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Two Sides of the Same Coin? Neutral Monism as an Attempt to Reconcile Subjectivity and Objectivity in Personal Identity

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Abstract: Standard views of personal identity over time often hover uneasily between the subjective, first-person dimension (e. g. psychological continuity), and the objective, third-person dimension (e. g. biological continuity) of a person's life. Since both dimensions capture something integral to personal identity, we show that neither can successfully be discarded in favor of the other. The apparent need to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity, however, presents standard views with problems both in seeking an ontological footing of, as well as epistemic evidence for, personal identity. We contend that a fresh look at neutral monism offers a novel way to tackle these problems; counting on the most fundamental building blocks of reality to be ontologically neutral with regards to subjectivity and objectivity of personal identity. If the basic units of reality are, in fact, ontologically neutral – but can give rise to mental as well as physical events – these basic units of reality might account for both subjectivity and objectivity in personal identity. If this were true, it would turn out that subjectivity and objectivity are not conflictive dimensions of personal identity but rather two sides of the same coin.

Keywords: personal identity, subjectivity, objectivity, psychological continuity, biological continuity, neutral monism, Russellian monism

Introduction: Motivating the Problem of Subjectivity and Objectivity in Personal Identity

Attempting to comprehensively answer the vexing question of what it takes for a person to persist through time calls for an ontological as well as an epistemological inquiry. Ontologically, there is the need for essaying both synchronic

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conditions of personhood that shed light on the features an entity must possess to qualify as a person at time *t*. And depending on these synchronic conditions, diachronic conditions can be given that tell us how persons, so defined, persist from *t* to *t**. Epistemologically, the question is, based on what evidence are we to tell whether a person did, in fact, persist from *t* to *t**?

In what follows, we argue that venturing to provide necessary and sufficient conditions of personal identity over time faces a perspectival predicament from the get-go. Here's the tension.

Persons are widely taken to be subjects of experience, and as such, fundamentally mental entities. There is a specific phenomenology that all and only persons possess: a subjective first-person perspective by means of which persons are capable of seeing themselves as themselves and, respectively, navigate the world. Accordingly, a criterion of personal identity that is sensitive to the mental nature of persons must be based on the trajectory of such first-person perspectival, meta-cognitive features, if it is to track persons at all.

At the same time, however, on any naturalistically-minded framework – the family of views that is widely taken to be most plausible – persons are biological beings; not immaterial substances, Cartesian egos, souls or the like. At the very least, persons are constituted by biological organisms (Baker 2000) that are made up entirely of organic matter. And thus, persons can be fully described in objective, third-personal terms. Accordingly, then, a criterion of personal identity that is sensitive to the naturalistic nature of persons must be based on the trajectory of such third-person perspectival, organic features, if it is to track persons at all.

Here are the two synchronic claims with their implications for persons' diachronic persistence conditions (indicated by the subscripted i) that we take to be both independently plausible, and reasonably widely agreed upon, summed up:

Subjectivity	Persons are essentially mental entities with a distinct first-personal phenomenology.
(S_i)	Persons persist by virtue of first-person-perspectival continuity.
Objectivity	Persons are essentially naturalistic entities, constituted by distinct third-personal biological organisms.
(O_i)	Persons persist by virtue of third-person-perspectival continuity.

Now, which one is it? Are persons fundamentally subjective, such that their persistence conditions must be given in accordance with their subjective, first-

personal nature? Or are persons fundamentally objective, such that their persistence conditions must be given in accordance with their objective, third-personal nature? Throughout the remainder of this text, we argue that only a reconciliation of both subjective and objective conditions of personal identity allows for a comprehensive analysis. To be more precise, we believe that splitting the person into subject and object is unnecessary and futile. We use Russell's neutral monism to suggest that the divide can, in fact, go away, and that we can have it both ways; namely, the subjective and objective conditions of personal identity can peacefully co-exist. To achieve this, as neutral monism suggests, one must change both the epistemological as well as the metaphysical outlook on the most basic units of reality.

Even though the apparent tension between subjective and objective conditions of persons and their identity over time has been underappreciated ever since it was introduced by Nagel (1979, 1986), theories of personal identity inevitably take up a stance on the matter; if nothing else, implicitly.

Before spelling out how different criteria of personal identity figure in the subjective/objective gulf, what they lack, and how this shortcoming might be tackled, we turn to swiftly introducing the two most commonly held views.

Standard Views

Here's a brief sketch of two of the most widely held views of personal identity that advance ontologically necessary and sufficient conditions of persons' persistence through time.

