Sprigge's Ontology of Consciousness

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Abstract
Timothy Sprigge advanced an original synthesis of panpsychism and absolute idealism. He argued that consciousness is an irreducible, subjective reality that is only grasped by an introspective, phenomenological approach and constructed his ontology from what is revealed in the phenomenology. In defending the unique place of metaphysics in the pursuit of truth, he claimed that scientific investigation can never discover the essence of consciousness since it can only provide descriptions of structure and function in what we normally think of as physical existence. In this paper I present a critical evaluation of Sprigge's view focusing in particular on his conception of the nature of scientific inquiry vis-à-vis the ambitious project of his metaphysics. I argue that a naturalistic metaphysics provides a more adequate approach to the relation between science and metaphysics.

1. Introduction to Sprigge's Philosophy

Timothy Sprigge arrived at a solution to the problem of consciousness that became the basis for a metaphysical system in the grand style of Spinoza, Hegel, Bradley and Whitehead. He said he came to his view by a transformation of his philosophical outlook, one that enabled him to escape from a variety of absurdities into which he had been led by premises he did not think to question.[1] By the early 1970s he had been influenced by the most respected figures in British philosophy, Bertrand Russell, G. E. Moore and A. J. Ayer, but it was the serious study of the American philosophers, George Santayana and William James, who provided a more intellectually satisfying answer to his questions, and after a long period of gestation, the impact of Spinoza and Bradley put the final touches to his system. This transformation is much in evidence from the publication of his first book *Facts, Words and Beliefs* (1970) to *Santayana* (1974) and then with the publication of his *magnum opus*, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (1983). In short, Sprigge traded the relative security and respectability of mainstream analytical philosophy for what he

[1] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness' in *The Ontological Turn*, edited by M. S. Gram and E. D. Klemke (Iowa City: Iowa University Press, 1974), 115. Also see 'Orientations', *Philosophical Writings* **2** (1996), 98–100.

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knew would be widely perceived as a retreat into soft-minded, muddle-headed metaphysics.

Sprigge began his career at the University of Cambridge where he worked with R. T. H. Redpath and then A. J. Ayer at University College, London. He became Lecturer and then Reader in philosophy at the School of English and American Studies at the University of Sussex, Regis Professor of Logic and Metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh and finally Emeritus Fellow retiring in Edinburgh and then Lewes, Sussex. It was in this final period that he produced three studies of the same large scale as the Victorian novels he used to read, *James and Bradley* (1993), *The God of Metaphysics* (2006) and *The Phenomenology of Thought* (unfinished). He always preferred the sustained chain of thought in book-length monographs to journal articles and claimed he seldom read the latter in spite of the fact that he himself contributed over a hundred articles and book chapters in the course of his career. In addition to his scholarly work on Spinoza, Bentham, James, Royce, Santayana, Bradley and Whitehead, and the construction of his own original system of metaphysics he called 'panpsychistic absolute idealism', Sprigge also produced important work in utilitarian ethics and was a leading figure in the animal rights movement in Britain.

In this paper I will examine the main features and motivating factors in Sprigge's view of consciousness, explain some of the metaphysics he constructed from his initial discovery and then offer a critical evaluation of the results. His philosophy is filled with creative connections between the thinkers he absorbed, unique insights into how these positions form a consistent whole and innovative arguments for the views advanced, but as with any system of philosophy, there are problems that need to be clearly exposed and debated.[2] Enthusiasm is no homage to genius.

2. The Irreducibility of Consciousness

W. V. Quine once said of philosophical curiosities about which he was in no position to cope: 'Closer to home, there are the mysteries of the mechanism of memory; also of consciousness – I am even at a loss for a satisfactory statement of what consciousness is, though nothing is

[2] For a critical evaluation of Sprigge's thought, see P. Basile and L. McHenry (eds), *Consciousness, Reality and Value: Essays in Honour of T. L. S. Sprigge* (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2007).

