

Brian Loar on Physicalism and Phenomenal Concepts

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1. Introduction

Antiphysicalist arguments usually proceed from premises about concepts. It is assumed that there is a conceptual gap between the concept of conscious experiences and theoretical-physical-functional concepts, in the sense that the latter do not imply a priori the former, and on this basis the conclusion is drawn that there must be a metaphysical gap between the kinds of states that these concepts pick out. Typically conscious experience is understood by antiphysicalists phenomenally; to say, in this sense, that a given experience is a conscious experience is to say that there is something it is like to have it, where the property of its being like this to have a given experience – the so-called phenomenal property – is meant to be an intrinsic property of experience as such and not the property of an intensional object of experience. Thus the concepts of specific types of conscious experience deployed by antiphysicalists – the so-called phenomenal concepts – are the concepts of experiences understood phenomenally in the above sense. The conceptual independence of these concepts and physical-functional concepts is then typically established by arguing that one can coherently conceive of zombies, creatures identical to us in all physical respects but lacking conscious experience (Chalmers [1996]), or by arguing that one can know all physical-functional facts without knowing facts about conscious experience (Jackson [1982]).¹ In what follows I will argue that the antiphysicalist inference from the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts to their metaphysical independence is justified given that phenomenal concepts, along

¹ It is arguable that this sort of conceptual independence could not be established if experience is understood representationally rather than phenomenally. Representationalists typically deny that knowledge of experiences goes beyond physical-functional knowledge or that zombies are conceivable. For a recent account of the knowledge argument within the representationalist framework, see Jackson [2002].

with physical-functional concepts, refer directly – by conceiving their referents as they are essentially and not under the guide of some distinct, contingently related properties. Phenomenal concepts refer directly since they conceive experiences as possessing phenomenal properties and it is natural to assume that those are the essential properties of experiences.² Likewise, it is natural to assume that theoretical-physical-functional concepts conceive their referents essentially.³ Given this special feature of those two sorts of concepts, then, I will argue that they cannot pick out the same kinds. Speaking more generally, I will argue that it is inconsistent to hold that two conceptually independent and directly referring concepts could be coextensive. My view runs contrary to the view of Brian Loar [1997, 1999] and I will defend my view by showing where Loar goes wrong. According to Loar, we assume that two conceptually independent and directly referring concepts, in particular phenomenal and physical-functional concepts, cannot be coextensive only because we are in the grip of a certain unjustified view about the conditions under which coextensive concepts can be conceptually independent. I will argue, however, that we can see the force of the assumption in question independently of our views about the nature of conceptual independence. More specifically, I will argue that concepts that refer directly and are conceptually independent cannot be coextensive since that would require that the properties they express be a posteriori identical, which is far from being intelligible.⁴ I will argue that we simply do not understand how properties could be identical on a posteriori grounds.

2. The Knowledge Argument and Its Semantic Premise

I begin with Loar's discussion of Frank Jackson's knowledge argument. Loar refers to this argument as the liveliest version of an antiphysicalist argument

² For a recent account of direct phenomenal concepts within two-dimensional semantics, see Chalmers [2003]. Direct phenomenal concepts are what Chalmers calls *pure phenomenal concepts*.

³ For example, the theoretical concept H₂O conceives its referent as composed of H₂O molecules, which is the essential property of H₂O. More on this in section 9.

⁴ I borrow the expression "property expressed" from Loar. In Loar's terminology, a property expressed is a reference-fixing property.

that stems from the premise about the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts and depends on a wrong view about the nature of conceptual independence. Thus according to Loar, the consideration of Jackson's argument may be instructive as it may help us see where most antiphysicalist arguments go wrong.

At the most intuitive level Jackson's argument is pretty straightforward. We are supposed to imagine the brilliant scientist Mary who knows all the physical-functional facts about us but has never seen color. Mary does not know what it is like to see red. As a result, she will learn something new when she acquires color experience, namely that *this* is what it is like to see red. That is the key intuition. Jackson then argues that if we accept that intuition, we have to conclude that what Mary will come to know, an experience of a certain type, cannot, in fact, be a physical-functional kind. So Mary's physical knowledge was not a complete knowledge of the world.

According to Loar, it is uncontroversial about this thought experiment that it proves the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts. If Mary can know all the physical-functional facts about us without knowing what it is like to see red, then the concept of red experience (the phenomenal concept *red*) is not a priori entailed by physical-functional concepts. According to Loar, Jackson then takes this conceptual independence to be the reason why the very experience of seeing red cannot be identical with any physical-functional kind. But why should that inference be justified, Loar asks? Why should the conceptual independence of the phenomenal concept *red* and physical-functional concepts imply the distinctness of the referents of these concepts?

