Normativity and the Metaphysics of Mind

Nick Zangwill [a]
[a] University of Durham,

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I consider the metaphysical consequences of the view that propositional attitudes have essential normative properties. I argue that realism should take a weak rather than a strong form. I argue that expressivism cannot get off the ground. And I argue that eliminativism is self-refuting.

How should we conceive of the normativity of the mental? And what are the consequences of accepting such a doctrine? In this paper, I explore the metaphysical consequences of accepting a particular view of the normativity of propositional attitudes, which I call 'Normative Essentialism'. I shall not attempt to motivate a normative view by arguing against non-normative accounts, and I shall not say very much by way of defending the particular normative view that I favour over rivals—although I shall say a little (see further Zangwill [1998, 2005]). What I want to consider is the situation once such a position is accepted. I begin by describing and fleshing out the Normative Essentialist view of propositional attitudes. I then turn to consider the impact of that view on realist views of propositional attitudes and on realist views of the norms of theoretical and practical rationality. I argue that Normative Essentialism should take a weak rather than a strong form, and I consider how physicalism about propositional attitudes should be formulated on the weak view. It turns out that this weak view allows us to meet an objection to Normative Essentialism, realistically construed. Next I consider the impact of Normative Essentialism on non-realist views about our thought about propositional attitudes. I argue that expressivist non-realism is unstable and self-undermining. Lastly I consider the impact of Normative Essentialism on eliminativist views about propositional attitudes. I argue that once we accept Normative Essentialism, the usual arguments for eliminativism are ineffective, and there is a powerful self-refutation argument against eliminativism. Overall, we will see reason to favour one kind of metaphysical view of propositional attitudes, given Normative Essentialism. It is a particular realist view, and I argue for it by elimination. That is, if we accept Normative Essentialism, then expressivism and eliminativism about propositional attitudes are false. Normative Essentialism is compatible only with realism. And realism should take a weak rather than a strong form.

I. Normative Essentialism

The view considered here—Normative Essentialism—is not merely that propositional attitudes *have* normative properties, which is relatively uncontroversial, but the claim that normative properties are *essential* for a propositional attitude to be the propositional attitude that it is. To take two examples: it is essential to a perceptual experience as of the fact that *p* to rationalize believing that *p*; and it is essential to desiring that *p* to rationalize intending that *p*. These rational normative properties are essential to what it is to be a perceptual experience or a desire; and they are essential to what it is for a particular perceptual experience or a desire to be the state that it is.

A number of further comments will make the Normative Essentialism thesis more precise and prevent misunderstandings and superficial objections.

(A)   The normative properties I have in mind are norms of *rationality*. There are other norms—moral, religious, sporting, and so on. But the norms that I say are essential to propositional attitudes are the rational norms. Furthermore, these rational norms are requirements (or perhaps permissions) to have propositional attitudes *given certain other propositional attitudes*. I call these 'horizontal' norms. In my view, all rational norms are horizontal norms. But there are those who deny this. Suppose that there they are right. Then the thesis is that the norms that are essential to propositional attitudes are the horizontal rational norms.[1]

(B)   Relations between propositional attitudes and the world, such as truth or satisfaction ('vertical' relations), are *not* central to Normative Essentialism, even if we were to grant that these are normative properties (or relations). Many other theories of 'the normativity of the mental' focus on the alleged normativity of the notion of truth, and many others then attack that conception. This is not what is in question for the view I am exploring. Many objections to the normativity of the mental assume the vertical conception of normativity as their target, whereas my conception is horizontal. Hence that debate over the normativity of the mental, where normativity is vertically construed, is not what I am interested in.

(C)   Being *subject* to rational norms implies neither discharging such requirements nor having a disposition to discharge them. Quite a few theories of the normativity of the mental commit themselves, tacitly or explicitly, to being sanguine about human irrationality; they assume that the normativity doctrine implies that human beings mostly conform to normative ideals. This opens such views to objections

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[1] I take it that rational norms are at least ways in which the person who has them ought to think, intend or feel. Where there is a norm, there is an ought, at least in my usage. Some writers have recently pursued an issue about whether 'rationality is normative'; but it is not clear whether this makes sense given the way I use these words. Some writers restrict the use of the word 'normative' only to refer to 'all things considered' oughts, and again, this is not my usage. Perhaps relatedly, I did not state the issue over normativity and the mental in terms of 'reasons'. I think that this generates confusion. But even if there are issues there, my concern is with the relation between propositional attitudes and rational normative properties, however it is with 'reasons'.

(especially from the psychological literature). The view I have in mind is compatible with the actuality of extensive irrationality.

(D) The rational requirements in question are *pro tanto* requirements, which can be outweighed. For example, the perceptual experience as of a dagger makes it rational to some extent ('gives me some reason', perhaps) to believe that there is a dagger in front of me, even if I know that I am hallucinating, which means that all things considered I should not believe that there is a dagger there. I will assume this *pro tanto* qualification in what follows.