According to *psychological continuity* criteria of personal identity,

> X *and* Y *are one and the same person at different times if and only if* X *stands in a psychological continuity relation to* Y. *You are the same person in the future (or past) as you are now (or were earlier) if your current (or past) beliefs, desires, memories, preferences and so forth are linked by a chain of overlapping psychological connections that are causally continuous (without having split into two or more successors).*

Among philosophers who advocate for psychological continuity approaches to personal identity, there is dispute over several issues: What mental features need to be inherited? What is the cause of psychological continuity, and what are its characteristics? Must it be realized in some kind of brain continuity, or will 'any cause' do? The 'any cause' discussion is based on the counterfactual idea that personal identity, realized by psychological continuity, would still hold, even if this continuity were no longer instantiated in a brain. For example, would psychological continuity still determine identity if the personality was

instantiated in a computer program? That is to say, what happens if the psychological relations that define personal identity get replicated and instantiated in a non-biological entity or in more than one biological entity? Also, identity is logically a 'one-one' relation but psychological continuity can, in principle, split into 'one-many'. This evokes the need for blocking such possibilities by implementing a 'one-one clause' into the criterion (Williams 1973).

One of the major opponents of *psychological continuity* views is *animalism*, according to which,

> *You are the same being in the future (or past) as you are now (or have been earlier), as long as you remain the same living biological organism. A human animal, or for that matter any organism, persists as long as its capacity to direct those vital functions that keep it biologically alive are not disrupted. If* X *is an animal at time* t *and* Y *exists at time* t*, X *and* Y *are identical if and only if the vital functions that* Y *has at* t* *are causally continuous (without having split into two or more successors) with those that* X *has at* t. *Presumably this will be the case only if* Y *is an animal at* t*.

According to animalists, anything that is an animal at one time will always be an animal, and identity between an animal at one time and at another time is maintained if and only if its vital functions are causally continuous. For animalists, psychological features have no bearing on personal identity, because human animals go through periods of their biological lives without having any mental functions but, nonetheless, remain biologically alive (Olson 1997).

The difference between these two criteria becomes most apparent when considering cases at the margins of life. A fetus has no psychological features, and thus, according to psychological continuity views, is not a person. So, no person is diachronically identical to a fetus. Animalists think this is counterintuitive since a fetus and the person it later becomes are biologically identical by virtue of being the same (single) living organism. The same holds for other cases in which human organisms lose their mental capacities but remain biologically alive. This leaves us with the question: What are we most fundamentally – persons or human animals?

Advocates of *subjectivity* typically argue for *psychological continuity*, emphasizing the integral importance of mental features for personal identity. Whereas advocates of *objectivity* typically argue for *animalism*, emphasizing the integral importance of biological features for personal identity. These, however, need not be mutually exclusive. Attempts to have it both ways – that is, to simultaneously account for persons' biological and psychological features – are, for example, Nagel's (1986) early sketch of a brain view, and later versions of brain criteria such as McMahan's (2002) 'embodied mind' view. These are close to what the late Parfit (2012) adopted in favor of his initially psychological criterion of personal identity put forward in *Reasons and Persons* (1984).

We now turn to look at how the different approaches just sketched lead to different grounds for epistemic evidence of personal identity, widening the gulf between *subjectivity* and *objectivity*. Subsequently, we motivate the need for reconciling *subjectivity* and *objectivity* to account for both persons' fundamentally mental nature, and their fundamentally biological make-up. This, then, calls for a novel approach that does justice to both conditions. We venture that a fresh look at neutral monism might be able to just get the job done.

Epistemic Evidence for Personal Identity and Its Ontological Footing

Epistemic Evidence

Leaving aside for a moment the quest for ontologically necessary and sufficient conditions of personal identity, it is worth examining what grounds *subjectivity* and *objectivity* provide in terms of epistemic evidence for personal identity.

Subjectivity gives rise to introspective evidence for persons' persistence via some form of psychological continuity. A merit of this view is that our direct first-personal access to our phenomenology has some intuitive appeal. In fact, it seems as though exclusively through first-personal access can we account for the distinct subjective nature of the mental, and its continuity that constitutes personal identity over time. Needless to say, there are some drawbacks to this approach. How do we know that the cause of psychological continuity, after having woken up from a dreamless sleep, say, hasn't been substituted? This and other frequent disruptions of persons' first-personal introspective awareness highlight problems with the reliability of the epistemic evidence that *subjectivity* can provide.

Objectivity gives rise to exteroceptive evidence for a person's persistence via the human organism's, or more specifically, the brain's objective, neurobiological features as the bearer of a person's psychology. These objective features enable us to track a person's identity without relying on fallible introspection, so there's some appeal here too. However, such methods cannot account for the subjective nature of the mental since we cannot access a person's mental states through a brain scan or some other fancy neuroscientific technique (at least not yet, or perhaps not ever). It surely seems bizarre to consult one's neurologist to have her check on the biological continuity of one's brain when in doubt about one's persistence through time. So, even though we are, perhaps, able to fully

describe the trajectory of a human organism, the person we aim to track might vanish at some point. Neurodegenerative diseases such as dementia or Alzheimer's spring to mind. In such cases, it seems as though looking at the objective features of a person's brain does neither help the person themselves to get a clue as to their persistence. (It wouldn't help much to know that one's memory loss is due to the decay of the limbic system.) Nor does it help others seeking to determine a person's identity; particularly not if in the late stages of such diseases afflicted persons radically change their personality. What good can an inquiry into the brain's anatomy do here?

