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Panpsychism and Cognitive Closure: An Epistemic Approach to The Mind-Body Problem

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ABSTRACT

As a promising solution to the mind-body problem, panpsychism is the thesis that consciousness is fundamental and universal in the world. It has several theoretical advantages over other competing theories such as physicalism and dualism. Nevertheless, there is also worry that the solution to the mind-body problem is beyond our intellectual access due to our cognitive constraints, and there is no reliable reason for us to favour panpsychism over other theories despite its elegance and simplicity. In this paper, I give a substantial argument for panpsychism from an epistemic approach. I argue that if the solution to the mind-body problem is accessible to any cognitive subject, it must be a panpsychist one. I conclude that either we and any other cognitive beings can never solve the mind-body problem or panpsychist idealism is true.

INDEX WORDS: Panpsychism Mind-Body Problem Cognitive Closure Mysterianism

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DEDICATION

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1 INTRODUCTION

The mind-body problem is the problem of understanding why and how mind and matter are correlated to each other. Sometimes the mind-body problem is also understood as the "hard problem" of consciousness (Chalmers, 1995): some of the physical entities (e.g., our brains) have first-person phenomenal experience. Given their physical properties, why and how do they give rise to this phenomenal experience? We know there is an empirical correlation between physical and phenomenal properties, but it seems there is no clear explanation of why there is such a correlation. There is an "explanatory gap" (Levine, 1983; 2017) between the two types of properties. According to the "zombie argument" (Chalmers, 1996), we can conceive of a world in which there are creatures resembling us in every physical and behavioural detail yet lack subjective phenomenal experience. No matter whether such a zombie world is possible, the conceivability of it shows that we have an epistemic gap between physical properties and phenomenal properties in our theory of the mind-body relation.

Due to the unsatisfactory physicalist account of the mind-body problem, in recent philosophical discussions, there is a theoretical revival of panpsychism, the idea that the fundamental reality contains phenomenal properties. Compared to other competing theories, panpsychism has the advantage that it need not explain how phenomenal properties arise from non-phenomenal properties such as fundamental physical properties (Goff, 2017). Since the fundamental reality consists of phenomenal properties, there is no insurmountable ontological gap between the fundamental reality and the common phenomenal experience we are familiar with. On the other hand, panpsychism faces the problem of explaining how different fundamental phenomenal properties are "combined" to form the macro-phenomenal experience, which is known as the "combination problem" (Chalmers, 2016; Goff, 2017). The combination problem,

however, is not what will be discussed in this paper. There is another general threat from new mysterianism for all theories which take consciousness seriously in the mind-body problem. As the main proponent of new mysterianism, Colin McGinn (1989) claims that we have no cognitive access to the solution to the mind-body problem because our two cognitive faculties of forming conceptual knowledge, perception and introspection, can only represent objective matter and subjective consciousness respectively. We lack the third cognitive faculty to represent the unity of matter and consciousness. In other words, we are cognitively closed to the solution of the mind-body problem. According to McGinn, consciousness or phenomenal property is a natural structure of the physical world. There is no ontological gap between what we take as "matter" and what we take as "mind" in nature itself; the gap is epistemic for us. Had a creature possessed the necessary cognitive faculty to represent the "deep nature" of reality, it would understand why and how some of the physical processes (e.g., our brain activities) are necessarily accompanied by conscious feelings. The problem is that we are just not that creature[1].

In this paper, I argue for the disjunction of panpsychist idealism and mysterianism. The claim is that either the solution to the mind-body problem is an absolute mystery to any possible cognitive subject or panpsychist idealism must be true. Although this does not directly show that panpsychist idealism is true, it still gives us a substantive reason to take panpsychist idealism seriously.

The structure of the paper is as follows: I will first discuss two monism theories on the mind-body relation: panpsychism and panprotopsychism. It is followed by a brief discussion of

[1] Strictly speaking, the new mysterianism is consistent with both panpsychism and physicalism. It does not lay a claim on the nature of reality's "hidden structure" which can account for the mind-body link. The point is that we can never know what it is. If this is true, there is a problem with panpsychism: even if it may have many theoretical advantages over its competitors, we cannot know whether it is true. After all, elegance and simplicity are not the decisive reason to accept a theory.

alternative solutions to the mind-body problem: eliminative materialism, identity theory and dualism.

In the main part of my thesis, I will distinguish between two ways of understanding a property: the “ontological approach” and the “epistemic approach.” I take the latter approach to elaborate on three key principles for understanding the mind-matter relation. These three principles are: Principle of Conceptual Containment, Principle of Phenomenal Entailment and Principle of Existent Grounding.

I argue that the conjunction of these three principles entails the conclusion that either panpsychist idealism is the only possible solution to the mind-matter problem or the problem is not solvable at all. Next, I will a distinction between relative cognitive closure and absolute cognitive closure.

In the final part, I will discuss Michael Vlerick's opinion on cognitive closure. According to his view, what some philosophers such as Colin McGinn call “cognitive closure” is actually “psychological closure,” and psychological closure does not entail cognitive closure. Therefore, my argument can, at best, establish the conclusion that either panpsychist idealism or psychological closure (but not mysterianism and cognitive closure) is true. I will defend the idea that psychological closure does entail cognitive closure.

2 RUSSELLIAN MONISM: PANPSYCHISM AND PANPROTOPSYCHISM

Concerning the mind-body problem, all monist philosophical theories that take consciousness seriously can be categorised into two types: panpsychism and panprotopsychism. Both theories agree that phenomenal experience needs to be explained rather than denied. They also agree that consciousness is not identical with or reducible to physical processes or properties that we currently know (unlike mind-body identity theory or reductive materialism). For example, the subjective feeling of pain is not identical with nor can it be reduced to C-fibres firing, even though they may assume that there is a common ground to explain the correlation of these two phenomena. The common assumption of Russellian monism is that there is only one type of fundamental entity in the world, existing as the base and bridge of the two apparent different properties we know: phenomenal and physical properties. Since Russellian monism claims that there is only one kind of fundamental property grounding the physical properties and phenomenal properties we know, we can define panpsychism as the theory that such fundamental property is phenomenal. Then, we can define panprotopsychism as any other version of Russellian monism. Panprotopsychism, in the broad sense, can accommodate a sort of physicalism. Panprotopsychism assumes that the “deep nature” of the physical world gives rise to the phenomenal properties we know. The deep nature of the physical world consists of “protophenomenal properties”. Protophenomenal properties are not like the physical properties we already know, yet they are not phenomenal properties either. We have no idea what these protophenomenal properties are. However, if we take a loose definition of “physical property” and use it to refer to any concrete properties other than structural and dispositional properties, then protophenomenal properties may be understood as sort of “deep physical properties”, and panprotopsychism as “deep physicalism”.