(E) Some essential normative properties are negative normative properties. One example is this: it is *ir*rational to fear something that we do not believe to be dangerous. This may be explained by the positive normative fact that it is rational to fear what we believe to be dangerous. However, a more problematic kind of example is that of imagining or entertaining thoughts. The most obvious normative principle is that it is *irrational* to form the belief that there is a dagger in front of me from merely imagining a dagger in front of me or from entertaining the thought that there is a dagger in front of me. Entertaining the thought that *p lacks* the normative properties of having a perceptual experience as of *p,* and that lack is essential to what it is to imagine or entertain a thought. But that negative normative fact seems not obviously to be explained by a positive normative fact, as the negative normative fact about fear was explained. Furthermore, there are presumably different kinds of propositional attitudes with similar negative normative properties. So it might be thought that propositional attitude kinds, such as imagining, must also have some distinctive *positive* normative properties (unless our normative thesis applies to some but not all propositional attitudes; see comment (I) below). One suggestion is this: supposition can play a role in logical reasoning in conditional proofs and *reductio* arguments. When we suppose something, we entertain a thought, and when that thought is *combined* with other beliefs, that combination may jointly make it rational to form a conditional belief or to infer that the opposite of the supposition is true. This means that the entertained thought or the act of imagination makes some positive normative *contribution*, and that its normative properties are not all negative. Perhaps they have positive normative properties that are conditional on the presence of other propositional attitudes, just as beliefs may rationalize actions only in conjunction with certain desires, and desires may rationalize actions only in conjunction with certain beliefs.

(F) Not all intentional states are propositional attitudes. There are also what we might call 'objectual attitudes', such as when I fear a bear or love a person. And there are what we might call 'infinitive attitudes', such as wanting *to* swim or *to* fly. There is a question about whether we can have objectual or infinitive attitudes without propositional attitudes. Perhaps I can fear a bear only if I fear that it will do something nasty to me. But love seems not at all to be propositional. And perhaps animals or small children have objectual or infinitive intentional states without propositional attitudes. My focus in this paper is on propositional attitudes among the intentional states, although I believe that similar considerations apply to objectual and infinitive attitudes.

(G)   It is sometimes objected to normative theories that the oughts that they invoke mean a commitment to 'doxastic voluntarism', which is the dubious doctrine that we can will our beliefs. But it is far from obvious that oughts only attach to what is subject to the will—many emotions, for example, are rationally and morally assessable without being subject to the will.

(H)   The doctrine is not best expressed by saying that it is essential to propositional attitudes themselves to be the bearers of certain rational requirements. More exactly, the claim is that it is essential to a propositional attitude that its *bearer*—the person who has it—is subject to certain rational requirements in virtue of having the propositional attitude. However, the former mode of expression is more economical.

(I)   Normative Essentialism can come in more or less general versions. It might be the claim that some propositional attitude types have normative properties that distinguish them from some other propositional attitude types. It might be the claim that some propositional attitude types have normative properties that distinguish them from all other propositional attitude types. It might be the claim that that all propositional attitude types have normative properties that distinguish them from some other propositional attitude types. Or it might be the claim that all propositional attitude types have normative properties that distinguish them from all other propositional attitude types. For the purposes of this paper, I need only be concerned with the consequences for those propositional attitudes that have normative properties that are distinctive of them, although I think that a more general position is true.

II. Realism About Propositional Attitudes

The above description of Normative Essentialism was relatively neutral; but metaphysical issues need to be addressed.

The first decision to make about propositional attitudes is whether to embrace realism about propositional attitudes or some non-realist option? Do propositional attitudes exist? That is: are there propositional attitudes? Suppose we think that there are propositional attitudes, and we thus opt for realism. Then, surely, we must also be realist about their essential normative properties. In principle, we could perhaps combine realism about some range of entities with non-realism about normative properties of those entities, but not if those normative properties are essential to the entities. One reason is that if the essential normative properties of a thing explain (some of) its causal properties, then the normative properties must be as real as the causal properties they explain.[2] More generally, essential properties that are explanatory of other properties must, as the Scholastic philosophers and Descartes would say, have at least as much reality as what they explain.

A question that opens up once we embrace realism about propositional attitudes and also about their essential normative properties is this: how

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[2]Perhaps normative properties are explanatory when we *discharge* an obligation. We might give £5 because we owed the money. Or we might infer something because we are rationally required to do so.

exactly might we go about being a *physicalist*, given Normative Essentialism? Some close relation must be asserted between propositional attitudes and physical states *and* between the essential normative properties of those propositional attitudes and non-normative physical properties. In particular, in order to arrive at a physicalist metaphysics of mind, it is necessary to take a position about the metaphysics of the essential rational normative properties of propositional attitudes that is analogous to what naturalist moral realists say about the metaphysics of moral properties [Sturgeon 1984; Brink 1989]. Physicalists need to say that the rational normative properties of the mind are real properties that are identical with or realized in physical states. (By 'physical' states I mean intrinsic physical states of an organism or these plus their environmental properties.) By contrast, dualists are realists about rational normative properties who deny their identity with or realization in physical states. Both physicalists and dualists are realists about rational normative properties, but realists assert that such relations hold whereas dualists deny them.[3]

Someone might argue against realism about the essential normative properties of propositional attitudes by extending Hume's famous argument for the unreality of moral norms. Hume wrote:

> Take any object allow'd to be vicious: Wilful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case.
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> [Hume 1739: III, I, I]

We can take this argument in either a metaphysical or an epistemological way. Either we cannot *find* vice because it is not *there*, or we cannot *perceive* it. The epistemological aspect of this argument is the manifestation of empiricist principles that at best await validation. So let us focus on the metaphysical aspect, and ask: 'What matter of fact is the vice?' Could such an argument be run in the case of rational normative properties? Imagine someone inspired by Hume, who argues: 'Consider some combination of mental states of a person, or consider some transition between their earlier and later mental states; what matter of fact constitutes the fact that this collection or transition is rational or irrational?' However, it is not obvious that there is no good answer to this question. For example, being rational might be realized in certain relations between propositional attitudes or in certain relations between propositional attitudes and the world, and these relations might or might not be physically realized.