The epistemic evidence offered by both *subjectivity* and *objectivity* on their own is incomplete and unreliable. How can we trace back psychological or biological continuity with any certainty? Initially, the problem seems more pressing for *psychological continuity* since what appears as a continuous stream of someone's psychology might have been disrupted without one's knowing, or instantiated elsewhere, or caused differently (granted, some philosophers are prepared to bite the bullet here). But *animalism* doesn't fare much better since the person it aims to track occasionally eludes the tracking. During the course of any human animal's biological life, there are periods without that organism possessing any mental features. This suggests that *animalism* is not *really* in the business of tracking personal identity, but, by philosophical sleight of hand, animalists have changed the question to tracking the identity of a biological organism without mental features.

For good measure, the aspect of diachronicity adds to the trouble. That is, the issue of how to connect synchronic conditions of a person (be they subjective or objective) and their life into a coherent whole over time inevitably crops up. Taken together, a satisfactory account of personal identity over time must be able to capture the following *three ingredients* of a person's life:

(1) the distinctively subjective phenomenology of that person;
(2) their distinctively objective biological make-up;
(3) and an epistemically reliable way to diachronically connect synchronic states of that person's life, both in terms of psychological and biological events.

Persons thus have distinct synchronic characteristics that are glued together into a unique temporally extended psychological-biological nexus. There is a specific subjective way to be that person that can only be accessed from the inside; but there are also specific objective features that make up that person biologically, accessible via objective measurements.

The discussed merits and demerits of the subjectively and objectively based epistemic evidence for personal identity suggest that an inquiry into the relation between the mental and the physical is necessary to adequately meet the challenge of the *three ingredients*. Such an analysis might not only help to dissipate the apparent stalemate between *subjectivity* and *objectivity*, but more importantly, pave the way to reconciling these two integral conditions of personal identity.

The Ontological Relation of the Mental and the Physical

Because of the *three ingredients*, any sensible theory of personal identity cannot avoid but taking (at least implicitly) a stance on the relation between the mental and the physical. On almost any naturalistically-minded account, our persistence through time has very plausibly something to do with both mental and physical events. Even such naturalistically-minded theories can choose to leave open, or remain agnostic about, the question as to how the mental and the physical relate. These theories are, however, committed to claiming that there is *some* relation between the mental and the physical. An exception is *animalism*, according to which mental states are irrelevant to personal identity. This, however, comes at the cost of neglecting *subjectivity* altogether and with it, dropping an important part of the issue at hand, namely, the persisting subject of experience. Throwing out the baby with the bathwater, as it were.

So, what theories of the relation between the mental and the physical are at play in the different conditions of personal identity? Insisting on *subjectivity* alone suggests that some version of dualism underlies personal identity. Indeed, some philosophers have taken that approach (Nida-Rümelin 2013). Or, perhaps, panpsychism, as friends of its recent revival might suggest, could be another way to save the mental (Alter and Nagasawa 2015; Chalmers 2015; Skrbina 2005, 2007, 2009; Strawson 2006). At any rate, if the mental is *the* ingredient to personal identity, its fundamentally subjective reality can, at least in principle, be dislodged from its physical instantiation (if there ever was a physical instantiation in the first place). Thus, the physical instantiation of the mental is merely incidental. What matters is the subjective reality of the mental, regardless of how it is contingently realized.

Insisting on *objectivity* alone suggests that some version of reductive, or perhaps even eliminative, physicalism underlies personal identity. Thus, even if the mental does play a role in personal identity, it can either be fully reduced to its physical cause or completely re-described in physical terms. Either way, the subjective nature of the mental is eventually dropped.

Both strategies seem to leave out something crucial: persons and their identity are either reduced to human organisms at the expense of dropping the subjective, mental nature. Or persons and their identity are reduced to mental entities at the expense of dropping their objective, biological nature.

In what follows, we venture to propose that a Russell inspired version of neutral monism might be able to bridge the gap between subjective and objective conditions of personal identity, and because of its process (rather than substance) ontology, neutral monism potentially accounts for the *three ingredients* as well.

Can Neutral Monism Jump to the Rescue?

Granted that mental features are *causally* reducible to the physical workings of organisms, they are not *ontologically* reducible to brain/body states because of the subjective nature of the mental (Searle 1992). And so even within a naturalistic framework, a merely physical description of a person's identity over time cannot be a *complete* description thereof.

Neutral monism might offer a novel way to tackle that problem, counting on the most fundamental building blocks of reality being ontologically neutral with regards to the mental and the physical. If the basic units of reality are, in fact, ontologically neutral but can give rise to both mental and physical events, they might be able to account for all the manifestations of personal identity. This is, of course, no conclusive solution (or dissolution) of the subjective-objective gulf, but perhaps a promising direction to take a closer look at. To be clear, this is not to say that there's a logical (or analytical) entailment offered or given by a neutral monist account when it comes to relating mental and physical states. But in the natural world, it might be a way of accounting for their entailment.

The Need for a Subjective-Objective Completion and How Neutral Monism Might Do the Trick

Why does *subjectivity* need an objective completion? The subjective, first-personal experiences at different times do not themselves establish a persisting entity (Hume 1738; Kant 1781). Epistemically, this might hint at a lack of what we've earlier described as exteroceptive evidence for personal identity.

