

Research Essay

Entities Confining Other Entities (ECE): An Argument Against the Combinational Problem

Nikolai Lyng*

ABSTRACT

Confinement of other confinements is a remarkably general property within our conscious experiences. Such confinements appear to be more than what they confine and also characterize something which can be fundamental. In this article I will present an argument against the combinational problem based on this property of confinement. The combinational problem questions how a number of separate experiences can combine and then result into the macroexperience which we find in our own case.

Keywords: Conscious experience, confinement, entity, combinational problem.

Introduction

The idea of consciousness being fundamental in nature is called panpsychism (Chalmers, 2013). If panpsychism could be the case, then looking for sufficiently general properties in our conscious experiences may provide opportunities to predict nature in a fundamental way.

It turns out that confinement of other confinements is a very general property in our conscious experiences. For example our consciousness is confined to our conscious experiences. Also it turns out that confinement can confine any of our thoughts. For example an association between a mental picture of a cup and the word “cup” somehow relates them together in a way which they are not related to any other thoughts. In other words they are confined to each other. Since both of these thoughts exist due to experiencing them, the confinement must exist as well. We basically experience the confinement in addition to those thoughts and it has to be something more than the mental picture of the cup and word “cup”. Also if we find a spot on this mental picture of a cup, we can label it with the word “spot” and thus we have a new confinement within the confinement between the mental picture of the cup and the word “cup”. Since our consciousness confines the cup which again confines the spot, we see how confinements can generally confine other confinements. This property of confinement may generally apply to any of our thoughts. For example, anything which we can label is subject to confinement in the way as was described in the example above. Another example of confinement could be that we can distinguish some sequences of tones from other sequences of tones, and associate them with different parts of a melody.

In the following I will investigate whether confinement can be fundamental and how confinement may generally be subject to causation. Then it will be discussed how confinement

*Correspondence: Nikolai Lyng, Independent Researcher, Norway. E-mail: nikko9000@gmail.com

as entities can be a synthesis where panpsychism is the thesis and the combinational problem is the antithesis in an argument taking a Hegelian dialectic form.

Confinement as Entities

We perceive the confinement from the example above between the mental picture of the cup and the word “cup” as one whole. Confinement occurring as such cannot be shown to be fragmented and cannot be shown to vary in any way such that it loses its property of confinement. It exists as something more than the word “cup” and the mental picture of the cup. It may be the case that this confinement is an entity. Confinements of this kind have the characteristics of something which is fundamental due to being general and because it is unknown how microphenomenal these confinements can possibly be. If they are fundamental they can be considered as entities.

It is possible that consciousness exists as an entity which is confining our thoughts and not someone else’s. Then that is an example of how confinement can be a property which applies to existence. Perhaps it is then simplest (requires fewest new concepts) to assume that the confinements within our conscious experiences, e.g. between the word “cup” and the mental picture of the cup are also entities. Then instead of the concepts consciousness, confinements and qualia, we have reduced the perspective into entities and qualia or in other words just entities and experience. Whether confinements in themselves have all the properties which consciousness has or not, they do at least have the similarity to our consciousness which is that they confine other entities and something which exists.

Panpsychism proposes that consciousness represents fundamental physical entities and thus occurs generally in the physical universe. Since confinement is a general property in consciousness, then the case of panpsychism suggests that confinement may be general in the physical universe as well.

Causation and confinement

In the following example I would like to show that confinements can enter or exit the confinement of other confinements. Imagine that you have an apple and throw it into a basket, then later the basket is closed such that you cannot see the apple. What happened in terms of confinements? The confinement confining the properties of the apple and the word “apple” entered the confinement confining the properties of the basket and the word “basket”. Previously we could recognize the apple as not being a part of the basket. After the basket is closed however we can recognize that the apple is inside it even if we cannot see it. It is actually confined by the confinement which is also confining the word “basket” and the properties of the basket. However since the word “apple” only relates to the properties of the apple and not the basket it implies that the “basket confinement” confines the apple and not the other way around. Also we can note that the apple left the confinement which we labeled as “outside” of the basket, which it previously

could have been recognized to be a part of. As such this example demonstrates that confinements can enter or exit other confinements.

Axioms of Entities Confining other Entities

Below are some axioms which are based on observing conscious experience by simply experiencing it in the way which was discussed so far. The word confinement refers to the fact that we can experience that some thoughts which are different can be more related to each other than they are to other thoughts. The following axioms are meant to be self-evident:

- 1. Confinements exist as something more than what is being confined.**
- 2. Confinements can confine other confinements.**
- 3. Confinements can enter or exit the confinement of other confinements.**

Perhaps these axioms could have some predictive power beyond our conscious experiences, particularly if panpsychism is true. Essential properties in set theory do follow from these self-evident axioms. It could also be possible that these axioms predict the nature of fundamental entities.

The Combinational Problem

In David Chalmers article “Panpsychism and panprotopsychism” (Chalmers, 2013) he concluded that the combinational problem is an antithesis for Russellian monism and panpsychism. In this chapter I will investigate what happens when the combinational problem is applied to the interpretation where entities confining other entities are fundamental.

The combinational problem is given below (Chalmers, 2013):

“One way to pose the combination problem is in the form of a conceivability argument. (An approach along these lines is presented by Goff (2009), to whom my presentation here is indebted.) Here PP is the conjunction of all microphysical and microphenomenal truths about the world, and Q is a macrophenomenal truth, such as ‘Some macroscopic entity is conscious’.

