

This article was downloaded by: [Andrew Melnyk]

On: 25 July 2014, At: 10:15

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Australasian Journal of Philosophy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rajp20>

### 'The Conceptual Link from Physical to Mental', by Kirk, Robert

Andrew Melnyk<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Missouri

Published online: 22 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: Andrew Melnyk (2014) 'The Conceptual Link from Physical to Mental', by Kirk, Robert, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 92:3, 596-599, DOI: [10.1080/00048402.2014.882365](https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.882365)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.882365>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly

forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

tendency to benefit them or protect them from harm. That is what caring is, a disposition to act on others' behalf. A second reason for partiality is social. Societies have norms that encourage us to act in special ways toward our friends, children, parents, spouses, etc., and most people internalize these norms. As a result, both psychological dispositions and social norms combine to produce our acceptance of reasons of partiality. By contrast, the psychological and social supports for impartialist attitudes are extremely weak. Even people who are impartialists in theory are probably partialists in practice.

While explanations like these can account for our acceptance of partialist norms, they do not show that these partialist norms are worthy of acceptance. Many terrible practices have been sustained by psychological tendencies and social norms. Awareness of bad norms can lead us to question whether our norms are worthy of acceptance, and our answers may employ concepts and reasons (like those of the consequentialist) that are not part of the phenomenology of partiality.

It is not surprising that doubts about current norms have been sparked by what appear to be excesses of partiality. Our norms of partiality seem inappropriate when they allow extremely well-off people to care only for their friends and family while ignoring the deprivations suffered by many others. Any moral theory of partiality must consider how we tell when our norms permit excessive partiality. All of the traditional worries about egoism's excessive partiality to self have their counterparts in partiality toward others whom we care about.

*Conclusion* Simon Keller's *Partiality* contains many interesting ideas and exhibits great care in examining many issues. While I have focused critically on ideas that have struck me as deficient or problematic, the book's virtues will no doubt stand out more vividly for many other readers.

## References

- Keller, Simon. 2007. *The Limits of Loyalty*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
 Singer, Peter. 1972. Famine, Affluence, and Morality, *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1/3: 229–43.

Stephen Nathanson  
*Northeastern University*

© 2014 Stephen Nathanson

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2013.876058>

Robert Kirk, *The Conceptual Link from Physical to Mental*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. xii + 228, £35 (hardback).

Before non-eliminative physicalism about the mind can be argued either for or against, it must first be formulated. Attempts to do so pose two main philosophical problems. The first is that of specifying how the term 'physical' in a satisfactory formulation should be understood. The second is that of characterizing the relation that must hold between the mental and the physical if the mental is to be, in a suitable way, nothing over and above the physical. In his new book, Robert Kirk sets the first problem to one side: he understands 'physical' in terms of an 'imagined true physics' that 'conforms to the vital condition that it does not essentially invoke consciousness, intentionality, or other psychological notions, and in terms of which it is possible to describe and explain the fundamental workings of human and other organisms' [6].

The second problem he addresses in great detail, proposing a novel formulation of non-eliminative physicalism about the mind (henceforth just ‘physicalism’). He calls it ‘redescriptive physicalism’ [chs 1–3], and contrasts it with rival formulations in terms of identity, supervenience, or realization, with a view to exhibiting its superiority over them and defending it against objections to its adequacy as a formulation of physicalism [chs 4–7]. He also argues that it can solve the problems of mental causation [ch. 8], and that it is immune to standard objections to physicalism about phenomenal consciousness [chs 9, 10].

To all philosophers who think they know how to formulate physicalism I recommend the book highly; for specialists I regard it as absolutely required reading. It is packed with challenging ideas and arguments. It is also well-organized, written in an easy, almost conversational style, and, apart from an occasional tendency to excessive concision, very clear. It would make an excellent main text for a graduate seminar. In what follows, I raise a tentative question about the relationship between Kirk’s redescriptive physicalism and what I take to be its chief rival.