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more familiar'.[3] Regarding nothing more familiar, Sprigge claimed that he and 'Thomas Nagel offered, independently of each other, a definition of consciousness which amounts to saying that an individual is conscious at a certain time if there is an answer to the question what it was like being him, her, or it, at that time'.[4] In fact he had published this view three years before[5] Nagel's highly influential article, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?'[6] He said that this essentially non-physical view of consciousness had been obvious to him since he had been engaged in serious philosophy and believed it long before he first used it in print.[7] As Sprigge put it in a slightly more refined manner: 'An individual's state of consciousness at any moment is that concerning the character of which one is wondering if one asks oneself what it is like to be them just then'.[8] This is obviously not an epistemological matter of our attempt to know what it is like to be some individual or creature, nor is an issue of how much of one's self-consciousness one currently grasps, but rather an ontological matter concerning the reality of subjective experience. In what seems like a direct reply to Quine, Sprigge claimed that 'Whenever the question 'What is consciousness' is asked, as though consciousness were something very mysterious, one can be sure that the treatment of the subject is likely to be unsatisfactory. For consciousness is the most familiar of realities and its nature should be easier to grasp than is the nature of anything else'.[9] Should there be a lack of clarity in this formulation, Sprigge claimed one gets nearer to such a statement of the essence of consciousness as that in which being is one with its own non-discursive

[3] W. V. Quine, *Quine in Dialogue*, edited by D. Føllesdal and D. Quine (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 28.

[4] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Importance of Subjectivity: An Inaugural Lecture', *Inquiry* **25** (1982), 146.

[5] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Final Causes', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* **71** (1971), 166–8.

[6] T. Nagel, 'What Is It Like to Be a Bat?', *Philosophical Review* **83** (1974), 435–50. See also Nagel's acknowledgement to Sprigge in *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15n. Nagel also acknowledges in the same note that B. A. Farrell had asked in 1950 what it would be like to be a bat but dismissed the difficulty for materialism.

[7] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *Synthese* **98** (1994), 79.

[8] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Is Consciousness Mysterious?', *Anthropology & Philosophy* **3:2** (1999), 6.

[9] *Ibid*., 5.

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knowing of itself.[10] This is sometimes called 'phenomenological consciousness'. [11] It is the view that what makes a state phenomenally conscious is that there is something 'it is like' to be in that state. For both Sprigge and Nagel, this is to assert that consciousness has an essentially inner, subjective nature that is not specifiable in any physical terms. Consciousness is available to us simply because we are conscious. We know it as something that has its own appreciative sense of itself rather than by description.

The inner subjectivity of what it is like to be a person and 'the fact that he is conscious does not follow logically – however firmly it follows inferentially – from any fact about him of a physical kind, whether it concern the patterns of his behaviour, the occurrence of various computer type processes within his brain, or whatever'.[12] The notion was reinforced in *The Phenomenology of Thought* when Sprigge recounted a point made by John Wisdom to the effect that the concept of mind has little or nothing to do with the concept of the brain.[13] After the death of some eminent thinker, let us say Albert Einstein, his brain is examined. But to everyone's amazement all that there is inside his head is hay! The very bases of science seem destroyed, but no one decides that Einstein never had any thoughts. We all believe that consciousness, in the normal case, at least, depends on the brain, however, our conception of the brain does not imply anything about consciousness and vice versa. Was the concept of consciousness enriched by the discovery of nerve-cells seen in brain slices or the discovery of the electrochemical activity of the neurotransmitters in the same way as our concept of combustion was enriched by the discovery of oxygen? Sprigge argued that it did not. While there is a causal connection between the grey and white gooey stuff normally found in a person's skull and consciousness, there is no logically necessary relation between the two, and the concept of consciousness remains relatively untouched by any advances in the neurosciences.

Sprigge's discovery about consciousness might very well seem obvious to us in retrospect, and this I suggest is because of the

[10] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Importance of Subjectivity', *op. cit.*, 146–7. Sprigge credits F. H. Bradley with articulating this view. See also his 'Knowledge of Subjectivity', *Theoria to Theory* **14** (1981), 320.

[11] N. Block, 'On a Confusion about a Function of Consciousness', *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* **18** (1995), 227.

[12] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *op. cit.*, 79.

[13] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Phenomenology of Thought*, edited by L. McHenry (unpublished manuscript, Sprigge Archives, Edinburgh University Library), Part 2, Chapter 1, 17.