One prominent programme in epistemology, associated with Alvin Goldman, is the idea that the property of epistemic rationality of a belief

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[3]There is a menu of possible relations that might be used in formulating a thesis called 'physicalism'. Many of these relations fall short of identity. Jaegwon Kim has argued that once they do so there is a problem, that of 'explanatory exclusion' [Kim 1998]. Many philosophers feel they know where they are with identity, but other relations worry them. But this seems to be a kind of favouritism towards identity among all the other relations. What's so special about identity? Leibniz's law? Is that enough to privilege it? I think that such anxiety about relations other than identity can be overcome so that more relaxed forms of physicalism are feasible.

is realized in the reliability of the psychological processes by which the belief was formed [Goldman 1986, 1992, 2002]. This reliability would not be a matter of fact present to the mind of the person who has the belief (hence the theory is called 'externalist'). But it would be a matter of fact all the same. For example, perhaps reasoning in accordance with principles of logic or according to certain inductive principles is rational because it is truth-conducive and truth-retentive or error-avoiding and error-limiting. This would be a kind of consequentialist account, where truth is the consequence in question (rather than pleasure or happiness, as in utilitarian moral philosophy). For Goldman, such facts about reliability are the facts that realize the rationality of a belief. Goldman can be construed as a naturalist realist about epistemic rationality, like naturalist moral realists who think that natural facts (such as facts about happiness) realize moral facts. A parallel theory of practical rationality would be that the property of being practically rational is realized in those psychological processes (presumably deliberative processes) of desire or intention formation that are conducive to desire-satisfaction (and lack of desire-dissatisfaction). The general view would be that the property of rationality is realized in psychological processes that tend to yield propositional attitudes with the right relations to facts in the world—their truth- and satisfaction-makers. Such a view appeals to vertical mind–world relations. An alternative general view would be a more 'internalist' realist view of theoretical and practical rationality, according to which the properties of practical and theoretical rationality are realized in certain kinds of relations among the mental states of a person [BonJour 1985], and a crucial part of such a view would be the denial that truth and satisfaction relations determine which internal relations among mental states are the rational ones. It seems that one might be a rational brain in a vat, in which case one would be rational but unreliable. This case is more naturally accommodated by internalism. Wherever the truth lies in the internalism/externalism debate, something must realize the property of rationality; either vertical facts about reliability or else certain horizontal relations between propositional attitudes determine rationality irrespective of vertical relations.

It is important to distinguish the property of being *subject* to a rational demand from the property of succeeding in being epistemically rational. Being rational is the property of being subject to epistemic norms *and* living up to them. Epistemologists and theorists of practical reason are concerned with what it is to *succeed* in being theoretically and practically rational, rather than being *subject* to norms of theoretical and practical rationality, and possibly failing to live up to them. Reliability is a candidate for that in virtue of which a person successfully adheres to the norms of epistemic rationality to which they are subject; it is not a candidate for that in virtue of which we are merely subject to norms of theoretical and practical rationality—and it is only the latter that I say are the normative properties that are essential to propositional attitudes. So, it might be thought that epistemology and the theory of practical rationality do not describe the norms, being subject to which is essential for having propositional attitudes.

However, there is surely *some* connection, although it is a controversial and difficult matter to say exactly what it is. One claim that seems relatively safe is that the norms to which we are subject must dictate what would count as succeeding in conforming to them. Suppose my shopping trip was successful. Then I must have bought something that I set out to buy. My shopping trip may be *good* if I run into an old friend, but that does not make it *successful* as a shopping trip. Similarly, what counts as epistemological success is determined by the normative properties of propositional attitudes. Suppose that reliability makes one rational; then that must be because of the nature of the rational normative demands to which we are subject. Rationality is realized in part in the essential normative properties of propositional attitudes. Those essential normative properties of propositional attitudes, therefore, are also essential in a theory of theoretical and practical rationality because a theory of success in some endeavour must turn on the aim of the endeavour. This is something that needs further exploration in epistemology and the theory of practical rationality.

III. Strong and Weak Normative Essentialism

In order to consider the realization of rational normative properties further, there is an important distinction that we need to make between two kinds of Normative Essentialism—*strong* and *weak*. Strong Normative Essentialism is the view that propositional attitudes are identical with rational properties. On this view, having any particular propositional attitude just is having rational properties, in the sense of being subject to rational norms. To have the propositional attitude *is* to have the normative properties. Weak Normative Essentialism, by contrast, is the view that propositional attitudes have some nature or essence that *explains* the rational normative properties that we are subject to. It is essential to propositional attitudes to have rational normative properties, but we have the rational normative properties *in virtue of* having the propositional attitude. Generating those rational normative properties is nonetheless essential to the propositional attitudes being the propositional attitudes that they are.[4] But there is no identity between having the propositional attitudes and having those rational normative properties. One explains the other. Let us say that on this weak view, the rational normative properties are *consequentially* essential as opposed to *constitutively* essential to propositional attitudes [(see Fine [1995], for the general distinction)].