And vice versa, why does *objectivity* need a subjective completion? The subject of experience with its distinct first-personal phenomenology eludes a

purely physical (reductionist and eliminitavist alike) explanation of the reality of the mental. Epistemically, this might hint at a lack of what we've earlier described as introspective evidence for personal identity.

It is not that we *cannot* have it both ways; it is, in fact, that we *need* to have it both ways to get a grasp of the big picture. The need for a subjective-objective completion gives us at least a prima facie reason to assume that there are two sides of the same coin here – some underlying, more basic structure that accounts for *subjectivity* and *objectivity* alike, and sets the stage for diachronically connecting a person's life, thus fulfilling the *three ingredients*. The challenge, it seems, is to show how one's distinct subjective first-personal continuity has an, perhaps, *a posteriori* necessary footing in the objectively accessible third-personal biological continuity of organisms. What makes this such a vexing problem is its unprecedented status in science and philosophy. For all we know, there is an apparent non-contingent correlation between the mental and the physical, but what we presently do not know is how mental states supervene on physical states – only that, most likely, they do.

An intuitively appealing view of personal identity that potentially can account for both sides holds that we are embodied persons persisting through time due to an intimate psychophysical nexus. Most, except for animalists, agree that a view of personal identity that abandons a commitment to the reality of the phenomenological content of conscious experience cannot even get off the ground. While persons have distinctively subjective characteristics that appear to elude physical reduction, leaving modal arguments aside, it seems also true that these mental features are *a posteriori* necessarily linked to the objective, biological characteristics of a person's embodiment. A person's distinct psychology is not only contingently instantiated in your brain-body conglomerate, but it has also been informed by, and shaped in, a specific way because of the workings of that person's particular embodiment (Schechtman 1997).

Theories of personal identity that seek to offer an account able to explain both the introspective evidence for psychological continuity over time, and the brain's constitutive role in instantiating and sustaining such continuity face a related problem. If personal identity is not exhaustively captured by psychological continuity relations that are essentially private sensations, but at the same time, admits to an objectivity underlying of these private sensations, then the brain has to be taken into account as the most obvious contender that can account for such an objective underpinning of psychological continuity. But how can the brain, a purely physical organ, capture the subjective nature of psychological continuity? This would require an objective ontology of a subjective phenomenology – a problem that Nagel wrestled with in *The View from Nowhere* and numerous other writings. What is more, philosophers who want to

hold on to the ontological (not causal) irreducibility of mental states, maintain that subjectivity can never be fully captured by a purely physical explanation of the inner workings of the brain. This is so, they say, because mental and physical states are ontologically (perhaps not metaphysically) *sui generis*.

But what if it turns out that the mental and the physical are made up of the same stuff? This can go in either direction: a mainstream form of panpsychism roughly holds that the subjectivity of mental states comes from proto-conscious features of the smallest ontological units of the world (subjectivity is everywhere); whereas most physicalists either deny the reality of subjectivity or eliminate it in favor of physical states (subjectivity is nowhere). Neither option seems satisfying, although in what follows, we will come back briefly to both of them.

Perhaps there is another option worth looking at that has been somewhat neglected in recent discussions of personal identity. If the smallest ontological units of reality evade the distinction of subjective mental states and objective physical states by way of being initially neutral in that regard – or ontologically prior to that distinction – then, perhaps, we ought not decide between the rival camps of *subjectivity* and *objectivity*. Instead, this would offer a way to showcase how *subjectivity* and *objectivity* are really two sides of the same coin.

Russell's neutral monism might help shed light on why the apparent stalemate between either adhering to, or denying *subjectivity* is actually a misconception. If the dichotomy between irreducible subjective mental states and objective physical states is misconceived, it can be shown that so is the apparent exclusiveness of subjective features of introspective evidence for personal identity, and their objective physical underpinnings in the brain.

Some General Remarks on Neural Monism

Before we expose how we believe neutral monism can help, a few general remarks about the theory itself are in order. First, we have adopted Russell's version of neutral monism, or even more to the point, we are strongly inspired by it. We believe that Russell's version itself is the most comprehensive one and has the farthest-reaching philosophical consequences. Other competing versions of neutral monism would be those of Ernst Mach who, however, takes a more scientific and materialistic direction, or that of William James whose theory, despite being the inspiration for Russell's, remains rather sketchy and incomplete. One thing that comes across consistently from Russell's neutral monist theory, and which has grabbed our attention, is that taking sides in the subjective versus the objective accounts of reality, is the wrong approach. Not only

is it the wrong approach, but it actually skews our account of reality. Second, neutral monism is not only a metaphysical but also, at the same time, an epistemological theory, something which we consider to be its strength, and which brings it in line with what being responsive to the *three ingredients* calls for. In other words, just like Emmett Holman, we also feel "nudged" in the direction of neutral monism which, among other things, offers a way out of some of the terminological entanglements between types of physicalism and types of panpsychism (Holman 2008, 59).