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influence that Nagel's paper has had over thirty years of discussion, but in the late 1960s when Sprigge was making his case, he said: 'a striking feature of contemporary English philosophy is the insistence that philosophers since Descartes have been led astray by incoherent notions of a realm of private experience…'.[14] Such was the stranglehold of logical positivism and behaviourism at the time. The dominant views of mind shaped by Ryle and Wittgenstein amounted to a denial of consciousness in the sense in which its existence is taken as a basic fact of the reality of our subjective experience.[15] But there is, Sprigge argued, nothing incoherent or absurd about an intrinsic quality exemplifiable by private experience. In fact, following Descartes on this one point, he agrees our knowledge of our own consciousness is basic and certain. At each moment there is a quite definite character, however easy or difficult it is to identify this character about the private aspects of one's stream of consciousness. So, there is something it is like to be a person, a cat, and indeed probably almost all of the creatures in the animal kingdom. The main difference between human consciousness and other sentient creatures is that our consciousness is largely though not exclusively preoccupied with linguistic discourse or various types of symbolic representations of our experience. But it is quite clear that there is a definite character of the experience of other creatures even if at some very low level it is merely one of a dull throb of existence, a faint awareness or a vague sense of passage. Sprigge did not think that there was something it is like to be a mere aggregate like a cloud or a mountain even though in his view there is something it is like to be one of the ultimate constituents of all things and indeed the whole universe itself which he conceived of as one single substance in the fashion of Spinoza and Bradley.

The view of experience advanced by Sprigge begins with an approach to the study of consciousness that was pioneered by William James and Edmund Husserl.[16] He thought that the phenomenological approach was the only way to understand consciousness and that no one has come closer to illuminating its nature than James. What it is like to be a conscious human being is best grasped from within and described in watery metaphors of drops of

[14] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Privacy of Experience', *Mind* **78** (1969), 512.
[15] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *op. cit.*, 80.
[16] W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vols 1 & 2 (London: Macmillan and Co, 1901); E. Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, translated by J. S. Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).

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experience flowing together in a stream of mental discourse, continually fading into the past and advancing into the future. The lesson from James is 'a habit of directing one's attention at a certain reality, one's own total experience, and bearing the character of what one then notes vividly in mind whenever theorizing about mind or related matters'.[17] The crucial method here involves introspection, empathy, and insight into the necessities present in what this approach reveals. As James says: 'That unsharable feeling which each one of us has … may be disparaged for its egoism, may be sneered at as unscientific, but it is the one thing that fills up the measure of our concrete actuality, and any would-be existent that should lack such a feeling, or its analogue, would be a piece of reality only half made up'.[18]

One becomes especially aware of James' accomplishment by seeing how badly philosophy is done in complete neglect of this approach, as for instance one finds in the sort of identity theory of mind and brain in which consciousness is treated as a theoretical entity invoked to explain certain sorts of behaviour. All the wrong turns in contemporary philosophy of mind that have obscured our path to the essence of consciousness have resulted from preoccupations with abstractions rather than with absorption in the lived character of conscious experience. This includes what Daniel Dennett has referred to as a 'tormented snarl of increasingly convoluted and bizarre thought experiments … and a bounty of other sidetrackers and time-wasters',[19] though obviously Dennett and Sprigge are odd bedfellows in this complaint. For Sprigge the phenomenological study of consciousness is the foundation of other inquiries. Thus unlike Nagel's limited point, Sprigge developed this crucial insight about the essence of consciousness in a systematic manner both for his metaphysics and ethics. Conscious states, or more generally sentient states, with their subjective, first-person ontology are the true reality.

So, for Sprigge, this is the answer to the not-so-mysterious question 'what is consciousness?' As for the more difficult question of how consciousness is related to the brain, he argued that the first thing to know in charting the relation is to know what each term is,

[17] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The Distinctiveness of American Philosophy' in *Two Centuries of Philosophy in America*, edited by Peter Caws (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), 205.

[18] W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 499.

[19] D. Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1991), 369.

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and that he had illuminated the nature of the former in his phenomenological consciousness. Given that the relation of mind and brain is one of identity, and given further that Sprigge has been successful in capturing the essence of consciousness as subjective inwardness, then for him the substance of brain activity must consist of particulars that have the same character.[20] From this point of departure, he constructed a panpsychist ontology in which consciousness or sentience is omnipresent in the universe.

