

A Posteriori Physicalism

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1. A Posteriori Physicalism and the Neo-Dualist Arguments

Two puzzles that have long occupied Professor Kim are that of how to formulate physicalism in philosophy of mind, and whether an appropriately formulated physicalist thesis is true.

Physicalism, according to Kim, is “the claim that what happens in our mental life is wholly dependent on, and determined by, what happens with our bodily processes” (2005: 14). If a ostensibly more precise formulation is wanted, then we can adapt the following one from Kim (2006: 116):

If something x has some mental property M (or is in mental state M) at time t , then x is a physical thing and x has M at t in virtue of the fact that x has some physical property P (or is in physical state P) that stands in relation R to M in x at t .¹

Needless to say, there has been considerable debate about the appropriate ranges of P s, M s, and R s, and about whether this formulation requires further qualifications.² I myself favor a version of physicalism that is often called *a posteriori physicalism* (2004).³

There are two parts to a posteriori physicalism. First, we a posteriori physicalists hold that mental states or properties are identical to physical states or properties of bodies and brains,

¹ The suggested formulation modifies Kim’s proposal mainly by generalizing the possible relations R in virtue of which P constitutes M , and by clarifying that P may be a state or a property. Kim’s formulation specifies that R is *realization*.

² See, e.g., Jackson 1998, Melnyk 2003, Wilson 2005.

³ A posteriori physicalism is usually thought of as a view about the mind, particularly about conscious mental states or properties, and I will treat it as such in this paper.

and are therefore necessarily identically to physical states or properties of bodies and brains. So “a posteriori” physicalism is an elliptical name for “a posteriori *necessary*” physicalism. This puts us at odds with those who hold that mind and brain are only contingently related—a group that includes most functionalists (e.g., Putnam 1967 and Lycan 1987) and so-called non-reductive physicalists (e.g., Fodor 1974), as well as many property dualists (e.g., Chalmers 1996).

Second, we a posteriori physicalists hold that these necessary identities of the mental and the physical are empirically discovered, and cannot be known prior to empirical inquiry. We think of mind-brain identities on the model of the scientific or theoretical identification of gold and the element with atomic number 79, water and H₂O, temperature [in a gas] and mean molecular kinetic energy, lightening and electrical discharge, or Hesperus and Phosphorus. This puts us at odds with those who think that physicalism requires a priori knowable connections between minds and brains, most prominently of late: Frank Jackson (1998) and David Chalmers (1996; and Chalmers and Jackson 2001).⁴

I have characterized a posteriori physicalism in terms of a posteriori identity. But for my present concerns, the crucial elements are that the constituting relation R holds with metaphysical necessity and the fact that P bears R to M is knowable only a posteriori.

⁴ Let me now acknowledge three complaints that could be registered against what I have already said. One is that I have slyly helped myself to the claim that biological states and properties—e.g., brain states and properties—are physical properties. But it is controversial whether biological states and properties can be, in the language of Jackson (1998), “located” among the states and properties recognized by an austere theory of physics. Second, and relatedly, there is a well-known problem for characterizing physicalism in a way that is both true and non-trivial, having to do with what counts (even on the austere theory) as part of physics. I will not be offering solutions to either of these concerns at this time. (My own view is that biological states and properties are broadly physical, that they cannot be located in the way that Jackson demands, and so much the worse for Jackson’s account of locating explanations.) The third complaint is that some (or all) of my examples of purported scientific a posteriori identities are in fact examples of a priori knowable identities. If so, then the analogy of mind-brain identity with those will not serve me. The answer is that none of those examples are of identities that are knowable a priori, but that is not an argument that I can take up here. (For the objection, see Tichy (1984), Davies and Humbestone (1981), Chalmers (1996), Jackson (1998), and Chalmers and Jackson (2001). For the response see Block and Stalnaker (1999), Yablo 1999, Lycan (forthcoming), and Polger (manuscript).) Here I acknowledge these concerns only to set them aside.