In a nutshell, what neutral monism offers is neither a reductive nor an eliminativist solution. Its main advantage is that it redefines the subject and object of cognition without adding a third entity, an inscrutable of sorts. Russell's neutral monism offers a comprehensive explanatory mechanism of cognitive experience (via a standard epistemological explanation of the various cognitive faculties). This way, the subject of experience is, once and for all, prevented from being seen as substantive which bans ontological dualism in all of its forms. In other words, while Russell's neutral monism does not deny the person's phenomenology, it also does not neglect the fact that the person is a physical object among other physical objects; that is, a part of a physical causal chain. By offering a new metaphysical picture – the basic ingredients of reality are neutral entities – Russell's neutral monism manages to offer a reliable epistemic account of the person's experience both as a psychological and biological entity.

Russell's Neutral Monism

In broad strokes, "[t]he ultimate constituents of the world do not have the characteristics of either mind or matter as ordinarily understood: they are not solid persistent objects moving through space, nor are they fragments of 'consciousness'" (Russell 1921, 124). Although the neutral stuff which is the ultimate constituent of the world is primitive, it should not be thought of as a third entity (in addition to mind and matter) with its own, separate, ontological make-up.[1]

1 We believe that some Russell scholars (Landini (2011) being a prominent example) have a tendency to interpret Russell's neutral monism as a form of physicalism. We would like to acknowledge that while we do not disagree with this interpretation, it's worth noting that Russell's physicalism is atypical (anomalous even, to use Davidson's (2002) term). Russell's neutral monism does not subscribe to materialism as this would be a form of substantivism and hence, go against a genuinely monist position. Instead of supporting a claim to the effect that the world is material, Russell's claim simply is that physics, as one form of inquiry about the world, can most likely supply us with the most coherent explanation of reality. This explanation, however, is not contrary or contradictory, to the explanation that psychology, for example,

Russell is quick to offer a simile to illustrate the point: we should refer to the neutral stuff the way we refer to items organized into columns and/or rows. Cross-referencing is possible and, in some cases, necessary, but it is also entirely possible to catalogue items according to whatever principle is required by the current inquiry. Being an item in a column, for example, requires that the item enters into different (causal and associative) relations with all other items in the same column. In other words, mind and matter are referred to as two distinct categories only because of the type of inquiry they participate in. Every inquiry about the world has its own goals and conceptual apparatus which an entity, participating in the inquiry, must fit in. However, experience (experiential knowledge for Russell has always been the fundamental type of knowledge), as James observed, has no "inner duplicity"; there is only "pure experience" within which things and thoughts are only points of reference (James 1904a, 480). Eventually, Russell allows terms such as "proposition", "fact", "particular", and "sense-datum" to be absorbed by "event" thereby defining event as a "process" (and causes and effects as "temporally contiguous processes", Russell 1921, 94). When an event, (say, a recollection), is examined by psychology, it enters into various associations and causal laws typical for the psychological inquiry (e. g. "mnemic causation", a term Russell borrowed from Semon); when it is examined by physics, it enters into a different set of laws typical for the science of physics. But an event can participate in both without its "inner nature" changing in any way. This has significant repercussions for the understanding of causality which we will touch upon later, a contentious point for physicalists and panpsychists alike.[2]

In the *Analysis of Mind* Russell writes, "[w]e have seen that they [images] are subject to mnemic causation, and that mnemic causation may be reducible to ordinary physical causation in nervous tissue ... images belong only to the mental world, while those occurrences (if any) which do not form part of any experience belong only to the physical world" (Russell 1921, 303). What is clear from the quote is that Russell's main concern, which echoes James's, is how to

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can provide. In other words, we believe that Russell's alleged physicalism belongs to what Stoljar (2002) calls a "theory-based conception" of the physical.

2 There are variations of panpsychism and physicalism that might not consider this point too contentious. Cosmopsychism, for example, would hold that consciousness does not require subjectivity, while physicality such as Herbert Feigl and Grover Maxwell would not believe that the physicality of consciousness should necessarily reduce subjectivity to objectivity. However, as we shall make clear shortly, one of our goals in this text is to avoid various definitional dodges that accompany versions of both panpsychism and physicalism. As such, we are adamant to not attempt to classify Russell's neutral monism as either a form of panpsychism or a form of physicalism.

account for experience, and *not* how best to divide the world into mental and physical. As Michael Silberstein put it recently, for the neutral monist of Russellian kind, experience is "inherently relational" (Silberstein 2017, 1138), meaning that the subject is consistently interpreted by Russell as the *subject of experience*, and not as some type of an entity, an ontological fact of sorts.[3] In this sense, representationalism does not make much sense as there is no internal division of "in" and "out", "subjective" and "objective", "mental" and "material". Consistent anti-representationalism is well aligned with Russell's life-long commitment to direct realism (which in no way contradicts his structural realism from the neutral monist period).