- (1) PP&~Q is conceivable.
- (2) If PP&~Q is conceivable, it is possible.
- (3) If PP&~Q is metaphysically possible, constitutive panpsychism is false.

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- (4) Constitutive panpsychism is false.

Here premises (2) and (3) parallel the corresponding premises of the conceivability argument against materialism, and are supported by the same reasons. So the key premise here is premise (1). This premise asserts the conceivability of panpsychist zombies: beings that are physically and microphenomenally identical to us (and indeed whole worlds that are physically and microphenomenally identical to ours), without any macrophenomenal states.”

In terms of the interpretation based on entities confining other entities, the combinational problem translates to questioning why the entity which is our consciousness should always be there in human beings. If it is possible that our consciousness isn't there, why aren't there some human beings having no consciousness but only the entities which make up our conscious experiences? If there are no such people without consciousness it appears to require a new but otherwise unnecessary mysterious concept to explain why it is so. The introduction of a new unobserved concept which doesn't necessarily have to exist does in principle seem unlikely. Such a case seems more likely to violate the principle of Occam's Razor.

According to David Chalmers, panpsychism is the view that at least some fundamental physical entities are conscious. If panpsychism is the case such that consciousness is general, then the axioms of ECE may be general as well. In that case, and if confinements are entities, the emergence of macrophenomenal truths may become self-evident. Axiom 2 then says that entities confine other entities. Then the entity which is our consciousness may simply be there because of axiom 2. If we instead question why we confine exactly our thoughts, it could follow from axiom 3. Entities may enter or exit the confinement of other entities.

Another relevant property of confinement is that each confinement is unique not only by existing in itself, but by confining different contents. Even our consciousness has a unique property which all the confinements which we experience do not. That is that our consciousness confines all the confinements and qualia within it. These other confinements only confine a subset of it. It is possible that confining more information than a subset of it can play a unique role in causation. Then this unique property may have occurred in such a way that it was selected by natural selection.

Confinements exist as something more than what they confine and may define a relation between microphenomenal and macrophenomenal truths. As such each confinement can be unique due to its unique contents. They may also simplify how micro- and macrophenomenal truths are related together by possibly being fundamental entities which observable nature is to confine other entities. By accounting for all of these properties, two arguments taking a Hegelian dialectic form can be made, where entities confining other entities can be considered a synthesis with panpsychism as a thesis and the combinational problem as an antithesis. The first argument focuses on the uniqueness of each confinement and the other focuses on how causation relates to confinement.

Here PP is the conjunction of our microphenomenal truths about the world, and Q is a macrophenomenal truth, such as ‘Some macroscopic entity is conscious’:

- (1) If PP is a conjunction in itself, then it is defined by Q.
- (2) If Q is a necessary condition for PP, then PP&~Q inconceivable.

(3) The combinational problem is false

If PP is an example of our inner conscious experiences, then confinement may be the only thing which can relate them together. Our consciousness may therefore be a unique and relevant property in our conscious experiences which may also be necessary to play a role in causation. Confinement is macrophenomenal and also relates thoughts together. If we do not experience our thoughts, they may be lesser fragments which aren’t otherwise related to each other. Confinement is certainly subject to causation, and from our experience with nature, it generally appears as if that which is an effect of causation is a cause to a new effect. Why should not this also be the case for confinement and consciousness? The argument below is another argument which argues that causation may always ensure that consciousness always occurs.

Here PP is the conjunction of all microphysical and microphenomenal truths about the world, and Q is a macrophenomenal truth, such as ‘Some macroscopic entity is conscious’. C is how causation may relate to PP and Q.

- (1) PP&~Q&C may be inconceivable.
- (2) If PP&~Q&C is inconceivable, Q always occurs.
- (3) If Q always occurs, panpsychism is possible.

(4) Panpsychism is possible.

The argument says that consciousness, our experiences and causation are all a part of reality. Then it is possible that causation can ensure that consciousness is always there “when it is supposed to be there”, such that there may be no zombies behaving like humans. It is because consciousness may be a unique property and necessary property such that natural selection has ensured that causation causes consciousness to “be there”. Also the concept of entities confining other entities introduces a simplified relation between micro- and macrophenomenal properties and how they can relate to causation in a way such that no unnecessary concept beyond observation is necessary. Then causation may always cause consciousness to be “there”. This argument is based on generalizing the observations that confinements, experiences and causation are observable and possibly fundamental concepts in nature. It may in principle be in line with Occam’s Razor.

Conclusion

In the realm of conscious experiences, confinement is a very general property and also appears to be something more than the properties within it. By identifying properties of confinement and observing how they are subject to causation, the axioms of ECE could be established. If confinement is a fundamental concept, which its generality and possible “size” may suggest, then generalizing the axioms can possibly predict fundamental properties in nature.

Since each confinement is unique due to confining different contents but also more than what it confines, it is possible that each confinement can play a unique role in causation. It was discussed how these assumptions can provide an argument against the combinational problem. Since we can observe confinement and how it is subject to causation, no new concepts were introduced. The argument is then based on generalizing observable concepts which may be fundamental. Therefor the argument appears to not contradict the principle of Occam’s Razor.

References

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