As Loar points out, conceptual independence by itself does not imply metaphysical independence. Two concepts can be conceptually independent and yet coextensive. For example, the concepts of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ and alcohol have the same reference despite the fact that none of those concepts implies a priori the other. You can know that there is $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ in the bottle without knowing that there is alcohol. But this does not imply that $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ is not alcohol.

Loar points out further that the conceptual independence of the concepts of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ and alcohol can be cashed out in terms of different modes of presentation under which these concepts pick out their referents. Whereas the concept of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ picks out its referent as $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$, the concept of alcohol refers to $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ as the intoxicating component of beer and wine. These two modes of presentation are not a priori linked since it is not a priori true that $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ is the intoxicating component of beer and wine. This then explains why there is no a priori link between the concept of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ and the concept of alcohol. Still, the two modes of presentation are the modes of presentation of one and the same kind.

Couldn't we say that the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts also amounts to different modes of presentation of the same kinds? The idea would be that phenomenal concepts pick out physical-functional kinds under a phenomenal or experiential description so that when Mary comes to know what it is like to see red she does not come know a new kind but only a new way of conceiving of something that was already known to her. As Loar points out, however, the problem with that suggestion is that it is hard to see how we could explain the novelty of the description or the mode of presentation that would become available to Mary upon her release from the black and white room. In all standard cases, the difference in modes of presentation of one and the same kind is explained in terms of the difference between the properties *expressed* by given concepts. There is such a difference in the case of the concept of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ and the concept of alcohol, for example. The two concepts pick out the same kind, that is, $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$, yet the properties they express are different. Whereas the concept of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ expresses the property of being composed of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$ molecules, the concept of alcohol expresses the property of being the intoxicating component of beer and wine.⁵ Thus assuming that you know that the bottle contains $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$, we can say that when you learn that the bottle

⁵ Loar assumes that whereas a theoretical-physical concept, such as $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$, expresses an essential property of its referent, a property expressed by a non-theoretical natural kind concept, such as *alcohol*, is contingent.

contains alcohol, the novelty of your information amounts to learning a new property of $\text{CH}_3\text{CH}_2\text{OH}$, namely that it is the intoxicating component of beer and wine. Unfortunately, we cannot have a similar explanation in the case of Mary. This is because the phenomenal concept *red* picks out its referent *directly*. That is, assuming that the phenomenal concept *red* picks out a physical-functional kind directly – say, a kind of a brain state – the property it expresses would be an essential property of that physical-functional kind.⁶ But then the property expressed by the phenomenal concept would be identical with the property expressed by the concept of a brain state since that concept also picks out its referent essentially. So assuming that the two concepts are coextensive, we would not be able to explain the novelty of Mary's information by saying that she learns a new property of a brain state.

The key assumption in the above line of reasoning is that the properties expressed by two directly referring coextensive concepts must be identical. One might find this assumption questionable if one thinks that one and the same kind can have two distinct essential properties. If that is possible, we might think that phenomenal and physical-functional concepts pick out the same kinds directly and yet express distinct (essential) properties of those kinds. Consequently, we might say that when Mary learns something new upon her release, what she learns is a new essential property of a kind that she knew before as possessing another essential property.

This is not the response that Loar ever takes into consideration. Loar assumes that the properties expressed by two directly referring coextensive concepts must be identical. That seems right. It seems that there must be some inconsistency in the opposite view. Assuming that the kind *P* is essentially *F* and *G*, it would follow that there must be some necessary connection between *F* and *G*. For if the relation between *F* and *G* were contingent, *P* might be *F* without being *G*, which means that *P* would not be essentially *G*, and *P* might be *G* without being *F*,

⁶ To make it clear, Loar assumes that the property expressed by the phenomenal concept *red* is the phenomenal property of its being like this to see red. In general, phenomenal properties are the properties expressed by phenomenal concepts, according to Loar. At least, Loar assumes so for the sake of his discussion with antiphysicalists.

which means that P would not be essentially F . However, it is hard to see how the relation between F and G could be necessary if we assume that F and G are two distinct properties.