In short, panprotopsychism is the sum of Russellian monism (including the so-called Russellian neutral monism) other than Russellian panpsychism.

Sometimes panpsychism is understood as the thesis that all fundamental physical entities such as particles have phenomenal experience, namely, that there is something it is like to be those fundamental physical entities (Chalmers, 2016). However, I do not think this definition is precise enough to capture the main claim of panpsychism. For one thing, it is more like a dualistic than a monistic expression: the mere fact that a particle has phenomenal experience reveals no conceptual relation between its physical (non-phenomenal) and phenomenal properties. It is a brute fact that the ultimate entities have two different kinds of fundamental properties, none of which is more fundamental than the other. For another, some other versions of panpsychism do not presume the existence of micro-subjects like conscious particles. Cosmopsychism, for example, does not entail that micro-physical entities themselves are conscious subjects. Therefore, I will take another "idealist definition" of panpsychism, according to which the fundamental reality is purely phenomenal. According to this definition, pure panpsychism entails idealism. I call this version of panpsychism panpsychist idealism[2] (Brentyn J. Ramm 2021; Miri Albahari 2022)

[2] The term "panpsychist idealism" was first proposed by Brentyn J. Ramm (2021) and later adopted and defended by Miri Albahari (2022). According to their interpretation, the traditional version of panpsychism is actually "panpsychist materialism", which compromises with materialism and suffers the disadvantages of ontological dualism. Albahari also claims that in the study of the mind-body problem, there is a dialectical movement from dualism through panpsychism to idealism.

3 THE MOTIVATION FROM ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO PANPSYCHIST IDEALISM

Before I go further to discuss Russellian monism, it is worth noting that Russellian monism is not the only possible solution to the mind-body problem. There are at least three alternative positions that one may choose. They are eliminative materialism, identity theory and dualism. Why assume Russellian monism and mysterianism are the only possible options we have? Why not consider them at all? While I do not have a knock-down argument to reject them once and for all, I can argue that some versions of these alternative solutions are ultimately reducible to a Russellian monist one, and the other versions are less attractive for serious consideration.

Eliminative materialism is the thesis that mental concepts such as desire, belief and feeling do not exist or are just illusions. Phenomenal consciousness, as the whole of these mental phenomena, has no place in the serious science of mind. The most extreme form of eliminative materialism denies that there is any phenomenal consciousness that needs explanation at all. But it is hard to see how such a position can stand at all. Surely we can confirm the existence of our phenomenal consciousness via introspection. There is also a view according to which "consciousness is a being such that in its being the being of other being is known" (Colin McGinn 2008). That is, we know the existence of anything else through our consciousness, and the confirmation of our consciousness is epistemically prior to the confirmation of the existence of anything else. This is not to claim that our consciousness is more fundamental than anything else in the metaphysical sense, but that our phenomenal consciousness renders our knowledge of the world and of ourselves possible. Therefore, if we know anything, then we know that our consciousness exists, and we must reject the extreme form of eliminative materialism.

The softer form of eliminative materialism is illusionism, according to which our phenomenal consciousness exists but only in a derived and illusional sense (Keith Frankish 2016). The ultimate reality consists of non-experiential facts, some of which may give rise to the illusions of phenomenal consciousness. The relationship between our phenomenal consciousness and objective reality is similar to that between an image of a horse in your dream and a real horse. Illusionism agrees that there are phenomenal consciousness and experiential facts that need to be explained but assumes that they can be explained away by more fundamental physical reality. However, even if the existence of consciousness is an illusion, illusionists still have their own "illusion problem", the problem of explaining why we have such illusions in physical words. But our current physical knowledge seems insufficient to play that role. If an illusionist claims that phenomenal consciousness has no place in the fundamental reality and can be fully explained by some unknown non-experiential and physical facts, then she is actually appealing to Russian panprotopsychism more or less. In conclusion, the position of eliminative materialism is either too ridiculous to be true or too close to Russian panprotopsychism.

And what about (mind-body) identity theory? Identity theory is the thesis that mental states such as "being in pain" are identical to brain states such as C-fibres' firing. There is no mental state that is separate and different from the physical state. The biggest challenge for identity theory is that mental state and brain state differ in some essential respects. For example, a mental state such as being in pain is first-personal, experiential and private while C-fibres' firing is third-personal, non-experiential and publicly observable. Identity theory owes us an account of why the mental state and the brain state appear differently to us. Of course, the fact that these two states appear differently does not imply that they are not the same thing. Sometimes the very same thing can appear differently in different scenarios. For instance, the "morning star" and the "evening

star" appear differently. The morning star shows up in the morning while the evening star appears in the evening, but that is not evidence that they are different entities, for our scientific research shows that they are the same thing, namely, Venus appearing in different places and occasions. It is quite possible that the relationship between being in pain and C-fibres firing is the same as that between the morning star and the evening star. That is, the mental state of being in pain and the brain state of C-fibre's firing are two different manifestations of the very same unknown states. This relation may apply to all experiential facts and their corresponding non-experiential facts. Nevertheless, despite possibly being true, identity theory is far less than a satisfactory solution to the mind-body problem.

The problem with identity theory is that it is an incomplete theory. Firstly, it has to presume a third unknown aspect in which both mental state and brain state are identical, but it cannot tell us what this unknown entity or state is. Since mental state and brain state appear different to us, if mind-brain identity theory is correct, then the way a state appears to us cannot define what this state is. Otherwise, the fact that being in pain and C-fibres' firing appear differently to us would imply that they are different things. So according to identity theory, being in pain and C-fibres firing are two manifested aspects of the same underlying process. But what is this underlying process? One may argue that it is not necessary for identity theory to provide us with an account of what this underlying process or state is. We can leave it to our scientific investigation. However, without such an account, identity theory has little, if any, explanatory power on the mind-body relation. Neuroscience tells us that there is a tight correlation between C-fibres' firing and being in pain. Whenever there is C-fibres' firing, there is someone undergoing pain. The physicalist assumption tells us that the latter supervenes on the former. But what if one day we find an alien creature such as a Martian can undergo the same feeling of pain, and his pain nerve is not C-fibre?