There are two standard and familiar avenues of objection to a posteriori physicalism, as I have characterized it. The first is that it is false because the relationship between minds and brains is not even nomologically necessary. If minds can be implemented or realized in things that are substantially different from brains—“copper, soul, or cheese,” in Putnam’s (1975) pithy phrase—then it is not true that mental states or properties are identical to brain states or properties. This is, in a nutshell, the multiple realizability argument. If you find this objection compelling and you still hold that physicalism is correct, then you will be a so-called non-reductive physicalist. Now I think, and here I am just reporting, that the reductionist (e.g., Kim 1998, 2005) and property dualist (e.g., Chalmers 1996) critiques of non-reductive physicalism are compelling. I, myself, have argued that the best version of the non-reductive view (viz., functionalism) makes demands that cannot be jointly satisfied (Polger 2004). The weakness in the non-reductive thesis is the contingency claim. The general thrust of the objections to non-reductive physicalism is that commitment to a contingent mind-body relation is incompatible with the causal efficacy of instances of mental kinds. In particular, it is argued that the contingency claim undermines the causal claim if the physical is causally closed, which there is good reason to accept. So, without rehearsing these arguments in detail, I will take it that physicalism about the mind, if true, requires that mind and brain stand in a relation that holds with at least nomological necessity.

The second objection to a posteriori physicalism is that even if mind and brain are related with nomological necessity in fact, nevertheless it is metaphysically possible that one exist without the other. In short, the opponent asserts that it is not metaphysically necessary that mind and brain are identical. If so, because identity is necessary if it holds, we should conclude that the mind-brain identity claim is not true. This second objection is not so much an argument against a

posteriori physicalism as it is a simple rebuttal. For, as I have put it forth, the thesis of a posteriori physicalism simply denies that it is possible for mind and brain to, as it were, come apart in the way that the objector supposes. The objector simply brutes exactly the kinds of intuitions that a posteriori physicalism is designed to undercut. But we posteriori physicalists have a story to tell about why it might seem that two things could be distinct when in fact they are necessarily identical—appealing to the models of water and H₂O, Hesperus and Phosphorus, and so on. As such, the a posteriori physicalists will rightly regard the second objection as question-begging.⁵

But there is a now familiar family of arguments that aim to show that this a posteriori physicalist response to the second objection is ineffective. For convenience, I'll call these the *neo-dualist arguments*. The neo-dualist arguments conclude that a posteriori physicalism is metaphysically unstable or inadequate in ways that are analogous to the ways that non-reductive physicalism is charged with being unstable or inadequate. The strategy is to use the a posteriori physicalists' rejection of an a priori connection to drive a wedge between mind and brain, just as reductionists and property dualists had used the non-reductive physicalists' insistence on a contingent mind-brain connection as an opening for their objections. Crudely, the neo-dualist argues that physicalism requires more than an a posteriori necessary connection between mind and brain, it requires an "epistemically transparent" connection—one that is conceptual, analytic, "broadly logical," or otherwise a priori. Lacking a "transparent" or "epistemically necessary" connection, a posteriori physicalism is at best explanatorily inadequate and more likely just a version of property dualism after all.⁶ (The neo-dualist critique is, of course, accompanied by an

⁵ Many physicalists, including myself, have read Levine's (1983) criticism of Kripke (1970/82) and replacement of Kripke's dualist argument with the epistemic "explanatory gap" concern as showing the way for a posteriori physicalism. See also the footnotes to Lycan 1987, ch. 2, Section 5 for a (perhaps inadvertent) roadmap for identity theorists, and my (2004) for an attempt to follow that guide.

⁶ The most familiar versions of this argument come from David Chalmers, who offers several versions. I take it that the canonical versions are in Chalmers 1996, and Chalmers and Jackson 2001. See also Jackson 1998.

account of how the a posteriori physicalists' favorite examples—water and H₂O, Hesperus and Phosphorus, and so on—are can be understood as satisfying the demand for a priori transparent explanation.) So just as the a posteriori physicalist accuses the non-reductive physicalist of making incompatible claims about the ontological autonomy and causal efficacy of mental states, the a posteriori physicalist is charged with making incompatible claims about the epistemic independence and ontological dependence of the mental vis-à-vis physical. According to the neo-dualist, the mind-brain relation cannot be both metaphysically necessary and only knowable a posteriori.