Another thing to point out here is the meaning of "causal". When Russell talks about "mnemic causality", for example, he does not mean that our analysis will lead us to a primary cause, an origin of perception of sorts, something primitive (an inscrutable) that is capable of generating a chain of events. Such an interpretation would be at odds with a genuinely neutral monist account since if we accept a primary cause, then we are back to the generation problem, the radical emergence problem, and generally, ontological dualism. However, if by "causal" we mean "explanatory" where we have accepted that the primitive stuff of the world is neutral, that is, non-dual, then the causal mechanism of perception that Russell describes is, to borrow Silberstein's term, simply an "inductive projection" rather than a mechanism supposed to lead us to a hard datum (Silberstein 2017, 1138). In support of this, in his second major neutral monist work, *The Analysis of Matter*, Russell states that "[t]o mean more, it may be said, is to regard causality as something more than correlation, which there can be no reason for doing" (Russell 1927a, 327). In other words, since we do not have access to the "intrinsic" nature of events, we cannot conclude that "mental events" are caused by "non-mental events" or vice versa.

We can single out, then, a few features of Russell's neutral monism relevant to our project. These features will help us gain a fuller understanding of what made Russell's neutral monism neutral, in comparison to other

3 We acknowledge that Russell was always clear that there were no convincing grounds for thinking that mental phenomena are intrinsically relational. This is not what we mean when we quote Silberstein. The "relationality" of experience that we are referring to has to do with the fact that, for Russell, in the neutral monist period, there is no substantive self who is the agent of experience. In addition, Russell saw mind and matter as a series of events that are related and correlated via causal laws, hence our use of "relationality" of experience.

types of monism, and thus, attractive to us as the bridge between the subjective and the objective.

(i) It promotes structuralism about physics (i. e. physics explains the world only in abstract, structural terms without engaging with the intrinsic nature of the basic entities of reality). In other words, physics does not give us reality as a material substratum; it only provides us with a, more or less, coherent explanation without granting us direct access to what the building blocks of reality actually are. To translate this back to the problem of personal identity, structuralism about physics does not allow us to *reduce* the person to a physical object, thus leaving room for the person's subjective experience.

(ii) It champions monism about perception (more developed in the *Analysis of Matter* where Russell proposes a new theory of perception). Monism about perception establishes that all we have access to is perception; everything else is inferred, hence, the preoccupation with experience.

(iii) Neutral monism *re*constructs mind and matter (in other words, it does not construct matter); the neutral is not a third, separate entity from the mental and the physical; hence, there is no need for a split between subject and object (and no need to take a side either).

(iv) All elements of reality such as events, can be accounted for in different ways depending on what our interest in them is, and how they are grouped in complexes, much like cataloging information into columns and rows.

(v) There is a predominance of an epistemic as opposed to a metaphysical worry. This is important for our project since the *three ingredients* includes an epistemological requirement. Since the start of his preoccupation with theory of knowledge, Russell's main concern appears to have been epistemic stability. This is transparent in the way he deals with skepticism (considering it, without a change, "philosophically uninteresting") as well as his commitment to realism, whether **naïve** or scientific. This makes Leopold Stubenberg's remark that "it is this epistemic worry [of how experience provides evidence for physics] – not a concern about the metaphysical ungroundedness of physical properties – that leads him [Russell] to undertake his neutral monist reconstruction of matter and mind", particularly apt (Stubenberg 2016, 69). What is more, we are convinced that Stubenberg's suggestion that we should perhaps "be content if all the Russellian framework showed is how to find home for the phenomenal qualities in the physical world" as opposed to demanding that "the phenomenal properties

> not merely reside in, but also metaphysically ground, the physical structures they inhabit", rings true and is consistent with features (i) through (v).[4]

A quick clarification about Russellian Monism (RM) is in order. While RM wholeheartedly accepts (i), it, at the same time, does not adopt many of the other features of Russell's neutral monism which makes us worried that framing our project in the language of RM will get us bogged down in the problem of grounding (concerning the nature of inscrutables) as well as the earlier mentioned generation problem and the problem of radical emergence (Alter and Nagasawa 2015, 432–437), not to speak of the contentious phenomenal foundationalism to which, we are convinced, Russell would have objected. In addition, there are already many existing definitional dodges within the RM debate itself which only contribute to the terminological complications with types of physicalism and types of panpsychism that we are trying to use neutral monism to avoid in the first place (see for example, Holman 2008, 50–59).

At the same time, however, we find that panpsychism, broadly construed, bears relevance to our project since Russell himself refers, more or less, to panpsychism in *Religion and Science* when he claims that: "Now we can only say that we react to stimuli, and so do stones, though the stimuli to which they react are fewer. So far, as external 'perception' is concerned, the difference between us and a stone is only one of degree" (Russell 1935, 130–132). This seems consistent with what Russell wrote in *The Analysis of Mind*: "I do not believe that there is any 'stuff' of consciousness, so that there is no intrinsic value by which a 'conscious' experience can be distinguished from any other" (Russell 1921, 113). Stubenberg's remark, quoted earlier, concerning the epistemic agenda of Russell's neutral monism, allows for a parallel between neutral monism and panpsychism which Stubenberg himself makes. It is the panphenomenality of panpsychism that steers scholars like Rosenberg, Griffin and