This will entail that being in pain is not identical to C-fibres' firing. Instead, being in pain is "multiply realized" by different material states such as C-fires' firing. What evidence do we have to favour identity theory over a multiply realization theory with respect to the mind-body relation? It seems the only reason is we have not found any other material foundation that can give rise to the feeling of pain yet. But it is quite implausible to claim something is impossible just because it has not been confirmed yet. For identity theory to be a solid solution to the mind-body problem, a thorough explanation of how mental state and brain state are identical to each other at a more fundamental level is necessary. In other words, for identity theory to be a complete theory to account for the mind-body relation, it must rely on the progress of Russellian monism.

A less noticed but also important problem with identity theory is that many philosophers assume it supports physicalism while it does not. The claim that being in pain is identical to C-fibres' firing can have two interpretations: a physicalist one and an idealist one. According to the physicalist interpretation, C-fibres' firing (or some other underlying physical process) is more fundamental and real, the first-person, experiential pain is nothing but an alternative manifestation of the physical process. On the other hand, the idealist interpretation would put first-person, experiential pain in a superior position. The third-person, non-experiential C-fibres' firing is a manifestation of the former. The incomplete identity theory does not tell us which interpretation is correct.

The last possible alternative approach to the mind-body relation is dualism. Cartesian dualism claims that phenomenal consciousness and materials cannot be reduced to each other. Both are equally fundamental in reality. Substance dualism has few proponents nowadays and is becoming less popular, probably not because it has been proven wrong but because it contradicts one of our most important assumptions: that reality is united at the fundamental level. Perhaps this

is how we make sense of the world and keep making progress in science. Science is not satisfied with the superficial correlation of two different things but aims to figure out the deeper and underlying mechanism that reveals why such a correlation must be the case. Likewise, the correlation between phenomenal consciousness and physical states seems contingent, and substance dualism says that this contingent correlation is a “brute fact” that we should accept and seek no further explanation. If dualism is true, we get an internally heterogeneous pattern of the world. The mental and the physical things co-exist at the fundamental level. Neither is dependent on the other side, yet they coordinate with each other in a harmonious and miraculous way to make up the ordinary world we know! Is this world pattern possible? Although there is no logical contradiction in this pattern, its metaphysical assumption is less attractive than a united monism world pattern.

In summary, the most crucial solution to the mind-body problem lies in the debate between different versions of Russellian monism.

4 THE EPISTEMIC APPROACH TO THE MIND-BODY PROBLEM

In this part, I develop what I call the "epistemic approach" to the Russellian monism solution to the mind-body problem. Within the Russellian monism framework, the mind-body problem could be concluded as follows: given that there are first-person, experiential phenomenal properties and third-person, non-experiential properties, and if there is a fundamental property to which these two kinds of properties can both reduce, then what is it? We may ask an "ontological question": what is this fundamental property at all? Russellian panpsychists and idealists will say, "The fundamental property is phenomenal", while Russellian panprotopsychists and physicalists will claim that the fundamental property is a non-phenomenal one. We may also ask an "epistemic question": if there is any such fundamental property, do we have the necessary epistemic means to understand it? Asking an epistemic question first before asking an ontological question about something is not new in the history of philosophy. For example, Immanuel Kant tried to argue that due to our cognitive constraints, we may never to able to understand the answer to some metaphysical questions about God, freedom and noumenon. With respect to the mind-body problem, new mysterianists such as Colin McGinn also tried to argue that we don't have the epistemic capacity to understand the mind-body correlation. Compared to the ontological question, the epistemic question is usually overlooked due to naïve optimism. Knowledge is an epistemic relation between the subject who understand and the object which is being understood. It is quite possible that the very nature of the object has prevented the subject from establishing any such epistemic relation. Therefore, it is possible that the nature of the fundamental property responsible for the mind-body correlation may prevent us from comprehending what it is.

An epistemic approach can combine the ontological question and the epistemic question into one by asking, “If there is any property that can account for the mind-body correlation, and if it is comprehensible, what conditions must it satisfy?”

There are two ways of thinking about a property. We can ask what it is in and for itself or ask what it is for a cognitive subject. Phenomenal properties and non-phenomenal properties differ in both aspects. According to the former understanding, phenomenal properties are those properties whose instantiation in an entity will make it a conscious subject to undergo something it is like, while non-phenomenal properties are the properties that will not render the entity subject in virtue of their direct instantiation. For example, “being in pain” is a typical phenomenal property. Any entity that has this property will become a subject experiencing painful feelings, which entails that there is something it is like to be that entity. By contrast, “being solid” is a non-phenomenal property. The fact that an entity is solid does not entail that this entity is a subject with internal experience.

There is another way, however, to approach the same destination. There is an essential distinction between phenomenal properties and non-phenomenal properties with respect to the relation between their concrete instantiation and their positive conception in a subject’s mind. For any subject, the proper understanding (that is, an accurate representation) of a phenomenal property necessarily entails the concrete instantiation of such property. Here is a paradigmatic example: intuitively, the nature of seeing red is its qualitative characteristic. You will not be able to understand what seeing red is unless you know what it is like to have such an experience yourself. Therefore, to know what it is like to see red, it is necessary that a token redness is instantiated in your mind. We can say that a mental conception of a phenomenal property such as seeing red entails its concrete instantiation in the mind. When one has an accurate mental

representation of a property (either phenomenal or non-phenomenal) that reveals some of its essential aspects, it is said one has a positive concept of it. To know and understand a property is to possess a positive conception of it in your mind. For phenomenal properties, its positive conception in the mind entails its concrete instantiation (existence). In other words, a phenomenal property is a property such that when it is being positively conceived of by a cognitive subject, a token of this property necessarily instantiates. This is the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal property.

Before discussing the details further, I want to clarify the meaning of what I call "positive conception." According to Chalmers (2009), there are four types of possible concepts with respect to how well they reveal the essential aspects of their referents:

Transparent: A transparent concept reveals the nature of its referent (where the referent is a property, the concept reveals what it is for an object to have that property).