2. Particular and General Versions of Physicalism

Neo-dualist arguments conclude that the claim that the necessary relation between mind and brain is knowable only a posteriori is self-defeating. If the relation is a posteriori, they argue, then we must be conceding that there are possible worlds—namely, epistemically possible worlds—in which it does not hold. But if there are *any* possible worlds in which the relation does not hold, then it is not metaphysically necessary after all. Just like the non-reductive physicalists, we a posteriori physicalists can't have our cake and eat it too. On this view, we a posteriori physicalists are non-reductive physicalists who just don't recognize that we are.⁷

If a posteriori physicalists hold, as I claimed, that mental states are necessarily identical to physical states of brains and bodies, then we seem to make a claim that is meant to cover all possible worlds. If so, then where do these alleged “epistemically possible” worlds come from?

The fissure into which the neo-dualists are driving their wedge is the widely held view that physicalism is contingently true. It is often accepted, even by physicalists, that there are

⁷ Thus a posteriori physicalists join functionalists and non-reductive physicalists as “Type-B” materialists, in the taxonomy of Chalmers (1996). A posteriori physicalists and non-reductive physicalists both reject “Type-A” analytic physicalism.

worlds in which physicalism is false—worlds that contain angels, deities, ectoplasm, faeries, or some such.⁸ The debate between a posteriori identity theorists and functionalists, then, concerns the mind-brain relation in those worlds in which physicalism is true—leaving it open that there may be some dualist worlds, eliminativist worlds, and so forth. Likewise, the debate over physicalism turns out to be a debate over whether *our world* is a member of the set of worlds in which physicalism is true, or not. So physicalism is treated as a thesis about a subset of all worlds—for Jackson (1998) it is a thesis about those worlds that are “minimal physical duplicates” of our world.⁹ If physicalism is true in some worlds, the remaining question is whether physicalism is true in any worlds that contain mental states and properties—such as our world.

Responses to the neo-dualist challenge are numerous, indeed.¹⁰ But today I’d like to entertain a response that had thus far received remarkably little attention: Let us consider the view that physicalism is a thesis about all possible worlds—that it is necessarily true. We can still have a lively debate about whether physicalism is in fact true. But we physicalists won’t give up the leverage that we do if we allow that physicalism is a contingent thesis. It should be obvious that we opened ourselves to the neo-dualist arguments by that concession, so let us close the loophole. If there are any metaphysically possible worlds that contain angels, deities, ectoplasm, or faeries, then physicalism is false.

To appreciate the move I am proposing, it is useful to distinguish between what I will call, adapting the terminology of Janice Dowell (under review) *particular* and *general*

⁸ For example, see Chalmers 1996, Chalmers and Jackson 2001, Stoljar 2000, Wilson 2005, Dowell forthcoming, Melnyk 2003, and Lewis 1994.

⁹ I have some concerns about whether Jackson’s minimal physical duplicate formulation is the correct way to capture the idea that physicalism is a contingent thesis, but I will not pursue these herein.

¹⁰ I am especially fond of Block and Stalnaker 1999, Byrne 1999, Dowell unpublished, Hawthorne 2002, Hill and McLaughlin 1999, Lycan forthcoming, McLaughlin 2005, Polger (under review), Wright forthcoming, and Yablo 1999.

physicalist theses. Particular physicalist theses are ways of filling in M, P, and R in the formulation of physicalism presented earlier. General physicalist theses are claims about the modal extent of physicalism, viz., whether physicalism is true in all possible worlds, none, or some.¹¹ The options are illustrated in Figure 1.

Particular: The relation R between mental (M) properties and physical (P) properties is...