3. The Limits of Scientific Investigation

The problem of consciousness, as Sprigge saw it, is that it refuses to cooperate with the prevailing materialistic paradigm; it is the stubborn irreducibility of consciousness or the failure to explain how neurophysiological processes of the brain have any connection at all to that nothing more familiar phenomena of consciousness that remains the major stumbling block. It is, he said, the problem that has 'bedeviled philosophy'.[21] More recent writers have identified this as the 'hard problem', one that might very well be intractable because human beings simply don't have the intelligence or cognitive tools designed for understanding consciousness in the same way dogs don't have enough wattage in the bulb to do mathematics.[22] At least here we seem to know enough to know what we can't know, but Sprigge disagreed. Somehow this attitude of the 'new mysterians' such as Nagel and McGinn has escaped notice that it is defeatist. Why aren't all the unending philosophical problems just like the hard problem of consciousness equally intractable or hopeless? In Sprigge's idealist reversal of the hard problem, it is not consciousness that we fail to understand; rather in a move reminiscent of Berkeley, it is the very concept of physical matter that we do not understand. So, any notion that the nature or essence of consciousness is something that awaits the results of neurophysiological research to be understood is fundamentally misguided.

Sprigge argued that our knowledge of our own states of consciousness which are irreducibly subjective and private will be threatening

[20] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Is Consciousness Mysterious?', *op. cit.*, 19.

[21] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Phenomenology of Thought*, *op. cit.*, Part 1, Chapter 1.

[22] C. McGinn, *The Mysterious Flame: Conscious Minds in a Material World* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 47.

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only to those absorbed in current physicalistic dogma because such states present them with the possibility of failure to give a complete account of knowledge about the world. Some physicalists have even tried to convince themselves that they are not, in fact, conscious. The very title of Sprigge's major work, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, was a challenge to such philosophers for he thought that physicalism had become such a dogma that it had shut down discussion of other plausible options even if they were thought to be buried once and for all by the critiques of Russell, Moore and Ayer. The fact that we can know things about our own states that others cannot know is knowledge of truth about the world that even the most complete description of how things are in reality would miss out. This is the essence of the argument from phenomenological consciousness. Given all the physical information about a person, a bat or whatever, we still would not know what it was like to be that person or creature. Something would be left out, but it is not something physical, hence physicalism, the thesis that all reality must be physical reality, must be false.

Scientific investigation can no more reveal the essence of consciousness than the congenitally deaf can hear music or the congenitally blind can see colours. Our knowledge of the physical world remains nothing but structure and function no matter how far down or up we go with our microscopes and telescopes. Recent developments in neuroimaging reveal much fascinating information about the brain and might possibly aid in our understanding of affective disorders, but still reveal nothing about what it feels like to suffer from depression. Computer programmes might tell us much about cognitive functioning, but we still remain in the dark about how the brain thinks or what it is like to be a thinking thing. Sprigge thus armed with his distinction between the World of Description and the World of Acquaintance argued that scientific investigation is limited to investigations of appearances rather than the underlying reality of noumenal existence.[23] Here his view has been echoed in a powerful way by David Chalmers' argument against reductive explanation. As Chalmers puts it, '…the explanation of consciousness is not just a matter of explaining structure and function. Once we have explained all the physical structure in the vicinity of the brain, and we have explained how all the various brain functions are

[23] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'The World of Description and the World of Acquaintance' in *Beyond Conflict and Reduction: Between Philosophy, Science and Religion*, edited by W. Desmond, J. Steffen and K. Decoster (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001), 23.

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performed, there is a further sort of explanandum: consciousness itself'.[24] Other philosophers such as Russell have also made this point about the limits of scientific investigation and the non-inferential nature of our knowledge of the mental. 'Physics', he said, 'is mathematical not because we know so much about the physical world but because we know so little; it is only its mathematical properties that we can discover. For the rest, our knowledge is negative…'.[25] But Sprigge's view is not simply that science fails to get at the inner essence of what is perceived as physical reality. It is rather that science and metaphysics have two completely different aims. His view in this respect parallels Bradley who espoused a strong distinction between appearance and reality. Empirical science is confined to the former while metaphysics attempts to uncover the true or absolute nature of the latter. In other words, science is primarily concerned with abstractions whereas metaphysics is focused on revealing the nature of concrete reality.[26] What Sprigge meant by 'metaphysics' however is clearly not just any metaphysics but rather the sort that begins with affirming the subjective reality of consciousness. Accordingly, he argued that the World of Acquaintance is more real than the World of Description. Everything that exists must have its own appreciative sense of its own being and of its relation to others. What actually presents itself to us as the physical world is really a system of just such self-and-other-appreciating individuals whose togetherness forms one eternal cosmic consciousness.[27]

4. The Argument for Panpsychism

In his *Vindication of Absolute Idealism*, Sprigge argued that every conception of a physical reality is on deeper reflection really a phenomenological conception of reality, and corresponding to every phenomenal appearance there must be a noumenal backing that is

[24] D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

[25] B. Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1992), 125. Also see *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), 240.