Translucent: A translucent concept reveals part (but not all) of the nature of its referent (where the referent is a property, the concept reveals part of what it is for an object to have that property).

Mildly opaque: A mildly opaque concept does not reveal essential properties of the referent, but does reveal accidental features of the referent which uniquely identify it in the actual world.

Radically opaque: A radically opaque concept reveals neither essential nor accidental properties of its referent.

By this categorization, a concept is an idea that picks up some aspects of a referent and uses them to identify the referent. Some aspects of the referent are "essential". That is, the referent would cease to be what it is without possessing these features or aspects. There remains ambiguity here. What is the "nature" of a referent? And if a referent has different aspects, which aspect should be recognised as essential? If Kripke is right, the nature of "water" is that it is H_2O, not its

superficial features of being a colourless liquid. Water will cease to be water if it is no longer composed of H_2O.

Not all useful concepts are transparent or translucent. For example, many people form the concept of Napoleon by recognising that Napoleon was the one who became the emperor of France and launched many wars in Europe in the 19th century, even if they agree that Napoleon would still have been the same person had he not done the things he actually did. In this case, the concept of Napoleon has picked up some important aspects of its referent that interest the users, even if the concept is not transparent or translucent.

For our purpose, we can define "positive concept" as a concept that picks up some aspects of its referent which interest us and uses these aspects to identify its referent (even if these aspects are not "essential" in all cases). That is, depending on our interest in some scenarios, we can agree that a person has a positive concept of water if he knows that water has the superficial features of being drinkable, colourless liquid, without knowing that water is necessarily H_2O. For phenomenal properties like "seeing red", a positive concept of it should pick up and reveal the "what-it-is-like" aspect of it (because this aspect is what interests us in the mind-body problem). Thus, without knowing what it is like to see red herself, a person has no positive concept of seeing red, even if she knows the proposition that seeing red is the experience she would have if she looked at a mature apple in normal conditions. This definition of positive concept of phenomenal properties is neutral to the "phenomenal concept strategy" adopted by some physicalists. According to the phenomenal concept strategy, physical concepts and phenomenal concepts are just two different kinds of concepts we use to identify the very same (physical) process. For example, "C-fibres firing" and "the feeling of being in pain" are different concepts to pick up different aspects of the same process. We don't have to assume that C-fibres firing is a different thing other than the

subjective feeling of being in pain. My definition of the positive concept of phenomenal property does not rely on the phenomenal concept strategy (since I do not rely on their physicalist assumption) but can well accommodate it, so long as we both agree that phenomenal concepts have picked up some important aspects which are not revealed by the physical concepts.

In short, the positive concept of a phenomenal property is one that reveals and tells us the "what-it-is-like" aspect of this phenomenal property. If a fundamental property P is responsible for giving rise to the phenomenal properties that we know, then a positive concept of P should reveal and tell us how P is giving rise to a specific phenomenal property no less than a positive concept of the triangle reveals how something's being triangular necessitates its having at least two corners. I call the formation of a positive concept in our mind "positive conception".

Now I will move back to the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal properties, according to which the positive conception of a phenomenal property entails the instantiation of such a token property. Some may argue that the positive conception of a phenomenal property need not entail its instantiation. For example, I may claim that I know what headache is and I can think about it clearly in my mind, yet I don't suffer a real headache now. However, this claim has two conflations. It conflates original and derivative conception on the one hand, and truth condition and practical condition of conception on the other. What makes me believe that I know what headache is, even when I am not undergoing a real one? It seems obvious that it is only possible when I once experienced a fresh headache, forming an original positive conception of it, and now I still keep some experiential connection to the original impression in my memory. When I try to recall and hallucinate what headache is, even though I cannot instantiate a fresh headache with full experiential details, I can still form some sort of subjective impression resembling the original headache experience to some extent. In this case, I can say I have a derivative positive conception

of headache. For practical purposes, I may claim that I have a positive conception and knowledge of the headache. Another example is that the truth condition of being a circle can only be satisfied by a geometrically perfect circle. Although we do usually consider a geometrically imperfect "circle" as a real circle for various practical purpose, we should not forget that the plausibility of conception for practical use is derived from its original truth condition. Likewise, my derivative positive conception of headache inherits its plausibility from the original conception. If I completely lose the connection to the original phenomenal representation of headache, I no longer have its positive conception, even if I once did.

However, it is worth noticing that we can still know some truth about headache even when we completely lose its positive conception. Sometimes we use different meanings of knowing, but not all of them count as a positive conception and understanding of the nature of a property. For example, if my girlfriend tells me she is suffering from dysmenorrhea, I seem to understand what she means. I know that dysmenorrhea is a painful feeling that some females will suffer from time to time, and I know all its physiological causes. But do I, as a male, really know what dysmenorrhea (as a phenomenal feeling) is? No. There is a sense in which I don't know what she undergoes, for I have never experienced and cannot imagine the feeling of dysmenorrhea. Therefore, I don't have the positive conception of dysmenorrhea (as a phenomenal property). Because had I one, I would have had a token dysmenorrhea in my mind.

If you still doubt this, ask yourself a question: to what extent do you know what headache is, any more than you know what it is like to have a bat echolocation? I assume that we don't know what it is like to have a bat echolocation in our mind because we are no bats. At least we don't have a positive concept of such a feeling. But what about the positive concept of headache? There must be some more in us to grasp the positive concept of headache instead of the positive concept

of (the feeling of) echolocation. This positive concept cannot originate from third-person observation and knowledge of neuroanatomy, for we can do well in the neuroanatomy in bat brains no less than we do in our human brains, yet we don't know what it is like to have the feeling of echolocation. Therefore, the positive concept of (the feeling of) headache must originate from a fresh first-person experience of headache. That is, the instantiation of a (phenomenal) headache is necessary for the original positive conception of it. The original positive conception is sufficient for (which means entails) its instantiation.

In conclusion, to have the positive and original conception of a phenomenal property, you need to instantiate a token of such property in your mind. Panpsychism, in the epistemic approach, is the thesis that the fundamental reality consists of properties such that if any subject has a positive conception of them, they will necessarily be instantiated. In what follows, I will demonstrate how this leads to the conclusion that panpsychist idealism is the only plausible option if the solution to the mind-body problem is understandable at all.