For Weak Normative Essentialism, rational normative properties are realized in the constitutive essences of propositional attitudes. Such a view is quite intuitive in that it accepts the dependence of rational normative properties on propositional attitudes. Strong Normative Essentialism is unintuitive in so far as it rejects that idea. Surely we think that people are subject to rational requirements (or permissions) *in virtue of* their

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[4]A possible alternative view would be that normative properties are necessary but not essential to propositional attitudes.

propositional attitudes. In this respect, Strong Normative Essentialism turns out to be a revisionary doctrine, since it cannot capture this crucial idea. If there are no other considerations in play, realism about norms of mind should therefore take the weak form.[5]

How does this distinction affect the issue of physicalism? For Weak Normative Essentialism, the rational normative properties of propositional attitudes are consequential on the natures or constitutive essences of propositional attitudes, and there is a question about whether these natures or constitutive essences of propositional attitudes are realized in physical properties. For Strong Normative Essentialism, by contrast, rational normative properties and propositional attitudes are identical. Together they form one thick metaphysical crust, and the question is whether it depends on physical properties. The Weak Normative Essentialist says that rational norms are realized first in the constitutive essence of propositional attitudes, and how these constitutive essences, in turn, are realized is another question; it might be in soul-stuff or in physical matter, and the physicalist says that it is the latter. The physicalist who is a Strong Normative Essentialist says that rational properties are realized directly in physical states; while the physicalist who is a Weak Normative Essentialist says that rational properties are realized first in the constitutive essences of propositional attitudes, which in turn are realized in physical states. The dualist who is a Strong Normative Essentialist denies that rational properties are realized in physical states; while the dualist who is a Weak Normative Essentialist *accepts* that rational properties are realized first in the constitutive essence of propositional attitudes, but then *denies* that these are in turn realized in physical states, and asserts that they are realized in soul-stuff.

IV. Weak Normative Essentialism and *A Priori* Dependence

This distinction between Strong and Weak Normative Essentialism allows us to defuse a certain kind of objection to Normative Essentialism. This objection takes off from an epistemological, or perhaps conceptual, asymmetry between normative properties and mental properties. The asymmetry is that normative/non-normative dependence and supervenience are *a priori* conceptual constraints on normative thought, but psychophysical dependence and supervenience are not *a priori* conceptual constraints on psychological thought. As Simon Blackburn has pointed out, many millions (if not billions) of people are dualists about the mind, and they think that the mind can survive the destruction of the body; so it is not plausible that they are all flouting some *a priori* conceptual constraint [Blackburn 1985]. Competence in psychological thought does not require that we think that something that has psychological properties has them because of some (positive) physical properties, or that psychological

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[5]I embraced Strong Normative Essentialism in [1998], but rejected it in favour of Weak Normative Essentialism in [2005].

differences between things imply physical differences. By contrast, *normative* dependence and supervenience *are a priori* conceptual constraints. It is *a priori* that if something is bad, or we ought to do something, then that is because of the way it is in (positive) non-normative respects [see, further, Zangwill 2006, 2008]. And this implies that normative differences imply non-normative differences. Not to think this would be concept-abuse.[6] Given this, the objection to Normative Essentialism is the following: if propositional attitudes had essential normative properties, and this is part of our conception of them, then psychophysical dependence and supervenience would be *a priori*: but they are not. (I discuss this argument in [Zangwill 2005: §IV].)

One reply would be to agree that it *is a priori* or a conceptual truth that propositional attitudes depend and supervene on *something*. But it is *not a priori* or a conceptual truth that they depend and supervene on *physical* states. Normative Essentialists might help themselves to a move parallel to one that Hilary Putnam made early on [Putnam 1967]: propositional attitudes might supervene on green cheese or soul stuff for all we know as a consequence of what is built into our conception of propositional attitudes. But we do know *a priori*, or on conceptual grounds, that they supervene on *something*. That something might or might not be physical. So it is understandable that there are many dualists: psychophysical dependence and supervenience are *not a priori* even though normative/non-normative dependence and supervenience *are a priori*. However, this answer is not fully satisfying, because it is not clear that it is *a priori* or a conceptual truth that propositional attitudes depend on *anything* more basic. It is not contrary to the concept of a propositional attitude to be told that mind is fundamental in the universe—that mind is at the root of all being. Theists think this.

A different possible reply would be to deny that it is *a priori* that propositional attitudes have essential normative properties. Perhaps competent thinkers in propositional attitude terms can fail to know that they have normative properties that depend and supervene on non-normative properties, even though they do.

My own preferred reply is to draw attention to the Weak version of Normative Essentialism, which claims that normative properties of propositional attitudes depend on those propositional attitudes. This can be *a priori*, whether or not propositional attitudes themselves depend on anything more basic. The dependence of normative properties on propositional attitudes is one thing; the dependence of propositional attitudes on anything else is another.

Asbjørn Steglich-Petersen has objected to Normative Essentialism along these lines [Steglich-Petersen 2008]. He has two objections. The first is that if the mental is normative, and it is knowable *a priori* that it is so, then mental judgments are normative judgments and it would therefore be a requirement for mental ascriptions that we can provide some non-normative judgment in support of them. But, says Steglich-Petersen, there is no such requirement.

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[6]Normative dependence and supervenience are so central to normative thought that expressivists about normativity who would avoid an error theory about our normative thought must strive to capture them, or at least expressivist surrogates of them.

My reply to this is to say that although this argument may be successful against Strong Normative Essentialism, assuming that such a thesis were also a conceptual truth, it fails against Weak Normative Essentialism. For on a Weak Normative Essentialist view, mental judgments are not themselves normative judgments and there is no identity between mental properties and normative properties. Instead, the normative properties of propositional attitudes depend *a priori* on those propositional attitudes. The nature or identity of the propositional attitudes is non-normative even though it is (consequentially) essential to their nature or identity to generate normative properties. Hence ascribing mental properties to a person need not involve a commitment to their having properties in virtue of which those mental properties hold.