[26] F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1893), 250–51 and T.L.S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 476–8.

[27] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), Chapter 6 and *The God of Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, 486–90.

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essentially consciousness.[28] Whereas Kant had claimed that the noumenon or the thing-in-itself is essentially unknowable since it lies outside the categories of the understanding and sensible intuition,[29] Sprigge developed the idea that whatever we understand by physical reality, it must have a noumenal backing or being that is essentially psychical in character. The sort of knowledge one has in knowing oneself as a centre of consciousness reveals the inherent nature of one concrete reality or one such noumenon behind the phenomenon.[30] Once one has a sense of what Sprigge meant by the noumenal reality of human consciousness, it is then relatively easy to understand how he extended this concept to other beings as the noumena behind the phenomena perceived as physical reality. This he articulated as an ontology of distinct units, momentary centres of experience, that make up nature but are also related in such a way as to compose wholes which may or may not be sentient or conscious themselves.

Sprigge argued first in a Berkeleyan fashion that there is no such thing as an unexperienced physical reality because none of us, he claimed, can conceive of a world divested of consciousness. As he said: 'Whenever we seriously try to bring into clear consciousness the nature of any situation in the existence of which we believe, we imagine it either as a form or a content of some consciousness, actual or possible.'[31] But nature does not exist only as an object for human consciousness or as a system of possible sensations on our part. This leaves him with the view that for something to exist it must be experience.

Put in its simplest form, the crucial argument for this position is based on two premises:

1. That the physical world, or at least something which is the reality which we conceive as the physical world, exists independently of the consciousness of it by humans and animals, and that it existed before there were any humans or animals.
2. That nothing can exist except sentient experience.

From which it follows that:

3. The physical world is composed of sentient experience.[32]

[28] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism, op. cit.*, 39.

[29] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by N. Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1963), A 236/B 295–A 260/B 315.

[30] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The Vindication of Absolute Idealism, op. cit.*, 40–1, 105–10.

[31] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Are There Intrinsic Values in Nature?', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* **4** (1987), 25.

[32] T. L. S. Sprigge, *The God of Metaphysics, op. cit.*, 484.

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The first premise distinguishes Sprigge's view from Berkeley's subjective idealism and commits him to a form of realism. For Berkeley there are two sorts of things: minds (divine and human) and ideas whereas for Sprigge there are innumerable streams of experience existing independently of human and animal consciousness. But as is implied in the second premise what is external to us is nothing but sentient experience. This is a bold claim since it appears he neglects the unlikelihood of any trace of consciousness or sentience in the explosive beginning of the universe in the Big Bang or the magma oozing from a volcano. There is also the question about whether consciousness or sentient experience needs a brain. Panpsychism has thus been frequently characterized as lovely and tempting but less than sober.[33] Yet according to Sprigge it provides the best explanation for the answer to the question of the noumenal backing of phenomena and a solution to the mind-body problem. What is required in understanding the second premise is an obvious extension of the term 'experience' such that it is not understood in terms of human perception. Royce seems to come closest to making sense of this idea with his notion of apperceptive time spans.[34] What we perceive as inorganic nature is really a nature alive to various degrees. Another is Whitehead's concept of causal efficacy as the basic mode of perception in nature. As he argued:

> A jellyfish advances and withdraws, and in so doing, exhibits some perception of causal relationships with the world beyond itself; a plant grows downwards to the damp earth, and upward towards the light. There is thus some direct reason for attributing dim, slow feelings of causal nexus, although we have no reason for any ascription of the definite percepts in the mode of presentational immediacy….
>
> As we pass to the inorganic world, causation never for a moment seems to lose its grip. What is lost is originativeness, and any evidence of immediate absorption in the present.[35]

What these philosophers sought to achieve was a radical revision of classical British empiricism, one that naturalized mind and mentalized nature. Sprigge followed very closely these views when he formulated his ontology of momentary centres of experience.

[33] See C. McGinn, 'Hard Questions' in *Consciousness and its Place in Nature*, edited by A. Freeman (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2006), 93.

[34] J. Royce, *The World and the Individual*, second series (New York: Dover, 1959), 226–7.

[35] A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, *op. cit.*, 249.