My claim is based on the following three premises, each of which has an independent motivation to be defended: the principle of phenomenal entailment (PPE), the principle of existent grounding (PEG), and the principle of conceptual containment (PCC).

(1) *Principle of Phenomenal Entailment* (PPE): The positive conception of a phenomenal property entails the instantiation of such a token phenomenal property.

(2) *Principle of Conceptual Containment* (PCC): Any positive conception of the presumed fundamental property P, which gives rise to experiential/phenomenal facts, must also contain a positive conception of the corresponding phenomenal properties.

(3) *Principle of Existent Grounding* (PEG): If a presumed fundamental property P grounds and gives rise to a phenomenal property we know, then instantiation of a token phenomenal property

entails instantiation of a token P (for without P exists first, the corresponding phenomenal property cannot come into existence)

Although these premises are new, they are motivated and supported by some well-established philosophical thought experiments on the mind-body problem. These philosophical arguments have been well discussed. Nevertheless, some of their logical entailments are largely unnoticed, and these logical entailments lead to the principles I will defend in the following arguments.

4.1 Principle of Phenomenal Entailment and The Knowledge Argument

The first and most important premise I will defend is the Principle of Phenomenal Entailment, from which the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal property is derived. I will not repeat the argument for the epistemic definition of phenomenal property here, but it is worthwhile to talk about the Knowledge Argument developed by Frank Cameron Jackson (1982).

Imagine that Mary, a clever neuroscientist, grew up in a closed black-and-white room. Suppose she learnt everything about the human visual system, the working mechanism of human brains, and everything else she needed to know about the biological and physical world. One day, she was released from the room and saw something red herself for the first time. Intuitively, she learned something new in her knowledge, namely, what it is like to see something red. Despite her mastery of all the physical knowledge before her release, she didn't know what seeing red is until she saw something red in person. This argument is often used against physicalism. If physicalism is true, all facts in the world can be reduced to physical facts, and all knowledge can be deduced to physical knowledge. Since Mary can learn something new in addition to all physical knowledge, there are some facts (experiential facts) that are not physical facts. Thus, physicalism is false.

Of course, not all physicalists agree with the conclusion of this thought experiment. For our purpose, it is not necessary to appeal to its anti-physicalism conclusion. What matters is the plausibility of this scenario: Mary cannot claim that she knows the phenomenal character of seeing red unless she has seen something red herself or is able to imagine something red in her mind via active imagination (either by hallucination or perception). This scenario does not directly stand against physicalist claims, so even physicalists can accept its plausibility.

Moreover, it is hard to see how an alternative claim is possible. Suppose someone says, "Well, although I have never seen anything red myself, nor can I imagine what redness is in my mind, I do know very well what it is like to see red!" I take it that this claim is extremely counterintuitive and weird. Knowing what it is like to see red means you have a positive conception of seeing red yourself, but you will not do so unless you instantiate a token redness in your mind via imagination at the same time. Colin McGinn also says something similar in his paper *Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?* (1989),

"But there is a further point to be made about P and consciousness, which concerns our restricted access to the concepts of consciousness themselves. It is a familiar point that the range of concepts of consciousness attainable by a mind M is constrained by the specific forms of consciousness possessed by M. Crudely, you cannot form concepts of conscious properties unless you yourself instantiate those properties. The man born blind cannot grasp the concept of a visual experience of red, and human beings cannot conceive of the echolocatory experiences of bats" (P355)

In summary, even if we don't have to accept the Knowledge Argument's anti-physicalism conclusion, its scenario still implies that for phenomenal concepts like seeing red, instantiation of a token property is necessary for a subject to acquire a positive conception and knowledge of it.

By *modus tollens*, if the instantiation of a token phenomenal property in mind is necessary for its positive conception and knowledge, then its positive conception entails the instantiation of a token phenomenal property. And now we have the Principle of Phenomenal Entailment.

4.2 Principle of Conceptual Containment and The Conceivability Argument

The Principle of Conceptual Containment is motivated by the Conceivability (Zombie) Argument and the "Explanatory Gap". Some dualists will argue that physics cannot explain first-person experiential facts because we can conceive of a zombie which is a physical duplicate of us, yet lacking consciousness. Why is this argument against physicalism? The most popular appeal to the view is that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility (David Chalmers, 2002). If zombie is conceivable, then it is metaphysically possible. If it is possible that physical facts obtain while phenomenal facts do not, then it shows that phenomenal facts are not identical with and cannot be reduced to physical facts.

Some physicalists will deny that the Zombie Argument is a successful counterexample for physicalism. For one thing, whether conceivability entails metaphysical possibility is controversial. But this is a big topic that I won't discuss here. For another, One may argue that the premise of the Zombie Argument is questionable because this argument presumes we know all physical facts. But we surely don't know all the physical facts yet. Thus, it is impossible for us to set up a conceivable case in which all physical facts obtain. What follows is that there may be some unknown physical facts that can explain the production of phenomenal consciousness. Had we known them, a zombie would have been inconceivable.

Daniel Stoljar (2006) has used a fable to argue against the Conceivability Argument. He asks us to imagine that there are some intelligent slugs living on a mosaic made entirely of triangular and pie-slice-shaped tiles. Some of the pie slices are arranged into circles. Suppose for

some reason, the sensory organs of those slugs can only detect triangles and circles, but not pie-slice-shaped tiles. Then the slugs have their "circle-non-circle problem". They observe that the "circle fact" (existence of circles) are always accompanied by the "non-circle fact" (existence of triangular tiles). Some slug philosophers are asking, "Why is the non-circle fact always accompanied by circle fact instead of nothing?" Since they can conceive of triangular tiles existing without circles, they falsely conclude that the circle fact is something independent of the non-circle fact and cannot be reduced to the latter. The mistake of the slug philosophers is that they believe the existence of triangular tiles is all there is for non-circle facts. Had they detected the pie-slice-shaped tiles, they would have understood it is necessary that the non-circle fact entails the circle fact. Whenever they conceive of the pie slices arranged in a specific way, they also conceive of the circles immediately.

According to Stoliar, we are like the slugs; the mind-body problem is like the slugs' circle-non-circle problem. If experiential and phenomenal facts correspond to the "circle fact" and physical facts to the "non-circle fact", what evidence do we have to believe that we know about the (mind-relevant) physical facts any more than slugs know about the non-circle facts? And what evidence do we have to claim that phenomenal facts cannot be reduced to physical facts any more than the slugs' claim that the circle fact cannot be reduced to the non-circle facts? I believe Stoliar's argument is valid, and that we don't know whether we can conceive of a case in which all physical facts obtain while the phenomenal facts do not. Thus, physicalism is still on the table despite the Zombie Argument.