		Contingent	Necessary
General: Physicalism is (if true) ...	Contingent	Non-Reductive Physicalism: Functionalism (Putnam, Fodor, Lycan); and other non-reductive physicalisms	Identity Theories: a posteriori identity theories (Smart, Hill, McLaughlin, Block and Stalnaker); analytic Functionalisms (Lewis, Jackson, Shoemaker)
	Necessary	Dualists and Property Dualists: Descartes, Chalmers	Meta-physicalism

Figure 1. Particular and general physicalist theses, with some provisional assignments of occupants.

A particular physicalist thesis makes a claim about the relation R between the physical and the mental. The a posteriori physicalism that I described at the start is an example of a particular physicalist thesis; it claims that the relationship between mental states and the physical states of brains and bodies is a necessary one—identity. Functionalism is another particular physicalist thesis; it holds that the mind-body relationship is contingent—realization.

¹¹ I think that my *particular* physicalist theses correspond to Dowell's. But that what I am calling *general* physicalist theses are somewhat different from the those that she calls our attention to with this terminology. My *general* theses might be *meta-general* relative to hers.

In contrast, a general physicalist thesis makes a claim about physicalism. The standard contemporary general physicalist thesis is that physicalism is contingent—that any physicalist thesis holds only in a subset of possible worlds. But it appears that the Modern expectation was that physicalism, if true, is necessarily true. Plainly Descartes' arguments, and any conceivability arguments, get a grip only if the contrasting thesis is a necessary one. The mere possibility of dualism is impotent against the physicalist claim that only some worlds are physicalist worlds. No doubt this partially explains the appeal of the contingent general thesis. Yet Chalmersian neo-dualists exploit the contingency to arrive at the same conclusion as Cartesian dualists, so the gambit does not seem to have paid off.

I am proposing to consider the general physicalist thesis that a posteriori physicalism is true in all metaphysically possible worlds.¹² Call this view Meta-Physicalism. Meta-Physicalism may prove to be false—I am not yet asserting the truth of Meta-Physicalism. But it is worthwhile to consider Meta-Physicalism as a way of securing physicalism.

The distinction between particular and general theses helps us to see how the neo-dualist arguments exploit the contingency of the general thesis. Neo-dualists clearly suppose that physicalism requires Meta-Physicalism, so that if there are some worlds in which the physical does not determine the mental then physicalism is false. If so, then those who hold the contingent general thesis are giving away the farm. The way to block the neo-dualist arguments is to deny that physicalism is a contingent thesis and assert Meta-Physicalism. Just as we preserve the particular physicalist thesis by opting for a necessary mind-body relation, we may block the neo-dualist arguments by taking up the necessary general thesis.

¹² Because I concur with the critiques of non-reductive physicalism, there is no sense in considering necessary versions of them. To do so would violate the spirit of those views, in any case.

Much more needs to be said about these four options, and about which philosophers would endorse which positions. There is also an important question of whether any arguments can be given in favor of Meta-Physicalism. That it answers the neo-dualist arguments is one reason, but perhaps not enough of a reason. I'll return to this question all too briefly at the end of this paper. Given widespread endorsement of the contingent general thesis, a more pressing concern is that there may be obvious reasons for a physicalist to reject Meta-Physicalism. In the next section I consider objections of this sort.

2. Meta-Physicalism: Objections and Replies

If you believe that physicalism is false, then of course you will believe that Meta-Physicalism is false. But I am interested in whether there are obvious reasons for those who believe that physicalism is true to deny that it is necessarily true, to reject Meta-Physicalism.

Objection I. There are possible worlds with ghosts, deities, angels, or fundamental phenomenal properties. Therefore, Meta-Physicalism is false.

Reply I. If there are possible worlds with ghosts, deities, angels, or fundamental phenomenal properties, then physicalism is false. So the dualist and neo-dualist argue, and so I concede. If physicalism is false, then Meta-Physicalism is false. But this is no reason for a physicalist to reject Meta-Physicalism.