Steglich-Petersen has a second argument that he thinks works even against Weak Normative Essentialism. This argument is that propositional attitude judgments support normative judgments (of rationality). He argues that Weak Normative Essentialism cannot say this. This is surprising, for Weak Normative Essentialism was designed precisely to respect the dependency of normative properties (rationality requirements) on propositional attitudes. The issue in Steglich-Petersen's hands turns on the status of the dependence: is it logical, *a priori*, analytic, or metaphysical? Steglich-Petersen argues that the dependence must be *a priori* for Weak Normative Essentialism, and perhaps that is right. If so, we have *a priori* knowledge of the rational norms that are thrown up by propositional attitudes. And let us also assume that such knowledge is also conceptual or analytic. (Some *a priori* knowledge is not, such as our knowledge that we exist.) Steglich-Petersen then charges that this is problematic. His argument is that Weak Normative Essentialism violates Hume's Law, which is the impossibility of deducing a normative judgment from non-normative judgments; or as Steglich-Petersen puts it, that there is a 'ban [on] analytic inferences from non-normative to normative properties' [Steglich-Petersen 2008: §6.2]. My response to this problem is to deny Hume's law. I endorse Hume's law (and also the 'naturalistic fallacy') for *moral* normative properties,[7] but not for *rational* normative properties. Consider these examples. A is angry at X. A does not believe that X has done anything wrong to A. If we know these, we can deduce that A is irrational—a normative property. Or consider: A wills end X and believes that Y is a means to X. From knowledge of these, we can deduce that A rationally ought to will Y and that A is irrational if he does not will Y (other things being equal). Or: A has perceptual experience as of the fact that *p*. From knowledge of that, we can deduce that it would be rational of A to form the belief that *p* (other things being equal). These are all violations of Hume's law. Steglich-Petersen takes Hume's law to be inviolable—so that no normative/non-normative dependencies have conceptual or analytic status. But this, I maintain, is implausible. Some do.

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[7]There are Arthur Prior's sort of examples to worry about, such as 'Undertakers are church officers, therefore undertakers ought to do whatever church officers ought to do'. But perhaps there is a fix for such examples.

V. Non-realism About Propositional Attitude Thought

Let us now turn to consider non-realist options.

The idea of the normativity of the mental is sometimes bound up with an emphasis on the activity of interpretation. But it is not clear how or why normativity and interpretation are connected. One tradition has it that to be an intentional state is to be an object of possible interpretation, and interpretation proceeds on the basis of assumptions about the rationality of those being interpreted. (Donald Davidson and Daniel Dennett seem to converge on this point.) This sometimes looks like a 'response-dependent' theory: to be a belief is to be such that an ideal interpreter would interpret it as a belief. Such a theory is unsatisfactory. Too much depends on what the activity of interpretation is thought to be. If interpretation is just the attribution of intentional properties, then interpretationism is compatible with robust realism: a belief is the object of possible interpretation in the way that a physical thing is an object of possible perception. In both cases, it may be that what *grounds* the possibility is a real property. If so, the view would be realist and the considerations of previous sections would apply. But if not, then it is difficult to know what features ground the possibility of interpretation. It looks as if non-realist response-dependent interpretations of interpretationism are either implausible or underdefined.[8]

A different account of interpretationism is that it is an expressive view. Perhaps interpretationism is analogous to Humean expressive views in moral philosophy. Let us explore this idea, which has explicit supporters. Alan Gibbard, Robert Brandom and Hartry Field are expressivists about rational norms [Gibbard 1990; Brandom 1994; Field 1998]. I shall argue that this view is self-defeating, but not in the way that many think that it is self-defeating to be a Humean about causation.

Expressivism about some subject-matter depends on being able to distinguish thoughts of the disputed sort and thoughts that are thinner (not of the disputed sort). So, for example, moral expressivism requires that we have both moral thoughts about good and evil, right and wrong, virtue and vice, justice and injustice, as well as non-moral thoughts about passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. The moral expressivist then says that we have non-moral beliefs (about passions, motives, volitions and thoughts), and we also have non-cognitive reactions to these beliefs. We have emotions, pleasures or desires that share non-moral contents with our beliefs. Those non-cognitive reactions are that on which the moral expressivist story is built. Moral judgments are expressive of non-cognitive reactions with non-moral content. Those reactions are that out of which moral content is synthesized. Moral content arises from a certain type of non-cognitive attitude (emotion, pleasure, desire, or whatever). The details of such a

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[8]Whether Davidson's actual view should be characterized as response-dependent is an interpretative question I shall not broach.

construction need not concern us here. Such an account may or may not succeed. But it can certainly get off the ground [Blackburn 1984, 1993, 1998].

Expressivism about causation has the special problem that it seems that we cannot conceive of a world stripped of causation. If Immanuel Kant and Sydney Shoemaker are right, we cannot do that [Kant 1787; Shoemaker 1984, 1998]. The idea is that we cannot conceive of (spatial) objects, and events and properties without conceiving of them as having causal powers. So a bare non-causal Humean world, onto which we might project our expectations and come to think and speak of the world as if causality were part of it, is inconceivable. Thus expressivism about causation cannot be stated without incoherence, and thus cannot get started.[9] By contrast, expressivism about moral judgments and all normative judgments is not subject to *this* difficulty. For we *can* distinguish normative thought contents from non-normative thought contents. We can conceive of things in non-normative terms. Much of our thought is non-normative. We have both normative thoughts and also non-normative thoughts. So normative expressivism can at least get off the ground.