However, another hidden assumption of the Zombie Argument and Stoliar's argument goes largely unnoticed. I take it that both dualists and physicalists like Stoliar rely on the following:

1. If a property or mechanism P (whether it is physical or not) can fully explain first-person facts and phenomenal consciousness, then for an ideal being which can conceive of P, it is inconceivable that P obtains while the corresponding first-person facts do not. There should be no "explanatory gap" between facts about P and facts about phenomenal consciousness.
2. The Zombie Arguments at least show that the physical properties we already know are not such P.

I think 1 and 2 entail that if we can conceive of P, it is necessary that we also conceive of how it gives rise to phenomenal consciousness. Any physicalist who accepts Stoliar's argument must also accept these two assumptions. This leads to the Principle of Conceptual Containment. The Principle of Conceptual Containment implies that if there is any fundamental property P that can explain the phenomenal facts, and if P is conceivable via positive conception, then it is necessary that conceiving of P entails conceiving of the phenomenal facts.

4.3 Principle of Existent Grounding

The last premise is quite straightforward, but it deserves a brief interpretation. Suppose there are two properties, X and Y. Let us define the "grounding" relationship as following: X grounds Y iff

(1) Y supervenes on X. That is, Y cannot be altered without X being altered first (if they can be altered at all).
(2) X is a more fundamental property compared to Y in that X is the categorical base for Y

Here is an example: let X be the glass' internal physical property which may affect its frangibility, and Y be "being fragile". In that case, the glass' having such and such internal physical structure is the categorical base for its being fragile. And we can say that having some specific

internal structure grounds its property of being fragile. Whenever there is an instantiation of the property of being fragile, there must be an instantiation of glass' internal physical structure.

Likewise, when we turn to the mind-body relation, if we hold a monism view and believe that the phenomenal properties we currently know must have a categorical base, and suppose this categorical base is a fundamental property P that we don't know yet, then we can infer that whenever a token phenomenal property instantiates, a token P must also instantiate, for the phenomenal property cannot exist without its categorical base P.

4.4 An Argument for Panpsychist Idealism and Mysterianism

I will argue that the conjunction of these three premises entails the disjunction of panpsychist idealism and mysterianism. If these principles are true, and if the mind-body problem is comprehensible to any possible subjects, then Russellian panpsychist idealism must be true.

Assume P is the fundamental property which can explain the production of phenomenal properties. Either P itself is another kind of phenomenal and experiential property (call it the "non-trivial" phenomenal property), or it is a kind of non-phenomenal property (protophenomenal property). Either P can be understood by some cognitive subjects (meaning they can form a positive conception of P in their mind), or P has no corresponding positive conception for any cognitive subjects. Then assume X is a known phenomenal property grounded by P. The existence of P can fully explain the existence of X.

Now imagine you are a very clever or even omniscient creature that knows what P is. Suppose you are conceiving of P, the Principle of Conceptual Containment tells us you are also necessarily conceiving of a phenomenal property X given rise by P (for there is no conceivable P-zombie without X). The Principle of Phenomenal Entailment tells us that when you have a positive

conception of X in your mind, a token of X will also instantiate. Finally, the Principle of Existent Grounding implies that when a token X comes into existence, a token P is necessarily instantiated.

Then we will have a very interesting conclusion: whenever you conceive of P, you always bring about a token P. Is P a protophenomenal property or phenomenal property? According to the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal property, a property is phenomenal iff its positive conception entails a token of this property. Thus, if some cognitive subjects can form a positive conception of P and comprehend P, then P must be a phenomenal property. Since P is the only fundamental property in the Russellian monism framework, panpsychist idealism must be true. Alternatively, it might be possible that there is no corresponding positive conception of P at all, and no possible cognitive subjects can conceive of P and know what P is. In that case, mysterianism is what we get.

5 OBJECTIONS AND RESPONSES

I now turn to several possible objections to my arguments. Doubt may be cast on the three principles I have defended. However, since I have discussed and defended them in detail, I won't repeat the discussion here. Instead, I will focus on two different objections here. Both objections accept the truth of the three principles but deny that their conjunction implies panpsychist idealism or mysterianism. The first objection targets the conclusion of panpsychist idealism by rejecting the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal property. It claims that even if we can show P is a property such that a positive conception of P always entails a token of it, it remains unclear whether it is a "non-trivial" phenomenal property or just a protophenomenal property. The second objection targets mysterianism. It is the thesis that P is still comprehensible even if there is no positive conception of it.

5.1 Objection to Panpsychist Idealism and Response

The first objection denies the "epistemic definition" of phenomenal property. The epistemic definition of phenomenal property tries to define phenomenal property by using their relation to the cognitive subject. By this definition, a property P is phenomenal iff its positive conception in a subject's mind entails the instantiation of a token of P. This definition has two sides. The necessity condition is that any phenomenal property must satisfy this definition, while the sufficiency condition is that any property that satisfies this definition must also be a phenomenal property. Given that the Principle of Phenomenal Entailment already guarantees the necessity condition of this definition, anyone who accepts the three principles but denies the epistemic definition can only argue against the sufficiency condition.

One may try to find a counterexample for the sufficiency condition of the epistemic definition. If they can find a property which satisfies the epistemic definition but fails to be a

phenomenal one, then the epistemic definition is false. For example, one can argue that “being an entity” is such a property. Suppose you are thinking about what it is to be an entity, and you seem to understand it quite well. The fact that you are thinking about something already entails that you are a thinking thing, and the fact that you are a thinking thing entails that you are an entity. Therefore, the positive conception of “being an entity” in your mind entails a token of “being an entity” is instantiating via your existence as a thinking thing. Nevertheless, “being an entity” seems not a phenomenal property, for something can possess this property but there is nothing it is like to be that thing. Surely a stone is an entity, but there is nothing it is like to be a stone! If the epistemic definition does not apply to some properties in determining whether they are phenomenal properties or not, then it might be that it does not apply to P either. In short, the epistemic definition cannot tell us whether P is a phenomenal property or not and whether panpsychist idealism is true.

