

Why I am not a cosmopsychist

Or am I?

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Outline

Section 1: Cosmopsychism, psychocosmism, and some related theses

Section 2: Cosmopsychism, micropsychism, and something in-between

Section 3: Monism, holism, and explanatory usefulness

Section 1: Cosmopsychism and Psychocosmism

Here are some fairly standard definitions:

- **Panpsychism:** The fundamental physical entities are conscious, and their consciousness grounds human consciousness.
- **Atomism:** The only fundamental physical entities are particles (or other very small things).
- **Monism:** The only fundamental physical entity is the cosmos as a whole.
 - Panpsychism + atomism = **Micropsychism:** Particles are the only fundamental physical entities, and are conscious, and their consciousness grounds human consciousness.
 - Panpsychism + monism = **Cosmopsychism:** The cosmos is the only fundamental physical entity, and is conscious, and its consciousness grounds human consciousness.

Section 1: Cosmopsychism and Psychocosmism

Here are some other theses, which don't have standard names:

1. The cosmos (the single object which all things are parts of) is a conscious subject, at least in some minimal sense.
2. The cosmos undergoes, at least in some minimal sense, all experiences that happen within it (even if they also belong to various other subjects as well).
3. All experiences in existence are phenomenally unified, at least in some minimal sense, with one another.

None of these entail cosmopsychism (or even panpsychism.)

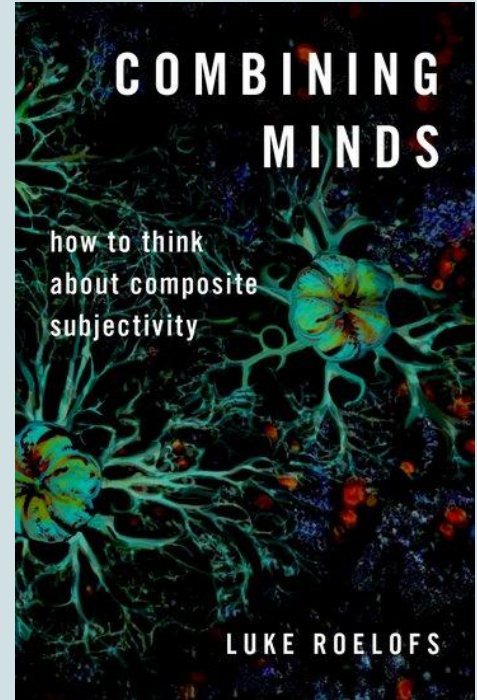
Section 1: Cosmopsychism and Psychocosmism

In *Combining Minds* I defend a view I call ‘panpsychist combinationism’, which attempts to address the combination problem from a roughly micropsychist starting point.

Yet in defending it, I find myself driven by force of argument towards all of the last slide’s theses 1-3:

1. The cosmos is conscious;
2. The cosmos undergoes all experiences;
3. All experiences are phenomenally unified.

(The relevant arguments are largely ‘anti-vagueness’ arguments of the sort that Lewis says support mereological universalism.)



Section 1: Cosmopsychism and Psychocosmism

So we can actually *from micropsychism* the idea that the cosmos undergoes all experiences in a unified way.

It's weird that there's no word for such a noteworthy claim!

Maybe we could call this view 'psychocosmism'.

Psychocosmism: The cosmos consciously undergoes all experiences in a phenomenally unified way.

Section 1: Cosmopsychism and Psychocosmism

Psychocosmism ↔ cosmopsychism: it says nothing about grounding.

(Cosmopsychism ↔ psychocosmism: it doesn't specify that the cosmos shares my experiences, only that its experiences somehow ground mine.)

The issue of what grounds what is real and important.

But the universe being conscious is arguably the more striking thing.

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Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

What distinguishes cosmopsychism from (psychocosmist) micropsychism is the ‘direction of grounding’.

- Does the big ground the small (cosmopsychism)?
- Does the small ground the big (micropsychism)?

But these aren't the only options:

- Maybe neither entirely grounds the other (as on some sort of emergentism)
- Maybe both ground the other (if grounding can be symmetrical)?

Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

I like that last option: symmetrical grounding.

This makes sense if we think composition is (something like) identity.

- The whole is ‘nothing over and above’ all the parts, because it just is them;
- The parts are ‘nothing over and above’ (nothing under and below?) the whole, because they collectively are it.

(It would be nice to just say the parts-whole relation is ‘identity’. That turns out to be hard to implement formally in plural logic.)

Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

I'm not sure what to call this position:

- Not 'cosmopsychism' (no priority for the whole);
- Not 'micropsychism' (no priority for the parts);
- Maybe 'ambipsychism'? Bidirectional panpsychism?
- Neutral-but-not-as-in-neutral-monism panpsychism?
- Neutral-er monism?

I won't try to motivate this position, whatever we call it. But let me address two worries.

Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

First worry: composition-as-identity is often associated with mereological essentialism, the idea that nothing can gain or lose parts.

Second worry: if neither the whole nor the parts have priority, does this mean that people and chairs are just as fundamental as particles and universes?

These worries answer each other:

Mereological essentialism doesn't make sense for people and chairs, because the relation between them and their parts isn't purely mereological - they are not mere sums of parts. That's also why they are non-fundamental.

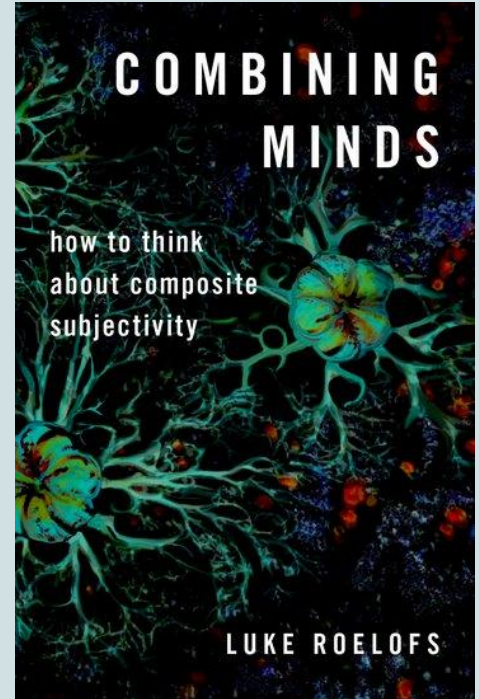
Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

This is also something I talk about more in *Combining Minds*.

The rough idea is that we (and most everyday composites) are ‘structure-specific wholes’, existing only as long as some parts instantiate the right structure.

We are materially constituted (in the statue-lump sense) by a mass of matter, which in turn is composed of smaller material parts in a purely mereological sense.

The constitution relation involves asymmetrical grounding, while the composition relation involves symmetrical grounding.



Section 2: Between Cosmopsychism and Micropsychism

Note: the discussion in this section has largely been *a priori* metaphysics - about ‘parts’ and ‘wholes’ in general.

Sometimes cosmopsychists suggest that contingent empirical facts establish cosmopsychism.

(E.g. quantum entanglement inherited from the Big Bang.)

My uncertainty about whether to view cosmopsychism as motivated metaphysically or empirically leads neatly into my third section...

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Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

Cosmopsychists sometimes leave me wondering how radical a change it really is.

The focus is on what's *most* fundamental: we de-throne particles and enthrone the cosmos.

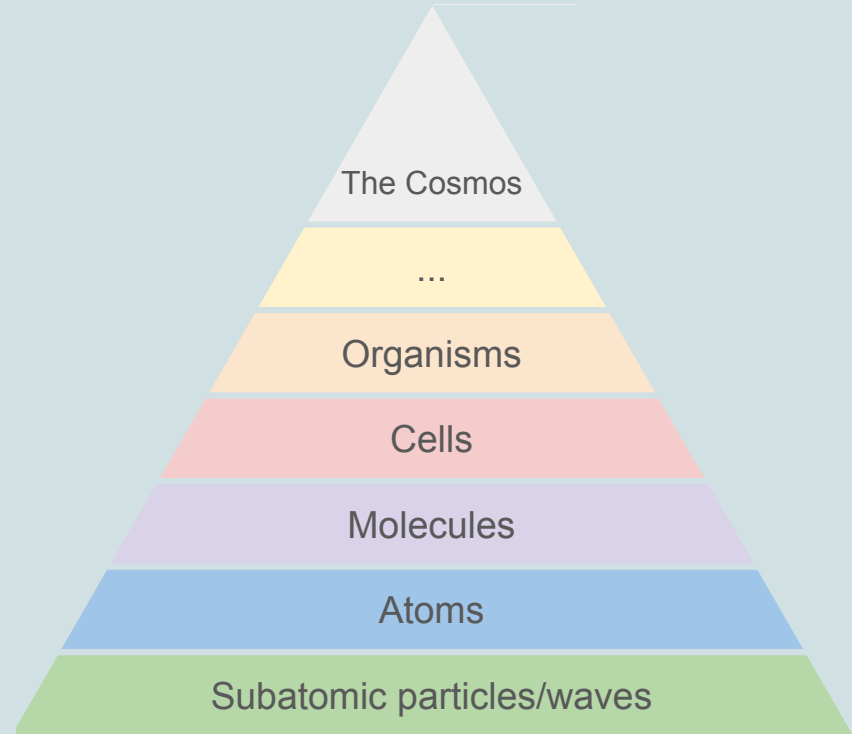
What about the other levels? Do they also 'flip around'?