However, the problem with expressivism about norms of rationality is different from that over causation, and it is a problem not shared by expressivism about other sorts of norms. An expressivist story requires that we separate two broad kinds of propositional attitudes: beliefs and desires; cognitive and non-cognitive states; reason and passion; and so on. And the expressivist story is built on one sort of propositional attitude rather than the other. But this project must collapse if we try to be expressivists about the rational properties that are essential to all types of propositional attitudes. For we will find that there is nothing non-normative to be that on which normative content is constructed. We *can* separate normative and non-normative *contents* among our attitudes. But we *cannot* separate normative and non-normative *attitudes* to contents, because propositional attitudes have essential normative properties and we conceive of them as such. The problem is that normative thoughts and non-normative thoughts are both kinds of propositional attitudes and therefore *both* have essential normative properties. An expressivist must appeal to something real as the basis for the expressive story, where that reality is non-normatively conceived. (Blackburn often emphasizes that expressivism is a causal-explanatory theory.) Expressivist accounts turn on a distinction between two kinds of propositional attitudes, which are both assumed to be real; and the problematic *content* is synthesized from one of these kinds of propositional *attitudes*. So such a story must fall apart if we try to be expressivist about thoughts about propositional attitudes themselves. There must be, as it were, some kind of fixed fulcrum—a non-normative fulcrum—on which normative expressivist accounts turn. But there is not. Hence, given Normative Essentialism, expressivists about moral norms, for example, must be committed to non-expressivism about norms of rationality. (This argument is neutral between Strong and Weak Normative

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[9]The same is also plausibly true of expressivism about necessity, essence and identity.

Essentialism about propositional attitudes; neither doctrine can be combined with expressivism.)[10]

This is a kind of transcendental argument against expressivism about rationality. It is not a transcendental argument for mental realism, for it only takes us to the disjunction of realism or eliminativism about rational norms. (Eliminativism is a conjunction of views: there are no propositional attitudes; and propositional attitude thought presupposes that there are propositional attitudes.) But we can be assured that expressivism about rationality is self-defeating. So long as we want to go on thinking in propositional attitude terms, we are driven to realism about propositional attitudes and their constitutive normative properties. And, as we saw, if we are to be physicalist, we must say that those normative properties are physically realized, by analogy with naturalist moral realism.

VI. Eliminativism About Propositional Attitudes and the Arguments For It

What then of eliminativism as proposed by Paul Churchland [1981] or Stephen Stich [1983]? The foregoing arguments leave this option open. It might be argued that eliminativists will not care about any alleged normative properties of propositional attitudes because if there are no propositional attitudes then these essential normative properties are never instantiated. So, they might say, the debate over eliminativism is unaffected by considerations of normativity. But this line of reasoning is mistaken.

Eliminativists think that the entities or states postulated in what is known as 'folk psychology' do not exist, whereas 'vindicationists' think that they do. But one can only take a view on this issue, one way or the other, if one has some view of the commitments of folk psychology.

Both physicalists and dualists tacitly or explicitly hold a 'success theory' of folk psychology rather than an 'error theory'. Both hold that the entities and states that it postulates exist, but they differ over how they are related to other entities and states. Both are vindicationist rather than eliminativist. Both assume an account of our folk psychological thought such that the physicalist or dualist metaphysics is the sort of thing that could be its vindication.

Functionalists credit propositional attitudes with essential dispositional–causal properties, and functionalism is often augmented with the idea that we conceive of propositional attitudes as having those dispositional–causal properties. Functionalists typically think that folk psychology primarily has a predictive and explanatory purpose. Given this, the question then becomes: are those dispositional–causal properties instantiated by human beings? In particular, if we think that mental states are realized in physical or computational states, the question is: to what extent are the physical or

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[10]The mental states on which all existing expressivist accounts are built are propositional attitudes, not merely objectual attitudes or infinitive attitudes: one takes displeasure, for example, in the fact that a cat is being burnt. And these sentiments are propositional attitudes that have essential normative properties. But even if the moral sentiments were objectual sentiments, it is plausible that they would still have essential normative properties. Love and hate, for example, are objectual intentional states that have essential normative properties. (Love makes it rational to care.)

computational states of human beings isomorphic to those postulated in folk psychology? The more isomorphism, the more vindicationist; the less isomorphism, the more eliminativist [Stich 1983: 231].

However, given a commitment to Normative Essentialism, the issue over eliminativism looks significantly different. Normative Essentialism is primarily a point about propositional attitudes themselves—that they have essential normative properties. But it is plausible that this should be augmented with a point about folk psychology—about our conception of propositional attitudes. The idea would be that instead of conceiving of propositional attitudes as playing a certain causal-explanatory role, as on the folk-functionalist view, we conceive of propositional attitudes as having essential normative properties, in the sense that we think that a person who has a propositional attitude is thereby subject to certain normative requirements or permissions.

