal consciousness. But such people were not aiming to do analytic metaphysics in writing about the truths they directly experienced, and this gives us some flexibility in interpreting these claims. At any rate, I will aim to justify the view I am articulating not on the basis of the testimony of mystics, although such support would be welcome too, but on the basis of its potential to account for the truths of logic.

What is the causal basis for a specific conscious mind coming to be formed out of universal consciousness? This question cannot be answered independently of the ongoing empirical and theoretical task of working out an adequate panpsychist theory. On a constitutive panpsychist theory, my mind is nothing over and above micro-level conscious subjects. On an emergentist version, there may be specific laws that result in new macro-level subject being formed of universal consciousness. Perhaps micro-level subjects flit in and out of being or perhaps there are a number of basic subjects that have existed since the beginning of time. Whatever the standard panpsychist says about the conditions sufficient for the creation of a new subject, the proponent of universal consciousness simply adds that in such conditions a subject is formed from universal consciousness. The account of logic I will defend below will be independent of these details.

5. The Ground of Logic

How can the metaphysical theory outlined in the previous section account for the truths of logic? Crucially, we need to interpret it as a claim about all of modal space. On this view, universal consciousness is a necessarily existent entity, and all possible contingent entities are conscious subjects formed of, and thereby partially constituted by, universal consciousness. With this stipulated, we now have an entity—universal consciousness—well-placed to be the ground of logical laws. On the one hand, universal consciousness exists necessarily, and hence can ground the necessary truth of logical laws. On the other hand, it is intimately related to contingent entities, and hence is in a good position to account for the intimate relationship the truths of logic bear to the physical universe, both by constraining it and by becoming known to certain creatures.

To account for the metaphysical aspect of the logic constraint, we need simply to posit that universal consciousness has an essentially logical nature, e.g. is essentially such as to not tolerate being formed into contradictory states of affairs. This is just the nature of the clay out of which concrete entities are formed. This postulation entails, given that all possible states of affairs are formed from universal consciousness, that LNC holds in all possible worlds.

What about the epistemological aspect of the logic constraint? I want to propose that a plausible model of the epistemology of consciousness can be applied in this context. Before introducing this model, we need to bring in some technical terms. Many robust realists about consciousness hold that a subject necessarily stands in a relation of direct, pre-conceptual awareness to the phenomenal qualities of its experiences, a relation we can call ›acquaintance.‹ David Chalmers has outlined in great detail how we can account for our special epistemological relationship with phenomenal qualities in terms of the acquaintance relationship.¹¹ Whilst all creatures are acquainted with their phenomenal qualities, not all creatures are able to use that acquaintance relationship to attend to them and think about them. A mature human is able to form what Chalmers calls a ›direct phenomenal thought‹, a thought in which one attends to a phenomenal quality and thinks the thought ›I am feeling *like that*‹, where the reference of ›*like that*‹ is determined wholly by the act of attending to the phenomenal quality itself. In direct phenomenal thought, according to Chalmers, the acquaintance relation the subject bears to the phenomenal quality being thought about plays a special justificatory role, enabling direct and certain knowledge of the truth of what is thought.

11 Chalmers 2003. I argue for the acquaintance relation in Goff 2015 and Goff 2017: Ch. 5.

How can this model account for our knowledge of logic? This requires holding that universal consciousness is necessarily acquainted with its own logical nature, and that each conscious mind, being partly constituted of universal consciousness, inherits the acquaintance universal consciousness has with its logical nature. Of course, not all conscious creatures will be able to make use of this acquaintance, just as not all creatures can make use of their acquaintance with phenomenal qualities. But for creatures who have evolved cognitive resources that enable them to entertain a logical truth, such as $\sim(P\&\sim P)$, their acquaintance with the logical nature of universal consciousness facilitates, we can suppose, a clear and distinct grasp of its necessary truth. Just as our acquaintance with our phenomenal qualities grounds and justifies direct phenomenal thought, so our acquaintance with universal consciousness grounds and justifies clear and distinct perception.

Leibniz argued that whilst we are not born with knowledge of necessary truths ›[w]hat is innate is what might be called the potential knowledge of them, as the veins of the marble outline a shape that is in the marble before they are uncovered by the sculptor.‹¹² What the above model provides is a way of *explaining* this potential rather than leaving it as brute fact or divinely endowed. Moreover, this explanation fits well with a plausible theory of our knowledge of consciousness, providing a unified account of the justification of those aspects of human knowledge which involve rational certainty.

In summary, the postulation of universal consciousness allows for a simple and elegant theory of the metaphysics and epistemology of logical truth, one that is internally unified and fits well with a plausible theory of knowledge in another domain.

6. Is this Pan(en)theism?

Does the view I have just defended count as a form of pantheism or panentheism? We can split this question into two:

1. Is universal consciousness God?
2. Is the relationship that obtains between universal consciousness and the universe a form of the relationship the pan(en)theist takes to hold between God and the universe?