- If not, then most explanatory challenges (e.g. combination problems) are unchanged.
- If so, the resultant view seems very implausible.

Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

Consider this rough sketch of the ‘levels of nature’:

Each level is explained by the level below (in some sense).



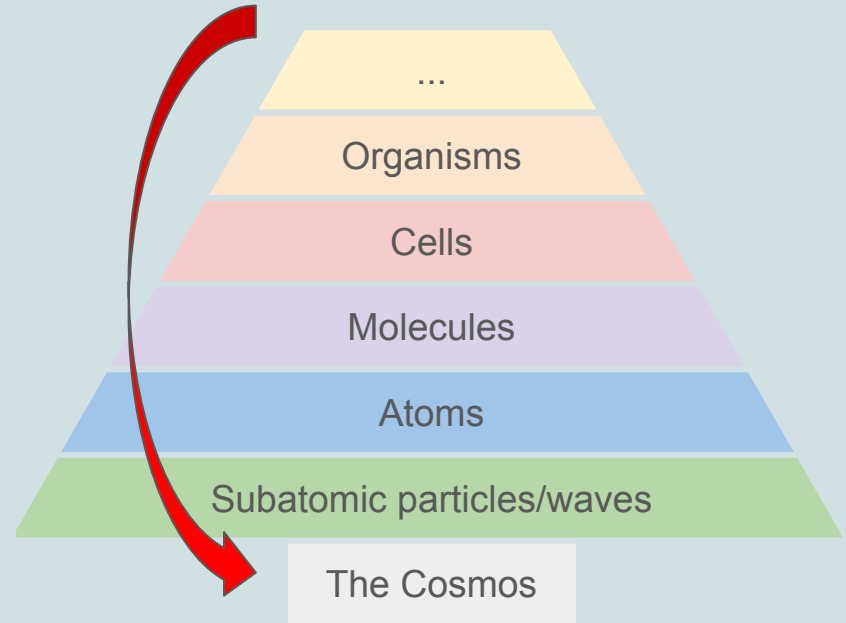
Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

One Option:

Cosmopsychism puts ‘the cosmos’ at the bottom, but leaves the other levels unchanged.

So although subatomic particles are explained by the cosmos, atoms are still explained in terms of particles, not vice versa.

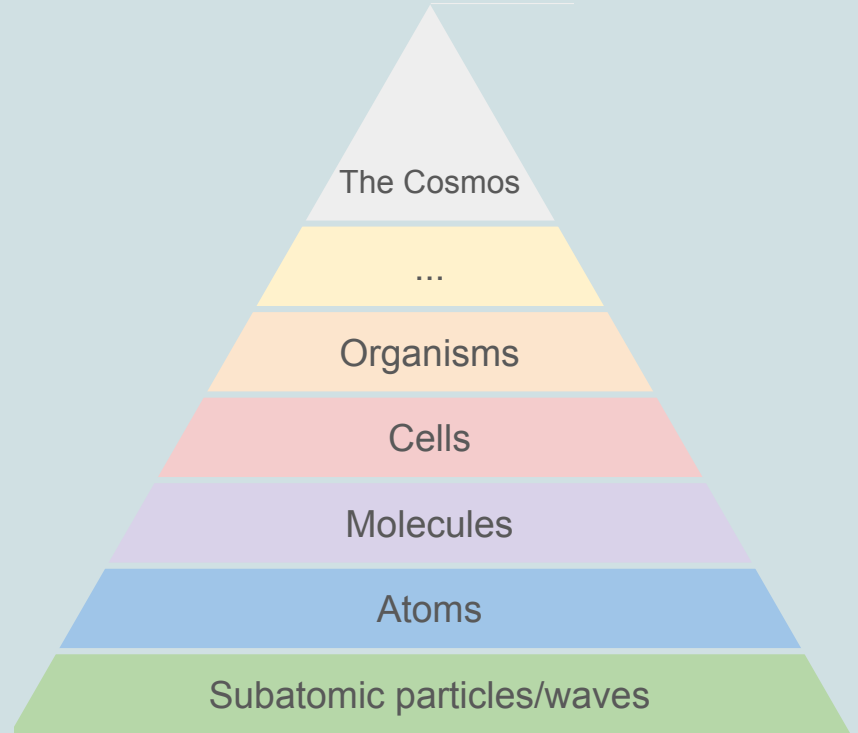
(Maybe call this ‘conservative cosmopsychism’?)



Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

Another Option:

Cosmopsychism flips the pyramid over: it rejects ‘smallism’ in all its forms, replacing it with ‘holism’ (or ‘biggism’).



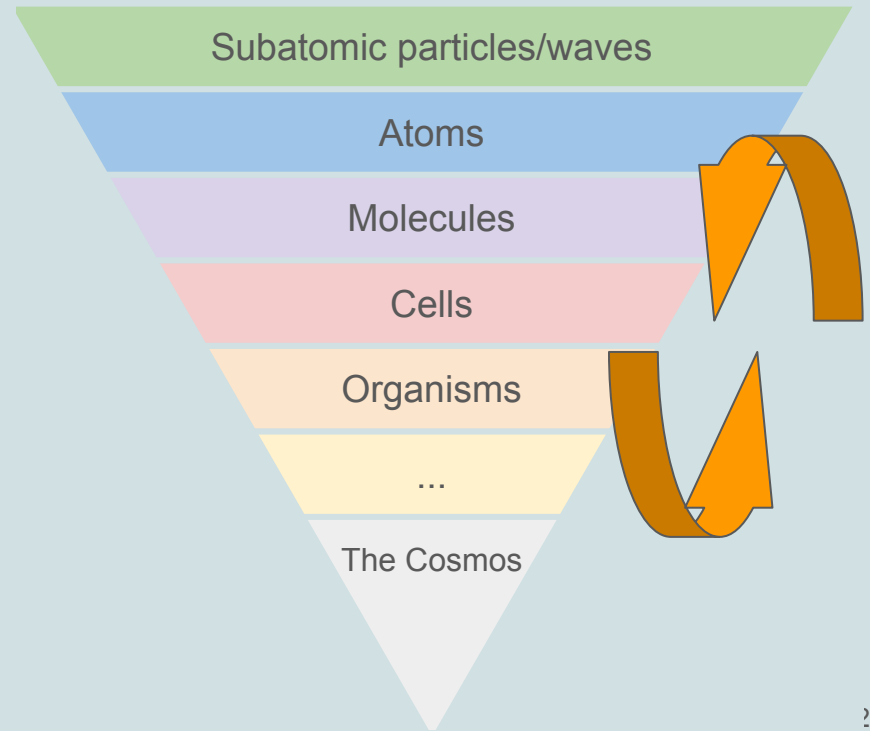
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Another Option:

Cosmopsychism flips the pyramid over: it rejects ‘smallism’ in all its forms, replacing it with ‘holism’ (or ‘biggism’).

Then atoms are explained in terms of molecules, molecules in terms of cells, cells in terms of organisms, etc.

(Maybe call this ‘holistic cosmopsychism’?)



Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

I think conservative cosmopsychism is *way* more plausible than holistic cosmopsychism.

Flipping around the entire pyramid demolishes our explanations. Higher levels are not just larger in scale than the lower levels, they're less general in scope.

E.g. all cells are made of molecules, but not all molecules are part of a cell. So we can't explain everything about molecules in terms of cells.

Conservative cosmopsychism also fits better with cosmopsychism being motivated by empirical discoveries in physics - it changes the ontology of physics, the bottom level, but not the relationship between the 'physical level', 'the chemical level', etc.

Section 3: Does Monism Imply Holism?

But if the pyramid is mostly unchanged, then cosmopsychism's explanatory impact is likely to be pretty mild.

E.g. The mismatch, revelation, and palette problems, about building human minds out of very many much smaller minds, are unchanged.

Maybe neither 'conservative' and 'holistic' cosmopsychism capture what actual cosmopsychists are going for. Maybe they have something more nuanced in mind.

I'm just not sure what it is.

Conclusions

So, why I *am* not a cosmopsychist?

- I can be a psychocosmist without being a cosmopsychist, and that's arguably a more striking claim.
- Micropsychism and cosmopsychism don't exhaust the options: parts and wholes might symmetrically ground each other.
- If cosmopsychism is thoroughly holistic, it's implausible, but if it's more conservative, then it has limited impact on the combination problems.

But none of that means that cosmopsychism is actually false. If I had to bet, I might give conservative cosmopsychism slightly above 50% odds of being true, given panpsychism.