4 Recently, Wishon (2015, 111) distinguished three types of neutral monism in Russell between 1921 and 1959. Put very roughly, Wishon claims that after 1940, Russell's neutral monist agenda moves away from being genuinely neutral monist where the epistemological concern is primary (how we account for mental and physical events) to leaning more toward a physicalist agenda. As already mentioned in footnote 1, scholars such as Landini (2011) and Banks (2010, 2014) see all of Russell's neutral monism as being propped up on physicalism or naturalism as Landini calls it (2011, 322). We do not, in principle, disagree with this label. Again, what is important to highlight for our project is Russell's neutral monist caveat that physics cannot tell us anything about the intrinsic nature of physical phenomena, and hence, all we have access to is our experience of the world. We will come back to Russell's physicalism in the last section of the text.

the already mentioned Holman toward the term "panexperientialism"[5] (Rosenberg 2004; Griffin 1997; Holman 2008) on the basis that a "Russellian theory of mind" (RTM) can work successfully if we focus on what it says about experience rather than try to fit it into already established metaphysical frameworks such as panpsychism or physicalism (Holman 2008, 60).[6]

Whether or not, and to what extent neutral monism is akin to (a form of) panpsychism, remains open. However, the important point for our project is that Russell remained firm in his non-reductionist agenda. For Russell, following his evolution in logical atomism, matter has always been viewed by both physics and common sense as either inferred or constructed. Here is what he wrote in *The Analysis of Matter*: "Both materialism and idealism have been guilty … of a confusion in their imaginative picture of matter. They have thought of matter in the external world being represented by their percepts when they see and touch, whereas these percepts are really part of the matter of the percipient's brain" (Russell 1927a, 382). Following this, Russell would always make clear that while physics gives us an abstract, indirect picture of reality, what we have direct access to is phenomena (that is, all that is directly accessible to us, without inference or derivation). Then, the most important question in the neutral monist period, as Stubenberg does not fail to notice, becomes this: what is the *relationship* between the physical reality (which is constructed or inferred) and the phenomenal reality which is known to us directly (Stubenberg 2016, 78)? Thus, Russell's neutral monism seems to be inspired not by positing a new building block of reality, or by trying to figure out what causal chains the body and mind

5 To clarify further, we acknowledge the point that Russell would, most likely, not have been happy with the label "panexperientialism". However, we believe that there is some value in the term "panexperientialism". As conceded in footnote 1, Russell did espouse a form of (atypical) physicalism in his neutral monist period but he never changed his mind about the statement that physics cannot tell us anything about the intrinsic nature of matter: "We now realize that we know nothing of the intrinsic quality of physical phenomena except when they happen to be sensations … " (Russell 1927b, 117).

6 We must, once again, acknowledge that if one is not unsympathetic to the view defended by Landini, Banks and recently by Silberstein, claiming that Russell espoused a form of physicalism (non-mainstream physicalism to be sure) in the neutral monist period (Landini 2011, 280–281; Banks 2014, 7, 118; Silberstein 2017, 1129–1135), we might find ourselves reading panpsychism in a way that brings it very close to physicalism; something Holman, Alter & Nagasawa, as well as Silberstein wrestle with. While disentangling the terminological complexities of both is a worthy enterprise in and of itself, we believe that as long as we agree that for Russell experience was not fundamental but yet, it is the only thing we have direct access to (since we do not have access to the intrinsic nature of matter), we can use his neutral monism to propagate our process ontology vis-à-vis personal identity.

belong to, thus leading us to a primitive/inscrutable of sorts, but by the desire to find the relation between knower and known.

The only way to accomplish this is to assume that the building blocks of reality are neither mental nor physical but can be either, depending on the complexes/systems they are a part of. To use Landini again, it seems that Russell "merges" two views: James's idea that consciousness is a process and the idea that matter consists of "continuants persisting in time" (2011, 282). In other words, "matter has lost its solidity … [and] mind has lost its spirituality" (2011, 283).[7] The account of reality we are seeking dictates the elements with which a given building block is grouped within a given event. Put otherwise, Russell's neutral monist theory has managed to flip the question of the relationship between reality and perception. Instead of asking how the physical entities (atoms, electrons, quarks, and other such particles) give rise to perceived color patches, it is preoccupied with how the color patches we perceive make up the physical particles that we infer. Stubenberg calls this Russell's neutral monist "elegant solution" to the "original grain problem" proposed by Wilfrid Sellars (Stubenberg 2016, 86).