Question 1 calls out for a definition of God, or at least an account of the meaning of the term ›God‹. Most philosophers assume that the meaning of ›God‹ is

¹² Leibniz 1765/1996, Bk 1, Ch. 1-2.

fixed *descriptively*. Benedikt Paul Göcke defines God as the entity which has the following characteristics: (A) it is the most fundamental entity, and (B) it is worthy of worship.¹³ Mark Johnston defines God as ›the highest one.‹¹⁴ An alternative to descriptivism is the view that the meaning of ›God‹ is fixed by *ostension*, i.e. via an act, or acts, of *pointing to* (in a broad sense of that term) a particular entity. This would put ›God‹ in the same broad semantic category as proper names, at least according to the account of proper names made popular by Saul Kripke.¹⁵ On this view, we fix the meaning of a proper name like ›William Shakespeare‹ not by description by an initial act of ostension: parents declare that *this child* is to be named ›William Shakespeare‹. The name is then passed on through the linguistic community, thereafter continuing to refer to Shakespeare in virtue of its causal relationship with this initial act of ostension.

Johnston rejects this view of the meaning of ›God‹ as follows:

In the scriptures, no one actually turns up and says, ›I am to be called by the name »God«. No one says anything like, ›I hereby use introduce *the name* ›God‹ as the name of THIS impressive being.‹ There is no original dubbing of someone or something as »God,« a dubbing that we can now fall back on.¹⁶

This is, however, a possibility that both Gauke and Johnston overlook: the meaning of ›God‹ might be fixed with reference to *religious experience*. Mystics report of a wondrous reality that is made manifest to them in certain altered states of consciousness. Although mystical experiences are relatively rare, intimations of the divine are a common motivation for many, perhaps most, religious believers. Let us refer to both mystical experiences and divine intimations collectively as ›religious experiences.‹ I propose defining ›God‹ as *that which is known in veridical religious experiences*, if indeed there are any. The advantage of this view is that it ties the meaning of ›God‹ to the fundamental motivations of real-world religious practice. Prophets, mystics and ordinary believers believe not because of abstract philosophical arguments, but because of their sense of the divine.

If we understand the term ›God‹ in this way, then whether or not universal consciousness is God will depend on whether or not universal consciousness is the object of mystical experiences. Whether or not this is the case cannot be settled, at least not straightforwardly, by examining the *beliefs* about God that are held by various religions. The fact that, say, Christians believe in a personal God is not inconsistent with universal consciousness being the object

13 Göcke 2017.

14 Johnston 2009.

15 Kripke 1980.

16 Johnston 2009: 6.

of Christian religious experiences. We must distinguish the accuracy conditions of the religious experiences themselves, from the truth-conditions of beliefs concerning the object of those experiences. Ancient Greeks had veridical experiences of water whilst mistakenly believing that water is a fundamental element. Similarly, it could be that Christians have veridical experiences of universal consciousness whilst mistakenly believing that universal consciousness is a kind of person.

Those who accept the reality of universal consciousness, at least in part, on the testimony of mystics will no doubt endorse an identity between the object of religious experience and universal consciousness. However, the cold-blooded motivations for universal consciousness I have outlined in this paper do not depend on the testimony of mystics, and hence it is in principle possible to accept my conclusion whilst taking all religious experiences to be delusions. In this case, it will simply be a coincidence that some of these delusions lead people to a correct view of reality, analogous to my dreaming my auntie is visiting when in fact, unbeknownst to me, she is.

Let us turn now to question (2). Suppose we do identify universal consciousness with God. What then is the relationship between God and the physical universe? Pantheists believe that the universe is identical with God. Panentheists believe that the universe is *in* God, in the sense that the universe is an aspect of God but God's nature is not exhausted by the physical universe. In fact, neither of these proposals captures the relationship universal consciousness bears to the physical universe on the view I outlined above. My proposal is that universal consciousness *partly constitutes* matter: that each individual entity is grounded in a relationship between universal consciousness and a bundle of phenomenal properties. Indeed, it is no part of the view I have defended that the physical universe was brought into being by universal consciousness. The view is compatible with the origins of the physical universe being a brute fact.

On this view, God/universal consciousness is an aspect of the physical universe, but the nature of the physical universe is not exhausted by God/universal consciousness: the physical universe is also constituted of phenomenal properties, which are not aspects of God. This is the converse of the panentheistic position: God is in the universe but the universe is not in God. We might call this view ›theosenpanism‹, if that word were not too cumbersome.

7. Conclusion

The view I outlined above may sound peculiar and extravagant. This is not surprising, as the relationship between logic and physical reality is peculiar.

How on earth do these laws manage to enforce their governance in all possible worlds? How on earth does a physical human being get to know the laws that govern all of modal space just by sitting in an armchair and thinking? From the perspective of a methodological naturalist, these facts seem impossible to explain.

But methodological naturalism is a historical idiosyncrasy, which arises from an over-enthusiasm for physical science. The realities of logical truth and logical knowledge are hard data, and we should be prepared to spend ontological dollars accounting for them. Our scientific culture renders us happy to spend to account for empirical data but miserly when it comes to non-empirical data (in so far as these are acknowledged at all). No doubt the cultural associations of ›new age‹ talk of universal consciousness, in contrast to the academic prestige associated with Platonism, also plays a role here in discouraging the perennial philosophy from being taken seriously.

In fact, the postulation of universal consciousness provides an explanation of logical phenomena which is surprisingly simple and elegant. We should take this possibility very seriously indeed.¹⁷

8. References

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