Normative Essentialism invites a view of our concept of propositional attitudes that emphasizes the first-person point of view rather than (or perhaps as well as) the third-person predictive and explanatory point of view. (Contrast Daniel Dennett's insightful and upfront introduction in Dennett [1987].) We ascribe propositional attitudes both to others and to ourselves. Propositional attitude concepts have first and third-person applications. *What* we ascribe is the same in either case, even though our grounds are very different. But the first-person application is intimately connected with reasoning. For rational norms are ways in which the person who has them ought to believe, intend or feel, and in reasoning we aim to honour those rational norms. We have to decide what to believe, intend or feel, and when we reason, we aim to conform to the rational norms that bear on us in virtue of our mental states. Those who reason, at least those who reason self-consciously, think they ought to believe, intend or feel something, and they aim to discharge those normative requirements in their mental lives. Since they take themselves to be subject to norms, they think that they have propositional attitudes in virtue of which they are subject to those norms. People who are subject to norms and do something about them obey those norms out of respect for them, not merely in accordance with them; and to do that they must see the norms as applying to themselves in virtue of the mental states that they are in. They must think: 'This is what state I am in, hence that is what I should do, and hence I will do it'. They must think the norm applies to *them* in virtue of their propositional attitudes, and they are able to do something about it [Korsgaard 1996].

Hence if either Strong Normative Essentialism or Weak Normative Essentialism is true and we conceive of propositional attitudes as having essential normative properties, then, contrary to most of those who have engaged in the debate over eliminativism, folk psychology does *not* have an entirely predictive and explanatory purpose. This is because of the close link between rational normative properties and reasoning. In its first-personal application, folk psychology primarily has a *deliberative* purpose. Not every self-ascription is a basis for deliberation. But propositional attitude self-ascriptions are potentially a basis for deliberation, and this is at least a

central purpose of folk psychology. This is a deliberative model of folk psychology.

This deliberative view of folk psychology stands in opposition to 'functionalism', according to which folk psychology primarily has a predictive and explanatory purpose. The deliberative view is equally opposed to simulationism [Gordon 1986; Heal 1986] since simulationism shares with functionalism the (false) assumption that the primary function of folk psychology is predictive and explanatory. The deliberative view is a third option.

Accepting the deliberative view need not lead us to deny that folk psychology is often used to predict and explain other minds. In a central kind of case of understanding, predicting and explaining other people, they are disposed to *obey* the norms to which they are subject; and then we predict what they will do. But ascribing propositional attitudes means ascribing (consequential) norms, not virtuous conformity to them. We are subject to many normative requirements that we do not discharge and do not even have a disposition to discharge, just as burglars have moral duties not to steal, which they do not obey, and do not even have a disposition to obey. Some may virtuously obey the norms that their propositional attitudes impose, and if so, we may predict what they will do. But in that case we can do so only because of *their* first-personal grasp of the consequential norms of their propositional attitudes.

Folk psychology *is* sometimes predictive and explanatory in its third-personal application, even though folk psychology primarily has a deliberative point in its first-personal application. Are first- and third-person applications therefore on a par? No: for we can imagine solitary desert islanders who have no need for third-person applications of folk psychology but who need first-personal applications (since they need to reason), but it is hard to imagine people who deploy folk psychology third-personally but not first-personally; for they would be people who could conceive of other minds yet who did not reason. So the deliberative use is essential while the predictive and explanatory use is accidental.

If the deliberative view of folk psychology is true, it has the consequence that Churchland and Stich's empirical pro-eliminativist arguments fall away as irrelevant since both assume the false predictive and explanatory conception of folk psychology as a premise. Given the alternative deliberative view, the entire debate over eliminativism and vindicationism in the philosophy of mind should be radically reconfigured. The scientific evidence adduced or imagined by Churchland and Stich does not cast a negative light on normative folk psychology. Arguments for or against eliminativism will have to be more traditional philosophical ones.

This is not to say that the world is therefore safe from all possible eliminativist arguments. One way to be an eliminativist in the new normative regime would be to see eliminativism as proposing a radically revisionary normative view. Perhaps folk psychology embodies a radically false normative theory, and folk psychology embodies significant normative mistakes. (Stich [1991] argues in this way.) By contrast, vindicationists in the

new regime would be normative conservatives. They think that mental states do in fact instantiate the normative properties that folk psychology takes to be essential to propositional attitudes. Mental eliminativism would also follow from a quite general and radical normative nihilism according to which there are no true (positive) normative judgments; so no (positive) normative theory is correct.

VII. Refashioning the Self-refutation Argument Against Eliminativism

Let us now turn from arguing against pro-eliminativist arguments to an argument against eliminativism. One prominent range of anti-eliminativist arguments is self-refutation arguments. Many have found these arguments persuasive [Baker 1987; Boghossian 1990]. But eliminativists have found these arguments unimpressive, and have unceremoniously rejected them as question-begging. I shall now pursue a specifically normative self-refutation argument, which I hope will force more respect from eliminativists than previous self-refutation arguments.

The standard self-refutation argument runs as follows: if eliminative materialism is true, then there is no truth, assertion or rational acceptability; for there are no beliefs to be true, no assertions, and no beliefs that there is evidence for [Baker 1987]. More simply: the eliminativist believes that there are no beliefs, asserts that there are no assertions, thinks that it is true that there are no true beliefs, and thinks that it is rational to believe that there are no beliefs that are rational—all of which are self-defeating.

One completely ineffective reply is to say, as Paul Churchland does (crediting Patricia Churchland), that such anti-eliminativist self-refutation arguments are like the anti-vitalist argument that one cannot assert anti-vitalism because if one did one would be dead and not capable of asserting anything [Churchland 1981: 22]. Lynne Baker complained that this analogy is very unfair, since the anti-vitalist is someone with a view about what
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or 'believes' that there are no assertions or beliefs. The eliminativist will deny the objector the right to use those terms.