The Process Ontology of Neutral Monism, and Its Relation to Subjectivity and Objectivity

Given what we presented about neutral monism, a question emerges: does neutral monism present us with a genuinely novel approach toward the reconciliation of subjectivity and objectivity in personal identity, or is it a cop-out

7 It is worth noting here that Landini who reads Russell as proposing that the building blocks of reality are, strictly speaking, physical events in space and time, some series of which constitute matter while others, mind, does not seem to believe that this reading of Russell's neutral monism can be reconciled with the earlier mentioned Alter & Nagasawa volume; namely, that the neutral stuff are phenomenal qualitative states some of which constitute matter while others, mind (Landini 2011, 291). Landini's reason appears to hinge on the interpretation of "phenomenal". If by phenomenal we mean the qualitative aspects of consciousness, then the two theses cannot be reconciled. It seems that Landini is advocating an anti-panpsychist reading of Russell's neutral monism. While, as we emphasized in the previous section, we believe that the matter of whether Russell could have been defending a version of panpsyhicsm or not, remains contentious in the literature, partly because of the recent proliferation of versions of panpsychism, it suffices, for our project, to emphasize the fact that Russell did see both mind and matter as events, that is, as each a series of "innumerable transient particulars" (Russell 1921, 143), none of which emerge from the other. This non-emergent quality of the neutral stuff suffices for the purposes of our project.

theory, based on linguistic or terminological switch-up, as it were? We are going to address this by going back to our earlier suggestion of process ontology (versus what we've called substance ontology).

What we believe is going on when we are being urged by Russell to account for the building blocks of reality as neutral entities is the following. We are being urged to focus on the *process* of accounting for personal identity. In this sense, we could, under the neutral monist paradigm, say with confidence that personal identity is not a thing, a substratum, a datum, but something forming when the neutral units trigger (in the sense of conditioning experience) their material and mental dispositions/properties which properties are, by definition, embedded in them. This might appear to fly in the face of how Landini sees Russell's neutral monism. For Landini, the neutrality of reality consists in that the series of particulars that make up reality persist through time, not that they can occur in either mental or material series (Landini 2011, 292).[8] The exact interpretation of mental and material series aside, we take Landini's point to further support the *three ingredients* requirement. If reality, as we access it, is what James called "pure experience" (1904b, 533) which is neither mental nor material, then there should be no trouble to diachronically connect synchronic states in a person's life which include both psychological and a biological events. We believe that by focusing on the process as opposed to the substance, a theory could accomplish both what Stubenberg calls "ontological economy" and "epistemological risk minimization", undoubtedly desirable traits for any theory (Stubenberg 2016, 80).

To belabor the point further we turn to the ending of the *Analysis of Mind* where Russell concludes that "[t]he causal laws of physics, so interpreted, differ from those of psychology only by the fact that they connect a particular with other appearances in the same piece of matter, rather than with other appearances in the same perspective" (1921, 301). Russell continues to make an important, for our project, connection between the causal laws of physics and those of psychology underlying the fact that the former "group together particulars having the same 'active' place, while psychology groups together those having the same 'passive' place" (1921, 301). There are particulars, such as images, that have only a "passive" place which is why they belong only to psychology. Both mind and matter are (logical) constructions, not hard data. They are constructed/inferred out of particulars which particulars form units/series/systems of various degrees of complexity. The particulars enter into various relations some of which are studied by physics while others, by

8 Following his own classification, Landini seems to consider (with a question mark at that) James and Spinoza as the only two genuine neutral monists.

psychology. *Objectivity*, then, is defined in terms of particulars, grouped according to their active places; while *subjectivity* is defined in terms of particulars, grouped according to their passive place at a given time. Thus, if we are to study a particular material unit (unit of particulars that are grouped according to their active place), we would uncover the causal laws that govern the particulars. Conceptual complications aside, the point is that these so-called causal laws (which are principles of correlation, really) would be applicable to physics and psychology alike. So, for example, mnemic causation, the causation governing memory, is responsible for activating certain patterns of events which form a memory-event. This, Russell believed, would achieve what traditional metaphysics could not, namely, paint a unified picture of reality: "I believe that the realization of the complexity of the material unit, and its analysis into constituents analogous to sensations, is of the utmost importance to philosophy, and vital for any understanding of the relations between mind and matter, between our perceptions and the world which they perceive" (1921, 306).[9]

This appears to satisfy the *three ingredients* requirement in the sense that neither the subject is reduced to the object, nor the object, to the subject. As a matter of fact, reducing or subsuming one to the other would not make sense under a neutral monist paradigm, as this would mean that all particulars have either only passive or only active places. The process of grouping particulars in systems according to their active or passive place allows us to preserve the person's subjective phenomenology while at the same time, acknowledge the person's presence as a biological entity. Hence, the threat of the subjectivity-objectivity gap disappears as subjectivity and objectivity appear to be two sides of the same coin.

9 We are fully aware that people like Landini and Banks vehemently argue against a more holistic interpretation of Russell's views (see for example Holman 2008; Rosenberg 2004). However, we believe that it is worth at least considering the "subjective unity" approach that both Holman and Rosenberg propose. Subjective unity requires a holistic approach to experience where the putting together of constituents of conscious states results in something different than putting together constituents that can be picked apart at any time (Holman's examples: planets in a planetary system or atoms in a molecule). Although Holman himself is skeptical that Russell ever held this precise view (Holman 2008, 61), it is worth mentioning that Russell's concept of "integral experience", and James's concept of "pure experience" (where the subject and the object are only "virtually or potentially" subject and object, James 1904b, 533) give enough indication that he would side with an approach under which we take the whole of the experience and pick it apart (to say, atomic conscious states) *only if* it is necessary and required by the inquiry about the world.

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