I have two responses to this objection. One relies on defending a modified version of the epistemic definition of phenomenal property, and the other one does not rely on the epistemic definition.

First, we may consider the possibility that the “epistemic definition” applies only to categorical properties. According to the modified version of epistemic definition, a categorical property is a phenomenal property iff its positive conception in a subject’s mind entails the instantiation of a token of it. If P is a categorical property, and P satisfies the epistemic definition, then P must be a phenomenal property. But what reason do we have to claim that P is a categorical property instead of a property like “being an entity”? The most important reason is that, by assumption, P is the most fundamental property. But “being an entity” cannot be a fundamental property because it must have a categorical base which is more fundamental. For example, for

something to be an entity, it must be a concrete thing (a physical thing or a thinking conscious mind). And it cannot be a concrete thing unless it already possesses some categorical properties[3]. In short, there is no property that can exist without being grounded by some more fundamental categorical properties. The most fundamental property must be a categorical property. Therefore, P is a categorical property. If P satisfies the new "epistemic definition", then P is a phenomenal property.

Second, even without epistemic definition, we still have strong reason to believe that P is much more likely to be a phenomenal property than a non-phenomenal one. The conjunction of the Principle of Phenomenal Entailment, the Principle of Conceptual Containment and the Principle of Existent Grounding implies that you can "bring about" a token of P by just conceiving of it (if you were to have its positive conception). If P is a physical/non-experiential property, it would sound very ridiculous. It means you can "create" part of the physical world by just thinking about it. One difficulty in defining "physical property" is that our physics is still incomplete, and it is hard for us to give a precise definition of "physical things." This is not to deny that we know some paradigmatic cases of physical properties and physical beings (surely we do!). The problem is that we cannot give a direct descriptive definition of physical property such that any undiscovered property counts as a physical property so long as it satisfies this definition. However, there is an indirect way to do so. Whatever physical properties turn out to be, an essential feature

[3] It might be argued that "being an entity" itself is also a categorical property. This does not contradict my point here. All I argue is that property like "being an entity" cannot be the most fundamental type of property, and it must have a more fundamental categorical base by which it is grounded. Why assume that it must be grounded by something else? Because being an entity is grounded by being a concrete being. One thing cannot cease to be an entity while remaining a concrete being, but it is imaginable that it can change from a specific being to another kind of being while its property of being an entity does not change at all. Therefore, "being an entity" supervenes on and is grounded by the more fundamental categorical property of being a specific kind of being.

of them is that they are mind-independent. That is, their concrete instantiation is independent of a conscious mind that represents them.

Suppose now you sit in front of a desk, staring at your laptop's screen and reading my philosophical paper. You may run into Cartesian scepticism and come up with a question like this: Is everything, the desk, my laptop and anything else in my room real? Or are they just illusions caused by a clever demon? It seems that you have a very clear mental representation of the physical properties of the environment surrounding you. You can conceive of their spatial properties in terms of their shape, size, and distance from you. Were these physical objects real and exactly the way they appear to you, you would have had an accurate positive conception of them. Nevertheless, what matters here is that you cannot infer from your positive conception of the external physical properties that there is a real such thing existing. In other words, from your subjective perspective, a positive conception of those physical properties does not *a priori* entail the external existence of such properties. After all, the instantiation of these physical properties must occur in an objective 3-dimensional space, not in your mind. Your mental representation is something “external” and irrelevant to their objective existence. We may conclude that non-phenomenal properties such as physical ones have the feature that their positive conception in a subjective mind has no *a priori* connection to their external existence.

We have to make the metaphysical assumption that a necessary condition for something to be “physical” is that its instantiation is external to consciousness and independent of an observer’s mind. Otherwise, what distinguishes physical things from their mental representation, and what distinguishes physicalism from idealism? Given this assumption, we may infer that if something is proven to be mind-independent, it is not physical. Since the instantiation of property P is mind-dependent (in that you can bring about a token P by conceiving of it), it is our best assumption that

P is a phenomenal property. And finally, since P is presumed to be the fundamental property, idealism must be correct.

5.2 Objection to Mysterianism and Response

I have argued that if P has a positive conception that can be grasped, it must be a phenomenal property. Therefore, the fact that P is comprehensible via positive conception entails panpsychist idealism. Is panpsychist idealism necessarily true? Probably not. For we cannot rule out the possibility that P has no positive conception at all and is something completely "in the dark". In that case, no possible cognitive subject can form a positive conception of P. This entails mysterianism. Motivated by McGinn's works, (new) mysterianism is the idea that our minds are incapable of solving some perennial philosophical problems such as the mind-body problem, free will, the foundation of meaning and so on. Sometimes, mysterianism has other names like "anti-constructive naturalism", "transcendental naturalism", and "cognitive closure". In the following argument, I will use cognitive closure to refer to the position of mysterianism.

Before I address possible objections to the idea of mysterianism, I want to distinguish between two kinds of cognitive closure. The first one is what I call "relative cognitive closure", according to which our human minds are constitutively incapable of understanding some features of the world. However, these features are, in principle, comprehensible to some other forms of minds (although we may not know what these minds are). After all, it is not surprising that some other minds in nature are more capable of knowing some aspects of the world than the human mind. For instance, the bat's mind may be able to understand what it is like to sense echolocation while the human mind has no access to it. As the product of evolution, our brains and minds are designed by nature to help us survive rather than understand every mystery of the world. McGinn's theory is at best understood as relative cognitive closure because he has not ruled out the possibility

that some other creatures (e.g., a very clever alien species) or a transformed human brain by technic methods may form the correct concept of the mind-body link (McGinn, 1999). The second kind of cognitive closure is “absolute cognitive closure”, according to which no cognitive subject has access to the solution to the mind-body problem due to the lack of a positive conception of P. That is, P, by its very nature, has no corresponding positive conception that can be comprehended.

Both relative and absolute cognitive closure presume that to understand a property, one must grasp its positive conception in the mind. The lack of this conception entails cognitive closure. Some philosophers, such as Michael Vlerick (2014, 2017, 2020), have criticised this assumption. I will first present Vlerick’s argument against mysterianism and then defend the thesis of cognitive closure. Vlerick’s argument targets McGinn’s original theory of cognitive closure (the “relative cognitive closure”), but since it attacks the common assumption of both kinds of cognitive closure (the idea that a grasp of the positive conception of a property is necessary for understanding it), it may threaten the conclusion of my argument as well.