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5. Recent Developments

Sprigge divided philosophical positions into two classes: (1) *incredible* because they contradict basic premises regarded as personal certainties by those who hold them, and (2) *serious options* because they supply answers to questions, the holding of which does not require an extraordinary leap of imagination.[36] In his own time Sprigge found himself among philosophers who regarded his position as incredible for his holding the view that consciousness is the basic certainty, and more specifically the existence of consciousness as something not explicable in physical terms. We have come a long way in that the number of philosophers who no longer regard his views as incredible has increased significantly. Given the stalemate in explaining consciousness in contemporary philosophy of mind, even panpsychism has been re-introduced into mainstream by the likes of David Chalmers, Galen Strawson, David Skrbina, and William Seager.[37] Galen Strawson has breathed new life into panpsychism with his argument that physicalism, rightly understood, entails panpsychism. He begins like Sprigge with a realism about experience, consciousness or what-it-is-likeness that commits him to the idea that the experiential is physical and thereby challenges Descartes' notion of the unextended mind.[38] David Chalmers has flirted with the notion by suggesting that any physical process can be treated as an information-processing system which is realized both physically and phenomenally.[39] There is even some question here as to whether Andy Clark's extended cognition thesis leads to extended consciousness.[40] For Sprigge the skull and skin are no boundary since our experience is just a fragment, a stereoscopic perspective of a field, which must be conceived as sentience lying behind the extended four-dimensional space-time. When physicalist philosophy

[36] T. L. S. Sprigge, 'Consciousness', *op. cit.*, 73.

[37] See for example, D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, *op. cit.*, 276–310; G. Strawson, 'Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism entails Panpsychism' in A. Freeman (ed.), *Consciousness and its Place in Nature, op. cit.*, 3–31; D. Skrbina (ed.), *Mind that Abides: Panpsychism in the New Millennium* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009); W. Seager, 'Consciousness, Information, and Panpsychism', *Journal of Consciousness Studies* **2:3** (1995), 272–88.

[38] G. Strawson, 'Realistic Monism', *op. cit.*, 3–31.

[39] D. Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind, op. cit.*, 288–99.

[40] This is a view that was considered but rejected in A. Clark and D. Chalmers, 'The Extended Mind', *Analysis* **58** (1998), 7–19, yet the authors agree the extended mind implies an extended self.

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of mind begins to make overtures to panpsychism we know we have entered a new period of discourse. Even if its new adherents embrace the doctrine with a certain amount of reluctance and caution, it seems they no longer feel they need to disguise their views when appearing among their orthodox analytical colleagues. Sprigge never needed to do so; he was unabashed in his commitment to panpsychism.

6. Critical Evaluation

Beginning with the irreducibility thesis and ending with a full-blown panpsychistic absolute idealism has a certain respectable coherence and explanatory power. It solves certain problems and avoids others, but then creates obvious problems of its own, many of which are generic to idealism. While I think Sprigge's argument about phenomenological consciousness is as good as one finds in philosophy of mind, I have always found his panpsychism fascinating yet fraught with difficulties. Aside from presenting a strong case against physicalism, it is less clear that he provided convincing justification for the second premise of his argument for panpsychism, *i.e*. that nothing can exist except sentient experience. That is, granted the Berkeleyan argument that to be is to be perceived – *esse est percipi* – or that objects of experience exist only in perceivers, how do we then get all objects of nature are themselves subjects of experience? Second, in spite of the attempts by Royce, Whitehead and Sprigge, it is very hard to understand how the use of the terms 'experience', 'sentience' and 'consciousness' can be meaningfully applied to inanimate nature. Our powers of imagination or empathy fade once we are outside of the realm of animal sentience. And finally, there are still far too many explanatory gaps to understand the emergence of the high grade streams of consciousness from the low grade momentary centres of experience even though the theory has the overall advantage of providing a smooth and continuous interpretation of nature in term of one ontological type. Sprigge thought we needed a panpsychist philosophy of science, but admitted he was not prepared to do the job. But in what follows I have a broader concern about his view of the relation, or lack of relation, between science and metaphysics.