Objection II. Physicalists must acknowledge that physicalism may be false. If it is even epistemically possible that physicalism is false, then there are some (epistemically) possible

worlds in which it is false. Therefore, Meta-Physicalism is false—physicalism is not true in all possible worlds.

Reply II. If the fallibility of physicalism entails that there are some possible worlds in which it is false, then physicalism is false. If physicalism is false, then Meta-Physicalism is false.

But Meta-Physicalism entails that there are no such possible worlds. If Meta-Physicalism is true, then the defeasibility of physicalism does not entail that there are any possible worlds in which it is false. So the objection is simply question-begging against the Meta-Physicalist.

The second objection is an attempt to re-connect metaphysical necessity and epistemic certainty by arguing that fallibility entails contingency. Here we require not assertion, but instead an argument that no necessary relation can be known fallibly. And that would be quite controversial. For example, take the identity of Hesperus and Phosphorus. From the fact that we could be wrong about the identity of Hesperus and Phosphorus, it does not follow that there are some possible worlds in which Hesperus is not Phosphorus. So it's hard to see how any such argument from fallibility to contingency could be less controversial—to a physicalist, remember—than the Meta-Physicalist claim that it is being mustered against. So this cannot be an obvious objection to Meta-Physicalism.

Objection III. The claim that physicalism is contingent is not a contradiction. It's at least logically possible that some worlds are physicalist worlds and some worlds are not.

Therefore, Meta-Physicalism is false.

Reply III. Meta-Physicalism does not appear to be a logical truth. It may turn out to be a non-obvious logical truth, in which case it would be a contradiction to claim that physicalism is contingent. Call this view *Analytic Meta-Physicalism*. (Given the examples that neo-dualists

propose as non-obvious “logical” truths, they can have no special objection to Analytic Meta-Physicalism.)

But those of us who are inclined toward a posteriori physicalism as a particular thesis can be just as happy to make the same a posteriori claim for a general thesis. Call this view *A Posteriori Meta-Physicalism*. *A Posteriori Meta-Physicalism* in fact has a better claim on the label “*A Posteriori Physicalism*,” for it is the thesis that physicalism itself is necessary a posteriori. On this view, the truth of physicalism is necessary but not knowable a priori. The *A Posteriori Meta-Physicalist* holds that we have discovered that physicalism is true, and that it is necessarily true. Physicalism, after all, is a claim about the nature of our world; and we usually find out about the actual nature of our world by empirical inquiry.

Think of it on the model of the atomic theory of chemical elements. The atomic theory is an empirical discovery, but it tells us how elements are individuated: that elements and elemental properties depend on and are determined by atomic structure. This is an empirical fact, but one with a modal force stronger than natural necessity. If atomic theory is true, then there are no possible worlds in which elements are determined by the ratio of earth, air, fire, and water of which they are composed. But that had to be discovered. Likewise, the *A Posteriori Meta-Physicalist* holds that there are no worlds in which physicalism is false, but that fact had (or perhaps, has) to be empirically discovered.

Objection IV. *Meta-Physicalism* invokes “strong” metaphysical necessity, a metaphysical necessity that is not rooted in logical or conceptual necessity. But there are no strong necessities, therefore *Meta-Physicalism* should be rejected.

Reply IV. Meta-Physicalism does not require strong necessities. At least Analytic Meta-Physicalists can do without them, and perhaps A Posteriori Meta-Physicalists as well.

Nevertheless, for the sake of argument, suppose that A Posteriori Meta-Physicalism requires strong necessities. Is that really so bad? No doubt some will think that it is. If such a person is a physicalist, that will be a reason for to explore A Priori Meta-Physicalism, I suppose.