According to Vlerick’s interpretation, the argument for cognitive closure is as follows:

(1) Lack of intuitive grasp of the positive conception of a property entails psychological closure to it

(2) Psychological closure entails cognitive closure

(3) Therefore, a lack of intuitive grasp of the positive conception of a property entails cognitive closure.

Vlerick makes a distinction between “psychological closure” and “representational closure” and believes mysterianists like McGinn have confused them. Thus, the problem with the argument for mysterianism lies in (2). In Vlerick’s words, a psychological understanding of a property means an intuitive grasp of it, which is neither necessary nor sufficient for a

representational understanding of it. A representational understanding is the access to a true theory that properly describes the property (or whatever else we are interested in). Here is an example. In modern science, especially in quantum mechanics, we seem to lack an intuitive and psychological grasp of many physical concepts, but we do have knowledge of the quantum phenomena and make successful predictions with our theory. That is, we do have a "representational understanding" of quantum phenomena. And if representational understanding counts as cognitive access, then representational understanding can rule out cognitive closure. Vlerick says,

" If you have the feeling that you intuitively 'grasp' quantum phenomena, you must have adopted a distorted or inaccurate representation of them, as quantum phenomena are not accessible to psychological understanding. Anyone who 'understands' them psychologically, doesn't understand them representationally. The reason why psychological understanding is irrelevant in determining representational access – and that therefore representational closure does not follow from psychological closure – is that psychological understanding is both too weak and too strong a criterion. (2017; 111)"

Doesn't this show that the lack of a psychological grasp is not sufficient to establish the conclusion of cognitive closure? With respect to the mind-body problem, doesn't it show that we do not need the positive conception of P for a true theory about the mind-body relation? No. I argue that Vlerick fails to provide us with a counterexample for cognitive closure. He confuses two different questions. The first question asks, "What do we know about a property?" and the second asks, "What do we know about an entity that possesses this property?" Vlerick's example correctly shows that we do not have to answer the first question in order to answer the second one, but his argument does not show that an answer to the second one can solve the first problem, nor

does he show that the second problem can replace the first one. I will use another example to illustrate the difference further.

Think about dysmenorrhea again. Suppose we want to know what dysmenorrhea is. There are plenty of questions we may ask. We may ask, “What is it like to undergo dysmenorrhea?” We may also ask, “What is the physiological-physical reason that causes dysmenorrhea?” Modern medical science has well explained and answered the second question while leaving the first one untouched (some of us do know what it is like to experience dysmenorrhea, but it is not from our medical knowledge). In this case, the phenomenon we are interested in, dysmenorrhea, has different properties. It has an “experiential feature” that can be comprehended only via psychological grasp, and a causal relation to other phenomena that we already know in science. On the one hand, it is true that a true scientific theory need not tell us about all the properties of a phenomenon to say something correct about it, for otherwise we can hardly have any scientific theory and progress. On the other hand, even if a theory can tell us more and more about other aspects of a phenomenon, it can leave the question about the first aspect untouched. Returning to the quantum phenomena, if the question we are asking is, “Can we know what it is like to perceive quantum phenomena?” instead of “Can we know anything about quantum phenomena?”, the success of quantum mechanics has no say in it. We are still cognitively closed to the phenomenal feature of quantum phenomena.

In conclusion, Vlerick believes he shows that there are different ways of understanding a property (psychological understanding and representational understanding), but what he really does is show that we can understand a phenomenon more or less by understanding some of its properties while leaving out the rest that beyond our reach, and that knowing all the properties of a phenomenon is not necessary for a true theory about this phenomenon.

Some proponents of Russellian monism (e.g., Bertrand Russell and physicist Arthur Eddington) claim that since the period of Galileo, the success of modern science (especially basic physics) results from ignoring the internal, qualitative nature of things while focusing on their causal-mathematical relation. Therefore, the success of modern science should not give us optimism in solving the problems involving the internal nature of things. If the mind-body problem is one of them, it remains possible that mysterianism is the case. Of course, this is not to deny that we can make progress in scientific theories that reveal more details of the mind-body relation. However, despite this progress, the hard core of the mind-body problem may remain in the darkness.

If my argument is sound, Vlerick's attack on the theory of cognitive closure misses the target because he fails to show that psychological closure to a specific property is consistent with cognitive access to it. Until we find another convincing argument, we had better hold the assumption that if there is any property P that can explain the mysterious mind-body link, we need a positive conception of it to understand what it is. If such conception is beyond our psychological grasp, we will have to accept mysterianism.

6 CONCLUSION

David Chalmers (2019) once said, “One starts as a materialist, then one becomes a dualist, then a panpsychist, and one ends up as an idealist”. In the recent study of consciousness in the philosophy of mind, there is dialectic through variants of materialism, dualism and panpsychism. With the revival of panpsychism in the contemporary philosophy of mind, some philosophers (Brentyn Ramm 2021; Miri Albahari 2019, 2022) believe that panpsychism is not the end of this dialectic movement. Within panpsychism, there is a debate between the so-called panpsychist materialism and panpsychist idealism. There is a tendency from the development of panpsychism theories to a revival of idealism.

Motivated by this debate, I try to develop a new approach to the mind-body problem and defend what they call “panpsychist idealism”. My argument is based on several well-known thought experiments in philosophy, such as the knowledge argument, the conceivability argument, and the explanatory gap argument. Although these arguments have been well discussed, some of their logical entailments have not been noticed yet. I argue that if we were to accept the assumptions and plausibility of these thought experiments (even if we do not agree with their direct conclusion), their conjunction implies three principles, the Principle of Phenomenal Entailment, the Principle of Conceptual Containment and the Principle of Existent Grounding, which in turn imply that panpsychist idealism is the only comprehensible solution to the mind-body problem. I also consider mysterianism, which has been marginalized in the last two decades. If mysterianism turns out to be the case, it may root more deeply than we thought. New mysterianists believe we humans are not capable of understanding how experiential properties arise from non-experiential ones. My argument tries to show that there might not be any mind that can do so. Mysterianism is thorough and absolute.

I conclude that the disjunction of panpsychist idealism and mysterianism is the only logical solution to the mind-body problem.

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