Regarding Sprigge's view of the aims of science, I suspect many scientists would find it unsatisfactory to describe their objectives as restricted to mere appearances, and that a special group of thinkers called metaphysicians have a privileged access to reality that reveals the truth about the world. Aside from remnants of positivism

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surviving in current science it is hard to see how science is confined to this severely limited role. Scientific theories often pass beyond phenomena altogether to postulate an unseen world whose detailed workings explain and unite diverse phenomenal effects. The quest for a Theory of Everything in theoretical physics incorporating such speculative theories as quantum ontologies, quantum theories of gravity, superstring theory and the multiverse hypothesis are prime examples. Theories of speculative biology seek explanations of the origin of life beyond mere structure and function. So, while it may seem useful to make a sharp distinction between appearance and reality, it is implausible that science and metaphysics operate in two realms, serve different purposes or have different functions.

As opposed to overly optimistic claims of pure metaphysicians a more defensible role for the discipline has been articulated by naturalized metaphysicians who see such theorising as merely the general end of theory.[41] Metaphysics is therefore continuous with science and risks its dignity in the same way. As Quine made the point: '[Naturalism] sees natural science as an inquiry into reality, fallible and corrigible but not answerable to any supra-scientific tribunal, and not in need of any justification beyond observation and the hypothetico-deductive method'.[42] Naturalized metaphysics rejects the idea of some other way to truth independent of science, but this is not necessarily an affirmation of physicalism, since the specific ontology will be an open question. It might be panpsychist if, for example, the philosopher or scientist sees it as the best, tentative solution to the problem of emergence or the mind-body problem. It might be monistic in the fashion of Einstein, pluralistic as in the case of Heisenberg, an Aristotelian substance ontology or a Whiteheadian event ontology. Where it seems to me, however, that Sprigge was right is in thinking that scientific investigation has nothing to contribute to the understanding of the intrinsic nature

[41] This distinction appears in my *Whitehead and Bradley: A Comparative Analysis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 16–9. Pure metaphysicians would include Bradley and Sprigge who argue for a sharp separation of science and metaphysics whereas naturalized metaphysicians would include Peirce, Whitehead and Quine who see metaphysics and science as necessary to rounding out our general theory of the world.

[42] W. V. Quine, *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 72. Quine espoused a thoroughgoing physicalism and behaviourism in line with his naturalism. Private, subjective phenomena play no role in his ontology, which perhaps explains why he regarded consciousness as a mystery.

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of conscious experience, but this has more to do with the limits of empirical investigation and the recognition of the role of introspective psychology than with metaphysics *per se*. Sprigge himself much admired scientific metaphysics but was also concerned to demonstrate that metaphysics could arrive at truth independent of science. It is this assertion that I find most problematic in his system. That is, it seems to me one claim that a phenomenological approach best grasps the nature of consciousness and quite another that metaphysical speculations from this point of departure reveal truth about the universe. Once experience has been interpreted in terms of ontological categories, one has left the relatively safe haven of phenomenology and entered the realm of metaphysical speculation. It is this leap between the what-it-is-likeness of consciousness to a panpsychist ontology that begins the process of theorising, one in which I find science and metaphysics to be engaged in the same quest. Sprigge equated a phenomenological description or state with a metaphysical truth without recognising the heavy dose of ontologising involved in the interpretation of experience. For example, this becomes clear in his very use of the concept of the noumenon to describe the subjectivity of experience which then becomes the basis for the ontological units of his system, the momentary centres of experience. Not that I deny him the ontological interpretation of experience or the leap from the phenomenological to the ontological, but however plausible or implausible it is, it needs to be recognized as such.

The view of science as mere abstractions may strike us as an obvious defect of idealism that warranted a strong revival of materialistic philosophy of mind. It was after all the failure of idealism to serve as an adequate foundation for the sciences that led to its demise at the beginning of the twentieth century, but Sprigge need not propound the strong separation of metaphysics and science to make his case for how much science is limited to revealing the essence of consciousness.

7. Conclusion

To engage in the project of systematic metaphysics at the time in which Sprigge did was a bold endeavour and one that ran so much against the grain of respectable philosophy that he faced isolation and ridicule. He demonstrated, however, through the sheer reasonableness of his arguments the strength of his view of consciousness which raised serious doubts about the complete success of the physicalist programme. Explaining consciousness is no mystery as long as one begins with one's own phenomenology rather than the theoretical

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constructs of physicalism, functionalism or behaviourism. Commitment to phenomenological consciousness, however, does not, in my view, privilege metaphysics against science as the only discipline with access to truth. [43]

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[43] I have profited from discussions with Frank McGuinness, Pauline Phemister and Pierfrancesco Basile on earlier drafts of this paper.

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