According to Kirk’s redescriptive physicalism, if P is the conjunction of all truths expressible in the proprietary vocabulary of the ‘imagined true physics’ noted above, then Q—the conjunction of all the mental truths that a physicalist must account for—is what Kirk calls a ‘pure redescription’ of the world insofar as it is describable by P. He says that ‘a pure redescription is a statement (or predicate) which is made true by items whose existence depends on nothing beyond whatever is specified by [a] base description [i.e., P in the case at hand]’ [8]. Furthermore, he argues that ‘because the pure redescription ascribes nothing to the item specified by the base description beyond what the latter provides for, it is impossible for the former to be true and the latter false’ [12; italics removed]. This sort of impossibility (and corresponding necessity) Kirk terms ‘logico-conceptual’, on the grounds that ‘words-to-world semantic rules plus logic’ determine what the world must be like for P to be true, while ‘world-to-words semantic rules plus logic’ determine that the world as characterized by P qualifies for (pure) redescription by Q [17]. He holds, then, that a necessary condition for physicalism is that P logico-conceptually entails Q, which he calls ‘the l-c entailment thesis’ [22]. However, he holds that we only obtain a necessary and sufficient condition for physicalism when the l-c entailment thesis is conjoined with the further claim that nothing exists but what P logico-conceptually entails, a claim that he calls ‘That’s All’ [30].

At one point Kirk remarks that ‘the core question of this book’ is ‘the nature of the necessary link from physical to mental’ if physicalism is true [86]. And he takes his position on this question—that this necessity is logico-conceptual—to contrast with the position taken by so-called *a posteriori* physicalists. *A posteriori* physicalism, despite its name, is not the view that the epistemic status of physicalism is that of an empirical hypothesis, and Kirk fully accepts that his redescriptive physicalism is a contingent thesis that, if true at all, can only be known to be true *a posteriori*. *A posteriori* physicalism is in fact any version of physicalism holding that the necessary link between the physical and the mental that obtains if physicalism is true is *metaphysically* necessary, reflecting the Kripkean necessity of the identity of mental properties with either physical properties or functional properties that are physically realized. Since these psycho-physical or psycho-functional claims of identity are *a posteriori*, so is the necessitation of Q by P; this is what gives *a posteriori* physicalism its name. Kirk takes redescriptive physicalism to differ from a *a posteriori* physicalism in two main ways. First, he thinks that *a posteriori* physicalists accept a view of metaphysical necessity according to which it isn’t logico-conceptual. Second, he thinks that physicalism is not committed to any psycho-physical identity claims. Indeed, he is inclined to reject all such claims as false [ch. 5]. Moreover, although he argues that

physicalism is actually committed to some sort of functionalism about phenomenally conscious mental states [75–83], he also thinks that physicalism is not committed to any psycho-functional identity claims [e.g., 43].

It would, however, be strange, I think, if *a posteriori* physicalists accepted a view of metaphysical necessity according to which it isn't logico-conceptual in Kirk's sense. True identity statements yield perfect examples of pure redescription (as indeed Kirk notes at 100–2). For example, if 'being water = being H<sub>2</sub>O' is true, then to describe my glass as containing water, given that in fact it contains H<sub>2</sub>O, is surely to give a pure redescription of my glass. Moreover, semantic facts about the term 'H<sub>2</sub>O' (as well as about the terms 'my glass' and 'contains') determine that the claim that my glass contains H<sub>2</sub>O is true iff a certain state of affairs obtains, while semantic facts about the term 'water' (as well as about the terms 'my glass' and 'contains') determine that this state of affairs makes it true that my glass contains water. So the necessity of identity counts as logico-conceptual by Kirk's lights. But because *a posteriori* physicalists can be, and typically are, robust externalists about linguistic and mental content, they need not treat the relevant semantic facts about 'H<sub>2</sub>O' and 'water' as accessible *a priori* to whoever grasps these terms; and so they need not fear that acknowledging the logico-conceptual character of the necessity of identity commits them to regarding all necessarily true identity claims as knowable *a priori*.