But I think that we have independent reasons to accept a metaphysical necessity that is not identified with logical or conceptual necessity.¹³ The objection to strong necessities is basically Humean, that there may be no necessary connections between distinct existences. Yet many of us hold that Humean accounts of causation are inadequate, and therefore accept theories of causation that appeal to strong necessities. Chalmers, even, seems to concede that causation will require such connections (1996: 86). So even if the Meta-Physicalist must appeal to strong necessities, this cannot be considered a sufficient reason to reject the thesis.

Objection V. Physicalism is only a thesis about nomologically possible worlds. Therefore no physicalist should accept Meta-Physicalism.¹⁴

Reply V. This objection might just be a reiteration of commitment to the contingent general thesis, that physicalism is true only in a subset of possible worlds. If so, then we know that the contingent general position is susceptible to the neo-dualist arguments. And that is a reason to resist the objection and maintain Meta-Physicalism.

¹³ Bill Lycan suggests that we (in fact) accept many non-logical modalities: “Consider the standard picture of logical space, featuring ever-larger concentric circles. We can start with the usual three grades of possibility, nomic, metaphysical, and conceptual; the nomically possible worlds are a proper subset of the metaphysically possible, which in turn are a proper subset of the conceptually possible. ...Of course, the usual three grades are only a tiny subset of all the grades or types of possibility there are. Biological possibility, legal possibility, moral possibility,... and few of even those street-level restriction classes themselves correspond to recognizable philosophical categories” (forthcoming).

¹⁴ Brandon Towl pressed me on this objection, in conversation.

But I raise this objection now in order to make a different point. Even as a contingent thesis, physicalism is not limited in scope to the nomologically possible worlds, worlds with the same laws of nature. For certainly physicalism could hold true in worlds in which the laws or other constitutive regularities of nature are slightly or radically different. The force of what is sometimes called Hempel's problem for the physicalist is to say what would count as a physical basis in a manner that is neither trivial nor false (see, e.g., Jackson 1998 and Melnyk 2003). I take it that an adequate solution to Hempel's problem must allow that physicalism could be true even if, for example, the speed of light were different than it is actually. So the general physicalist thesis must at least range over more than nomologically possible worlds.

Objection VI. We have no evidence for Meta-Physicalism. Moreover, it violates the spirit of naturalism, of which physicalism is surely supposed to be an instance. Therefore no physicalist should accept Meta-Physicalism.¹⁵

Reply VI. This objection raises the vexed question of how to understand naturalism in philosophy. It's clear enough that at least some versions of philosophical naturalism eschew any modal or otherwise "metaphysical" claims, and therefore would not accommodate Meta-Physicalism. It is less clear whether those forms of naturalism would allow even the particular a posteriori physicalist thesis. If not, then naturalistic scruples would provide reasons to reject physicalism, but not reasons for physicalists to reject Meta-Physicalism.

¹⁵ John Post pressed me on this objection, in conversation.

On the other hand, it seems that some versions of naturalism recognize modal relations, including modal relations other than strictly logical relations. For those naturalisms, there is no special reason for Meta-Physicalism to raise concerns.

As to the complaint that we have no evidence for Meta-Physicalism, this has a straightforward response. According to the account I offered above, evidence for Meta-Physicalism is like any other evidence about the natures of the constituents of our world. I compared it the discovery of Meta-Physicalism to the discovery of the atomic theory of chemistry. If we have naturalistically acceptable reasons to endorse the atomic theory despite not having studied the chemistry of other possible worlds, then we can also have naturalistically acceptable reasons for endorsing Meta-Physicalism.

If the story I am telling is correct, then the argument for Meta-Physicalism is an inference to the best explanation, and Kim for one has expressed doubts about this style of argument (e.g., Kim 2005). But Kim's concerns about inference to the best explanation arguments are directed at those who use inference to the best explanation to establish the truth of a posteriori physicalism. We may have to revisit that argument later. But in this paper my concern is not with the truth of physicalism, but rather with whether physicalists ought to hold that physicalism is a necessary or a contingent thesis. I am entertaining the idea that physicalism should be understood as Meta-Physicalism.