The problem for eliminative materialism that I want to cultivate arises from dispensing with rational norms in their first-personal application. How does the self-refutation argument look when transposed into the first-personal normative key? The problem is not, as in Baker's version of the argument, that asserting eliminativism presupposes the existence of beliefs or of truth or even simply of rational acceptability. The normative self-refutation problem is a distinctively first-personal normative one—that in believing or asserting eliminativism, one takes *oneself* to be *warranted* in believing eliminativism. If so, one cannot rationally think 'It is rational for me to think that nothing is rational'. For believing in the existence of rational normative demands means believing in the existence of the mental states that impose those demands. If epistemic norms are conceived by us as the Normative Essentialist proposes, then it is essential that such norms are imposed by beliefs or perceptual experiences; and to understand that a state is one of belief is to grasp the requirements that it places us under in virtue of being such a state. In particular, epistemic rational norms are those that are generated by beliefs and perceptual experiences; and belief states are those that generate epistemic rational norms. So I cannot think that I am rational to believe that there are no rational demands on me that are generated by my beliefs.

This is how I believe that the self-refutation argument against eliminativism can be rescued and recast. The self-refutation argument turns on the first-personal deployment of normative concepts in reasoning, and on the *a priori* connection of these normative concepts with our propositional attitudes (or other intentional states).

Such a self-refutation argument—which takes off from the essential normativity of propositional attitudes and the first-personal point of view— is not question-begging. The problem is not the third-personal one of how to describe the eliminativist's mindset; the problem is with eliminativists thinking eliminativist thoughts or with eliminativists taking themselves to be rational to think eliminativist thoughts. There is no problem with thinking that *others* are not subject to rational norms. The problem is with my taking myself to have reason to deny that *I* am subject to rational norms. For how can I take myself to have reason to think that there are no reasons? How can I think that it is rational to think that nothing is rational? This is the normative *cogito*. A person might say of *other* persons or organisms that they are not rational to believe anything. The problem, however, is with my thinking of myself that I have no reason to believe that very thought. I am to think: 'I have reason to think that I have no reason to think this thought?'[11]

Since we have already ruled out expressivism about normative thought, the self-refutation argument shows that we should be realists about normative properties of propositional attitudes. For only a real normative property can be one that I factor into my reasoning. To reason is to be

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[11]Compare Descartes's *cogito*: we might think 'John does not exist' but not 'I do not exist' (although we might *say* but not think 'I do not now exist', in a letter or recorded message, for example). Thinking 'I do not exist' is self-refuting. It is not rationally thinkable, Descartes thought. And my view is that we cannot rationally think 'It is rational for me to think that nothing, including this very thought, is rational'.

committed to the reality of propositional attitudes and of their normative properties. So, to reason for eliminativism is to be committed to the opposite of eliminativism. The usual eliminativist reply is that anti-eliminativist arguments are question-begging since they deploy the old vocabulary in objecting to it. But rational normative notions cannot be eliminated. Indeed at one point, Churchland suggests that he can hang onto to such notions while jettisoning folk psychology [Churchland 1981: 20]. But in reasoning, one aspires to be sensitive to rational justification; and if there is rational justification, there must be propositional attitudes to be rationally justified. Epistemic justification, for example, just is the rational norm that bears on one in virtue of one's beliefs (or perceptual experiences), as opposed to our desires, intentions and emotions. Hence reasoning for eliminativism—which means that there are no epistemic rational demands—is self-defeating.[12]

The normative perspective is the only one that accords with the first-personal deliberative perspective. My propositional attitudes are those on the basis of which I can and do reason. And I know that the propositional attitudes of others are those on the basis of which they can and do reason. In reasoning we modify our mindset in the light of rational norms that we think bear on us in virtue of having propositional attitudes. Being a reasoner implies having propositional attitudes and trying to respect the norms that flow from them. By contrast, on the third-personal predictive (functionalist or simulationist) picture of folk psychology, there would be no immediate connection between propositional attitudes and reasoning. That is what is wrong with such views.

Thus, given Normative Essentialism, eliminativism must be false and realism must be true. We can eliminate eliminativism.

VIII. Coda

I have pursued the consequences of Normative Essentialism for the metaphysics of mind. If we accept Normative Essentialism, the traditional views in the philosophy of mind—dualism, physicalism, functionalism and eliminativism—must be transformed; and the debates over these views must be reconfigured. When that is done, it turns out that views of propositional attitudes that reject realism are problematic. Normativists should be realists. Furthermore, we saw that Normative Essentialism should take a weak rather than a strong form. We should combine the realist view of normative properties with a Weak Normative Essentialist view that allows for the realization of normative properties in propositional attitudes, and that in principle allows space for theories that identify properties, such as physical properties, in which propositional attitudes together with their normative properties are realized. This is not to say that we have positive reason to think that such a theory is right. But thus far we have seen no reason to rule

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[12]Churchland briefly considers the threat to eliminativism from considerations of normativity [Churchland 1991: III and IV]. But the normativity arguments that he describes are very weak and confused, and so it is hardly surprising he has no trouble dispatching them.

out some such theory. Given the normative transformation of issues in the philosophy of mind, it seems to me that the pressing issues are like those in metaethics: we need to probe the dependence relation between normative and non-normative properties; we seek some idea of the specific dependencies that obtain; and we seek an account of knowledge of normative/non-normative dependencies.[13]

University of Durham

Received: September 2007
Revised: August 2008

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