What about Kirk's view that physicalism is not committed to either psycho-physical or psycho-functional identity claims? True identity statements yield such transparent examples of how pure redescription can arise that one might wonder whether pure redescription can arise in any other way; if it cannot, then of course redescriptive physicalism is committed to psycho-physical or psycho-functional identity claims after all. So can it? Kirk's thought is that, for P to logico-conceptually entail a certain mental truth, all that is needed is a *sufficient* condition for the applicability of the relevant mental predicate, hence not a sufficient *and necessary* condition, hence no claim that the property expressed by the predicate is *identical* with some or other physical or functional property [43, 201]. But while Kirk is clearly right that only a sufficient condition is needed as far as the logic of entailment by P is concerned, I do wonder whether his point justifies rejecting the *a posteriori* physicalist view (my own, as it happens) that, for physicalism to be true, every mental property must be identical with some or other functional property whose defining functional role can unproblematically be played by a physical property conforming to ordinary physical laws in a purely physical environment.

Kirk's redescriptive physicalism, I note, is strikingly unmetaphysical: it speaks of such things as truths and descriptions, but not of such things as properties, objects, or events. But I cannot see how a formulation of physicalism can possibly remain silent on the question of what *sort* of properties, metaphysically speaking, mental properties are, that they might be instantiated in a world in which the only fundamental properties instantiated are physical ones. In particular, I cannot see how there could be a sufficient condition for the applicability of a realistically-construed mental predicate in a P-world unless the predicate expressed a mental *property* that was one and the same as some property with a *nature* such that a sufficient condition for the property to be instantiated is the instantiation of a physical property playing such-and-such a functional role while conforming to ordinary physical laws in a purely physical environment. (I am assuming that psycho-*physical* property identities are off the table.)

Now although this point does not entail that physicalism must treat each mental property as identical with some property whose nature is such that a sufficient *and necessary* condition for the property to be instantiated is the instantiation of a physical property playing such-and-such a functional role, it does prompt the question of

what other sort of nature the mental property could have. Presumably the property would have to have a *disjunctive* nature, whereby it has two or more different sufficient conditions for its instantiation, at least one of which is the instantiation of a physical property that plays a certain functional role while conforming to ordinary physical laws in a purely physical environment. But what about the other sufficient conditions? Suppose that all of them are conditions consisting of the instantiation of a physical property that plays a certain functional role while conforming to ordinary physical laws in a purely physical environment—which is what Kirk’s words [201] perhaps suggest. Then the spirit, and perhaps also the letter, of my kind of *posteriori* physicalism (see above) is still respected.

To break faith with it, I suggest, at least one of the other sufficient conditions would have to be the playing of a role that can only be specified in radically non-physical—perhaps ectoplasmic—terms, so that the role *cannot* be played by a physical property conforming to ordinary physical laws in a purely physical environment. However, it is hard to see what could warrant thinking that mental properties have radically disjunctive functional natures of this kind. Of course, Kirk is not committed to thinking this, for he can quite consistently suspend judgment about the *full* nature of mental properties. But arguably even suspension of judgment would presuppose some reason to take seriously—to assign more than a non-zero probability to—the view that mental properties have radically disjunctive functional natures of the kind in question; and again it is hard to see what that reason could be. If so, then Kirk’s redescriptive physicalism may not after all represent a substantively new way of formulating physicalism.

Andrew Melnyk

*University of Missouri*

© 2014 Andrew Melnyk

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2014.882365>

Kripke, Saul A., *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. xiv + 170, £22.50 (hardback).

This manuscript is a lightly edited transcript of Kripke’s 1973 John Locke lectures. The material has long been influential, thanks to the circulation of an even less edited bootleg version. Those who are familiar with that typescript and who have pondered the matters that Kripke ponders will spot passages that have been abbreviated, expanded, or deleted in the preparation of this *official* publication. I will leave them to decide whether this sometimes obscures more than it clarifies.

For newcomers to these lectures, they are a sequel to *Naming and Necessity* [1972]. As in those earlier lectures, the presentation is casual and conversational, but claims under discussion are formulated precisely and sometimes symbolically. Again Kripke attacks descriptivist approaches to the semantics of names and kind terms, while arguing, with various degrees of self-assurance, for alternatives [3–4]:

I wish here to continue with some of the topics I discussed [in *Naming and Necessity*], in order to tie up some loose ends. . . . I wish especially to discuss two areas which I didn’t have the time and space to cover in *N&N*. . . . One of them, which is perhaps the more important of the two, is the whole topic of how naming relates to existence, in particular the problem of vacuous names and reference to what does not exist, of fictional entities, of existential statements, and the like. The other area . . . is that of speaker’s reference and semantic reference.