3. Arguments for Strong A Posteriori Physicalism

Although my exploration has not been exhaustive, so far I have failed to discover any obvious reasons for a physicalist to deny that physicalism is necessarily true. The remaining question,

then, is whether there are any arguments in favor of Meta-Physicalism. I'll sketch four that come to mind.

First, Meta-Physicalism undercuts neo-dualist arguments against physicalism. This isn't much of a reason for dualists to accept it, but it is a good reason for physicalists to accept it. Nevertheless, adopting the Meta-Physicalist view does not open one to the charge of question-begging because the dualist opponent already assumes that physicalism would have to be Meta-Physicalism. When the neo-dualist argues that the mere epistemic possibility of, say, zombies demonstrates the falsity of physicalism, this reveals the dualist assumption that physicalism can only be true if it is necessarily true. So they can have no objection to the physicalist taking up the same assumption. As such, a second reason for considering Meta-Physicalism is that it is plainly an available option.

Third, Meta-Physicalism may be implied by some particular physicalist theses. A posteriori physicalism provides an example. If the mind-brain relation is identity, then it must hold in all possible worlds. It is incompatible with the mind-brain identity theory to suppose that it only holds in some possible worlds. This was the inconsistency that the neo-dualist arguments made us of. We see now that it is not merely fortuitous that Meta-Physicalism blocks those arguments. It blocks them because they were attacking a genuine inconsistency, and that inconsistency is avoided if the truth of physicalism is necessary. So we can conclude with confidence that an identity theorist ought to be a Meta-Physicalist.

Fourth, the claim that physicalism is necessarily true is implied by some accounts of possible worlds. Take any actualist combinatorial view, according to which other possible worlds are permissible arrangements of the actual stuff of our world, sentences about our world, or facts or propositions about our world. If physicalism is true then it will be necessarily true, for no

rearrangement of the entities, properties, sentences, or facts of a physicalist world will yield a non-physicalist world. I am not myself inclined toward a combinatorial view of possible worlds, but many physicalists are so this could be a consideration for them.

Of course I don't suppose that any of these four arguments would be decisive, nor that gesturing toward these arguments counts as making them. But since I have argued that Meta-Physicalism is not obviously false, then if there are any reasons for supporting the view then it should be given further consideration.

4. Conclusion

There are no doubt arguments against particular physicalist theses—against some of them, or against all of them—that do not depend on whether the general status of physicalism is necessary or contingent. I have said nothing about such arguments. But the recently fashionable neo-dualist arguments do exploit the standard view that physicalism is a contingent thesis. Against these arguments, I recommend the physicalists adopt the general thesis of Meta-Physicalism.

Physicalism is a thesis about all possible worlds.

5. Coda

In closing, we might want to know how Meta-Physicalism would impact Professor Kim's recent "near enough" physicalism (2005). Kim's functional reduction (1998, 2005) is clearly a particular physicalist thesis. Kim concludes that qualitative mental states are not reducible to the physical in the way that other mental states are, thus rendering them a singular and epiphenomenal exception to his reductionism. Unsurprisingly, this conclusion was heralded as a victory by the neo-dualist camp: "Kim, often seen as an arch-reductionist, comes out of the

closet as a dualist” (Chalmers, 26 September 2005, <http://fragments.consc.net/djc/2005/09/jaegwon_kim_com.html>.) The failure or incompleteness of any particular physicalist thesis can only have this consequence if physicalism is a contingent thesis—and even then the inference may be questioned. Kim’s way of setting forth the mind-body problem sometimes presents it as a question about which particular thesis should be favored, against the background assumption that physicalism is correct (e.g., 1998). While this commitment falls short of Meta-Physicalism, it hints that he might be open to the stronger view. And Kim’s commitments to a robust causal relation suggest that he should have no special problem with “strong” necessities. So Meta-Physicalism may be just what Kim needs to stop worrying about brute identities and come back into the fold. Kim should say: Physicalism is true. The connections between the physical and the mental are not always as transparent as some would like, but they are clear enough.

6. *Acknowledgments*

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