Assuming then that it does not make sense to speak of two distinct essential properties of one kind and assuming the coextensiveness of the phenomenal concept *red* and the relevant physical-functional concept, we have to agree that the property expressed by the phenomenal concept *red* that Mary acquires upon her release is identical with the property expressed by the relevant physical-functional concept. But then we cannot explain the novelty of Mary's information in terms of her coming to know a new property of an old kind. Loar assumes that this is the implicit reason why Jackson is driven towards his antiphysicalist conclusion. According to Loar, Jackson must tacitly assume that there isn't any alternative explanation of the idea that Mary learns something new, one that would not depend on assuming that Mary comes to know a new property of an old kind. This tacit assumption leads Jackson to conclude that what Mary comes to know is an altogether new kind, hence that what she comes to know is not a physical-functional kind.

To generalize, Loar argues that the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts poses a threat to physicalism if it is combined with the claim that both phenomenal and physical-functional concepts refer directly and hence express the essential properties of the kinds they pick out. Given this special feature of those concepts and assuming that they are coextensive, we are committed to holding that the properties they express are identical and therefore we cannot explain their conceptual independence by assuming that they pick out the same kinds (physical-functional kinds) while expressing some distinct properties. This leads to the difficulty if we assume that the explanation of the conceptual independence of two coextensive concepts in terms of the expression of distinct properties by those concepts is the only possible explanation. If that assumption is true, then given that both phenomenal and physical-functional concepts refer directly, they cannot be both conceptually independent and coextensive. So since they are conceptually independent, they

cannot be coextensive. This is, according to Loar, the line of reasoning that leads from the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts to their metaphysical independence.

The crucial assumption in this line of reasoning is the assumption about the conditions under which two coextensive concepts can be conceptually independent. To repeat, the assumption is that two coextensive concepts can be conceptually independent only if they express distinct properties, hence only if at least one of the concepts refers indirectly. Loar thinks that this is the key assumption of the knowledge argument and refers to this assumption as the semantic premise of the knowledge argument. In *Phenomenal States* he formulates the semantic premise as follows:

A statement of property identity that links conceptually independent concepts is true only if at least one concept picks out the property it refers to by connoting a contingent property of that property. [Loar 1997, p. 600]

Alternatively, he says that the semantic premise amounts to the following claim:

The only way to account for the a posteriori status of a true property identity is this: one of the terms expresses a contingent mode of presentation. [Ibid.]

Obviously, the above two formulations from *Phenomenal States* are equivalent to the claim that conceptual independence implies the expression of distinct properties. But notice that the last two formulations do not specify explicitly the conditions of the conceptual independence of coextensive concepts. Rather, they specify the conditions under which conceptually independent concepts can be coextensive. If we think of the semantic premise in the last two formulations, we can see that the premise is equivalent, respectively, to the following two claims: that two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts cannot be coextensive, and that two directly referring concepts cannot be coextensive on a posteriori grounds. These claims – call them *the antiphysicalist assumption* – lead then directly to the conclusion that phenomenal and physical-functional concepts cannot be coextensive.

I take it that according to Loar, the semantic premise in the last two formulations is motivated by the semantic premise understood as a claim about conceptual independence. According to Loar, we are in the grip of a certain view about the nature of *conceptual independence*, namely that two coextensive concepts can be conceptually independent only if they express distinct properties, and from this we infer that the same condition is the condition under which two conceptually independent concepts can be *coextensive*.⁷

3. Loar's Argument Against the Semantic Premise

Having identified the semantic premise as the key assumption of the knowledge argument, Loar argues that this premise, at least when understood as a claim about conceptual independence, is unmotivated in the light of the obvious distinction between concepts and properties. Why so? The semantic premise makes the inference from a conceptual phenomenon (the conceptual independence of coextensive concepts) to a metaphysical one (the distinctness of properties expressed by given concepts) and it is that inference that is questionable, according to Loar. Given that properties are not constituted by concepts, it just does not seem right to insist that a gap between concepts should reflect a gap between expressed properties. Conceptual independence is a conceptual phenomenon and so we should be able to explain it in purely

⁷ Loar argues that the semantic premise is the key assumption not only in Jackson's knowledge argument but also in Chalmers's [1996] and Kripke's [1980] antiphenomenalist arguments. With respect to Chalmers's argument from the conceivability of zombies, Loar points out that the conceivability of zombies follows from the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts and that Chalmers takes the conceivability of zombies to imply their possibility only because he tacitly assumes that the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts implies the distinctness of properties expressed by these concepts (see Loar [1999]). Regarding Kripke, all that Loar says is that the semantic premise is Kripke's motivation for claiming that phenomenal experiences are not a posteriori identical with physical kinds (see Loar [1997]). Whether or not this is the right interpretation of Kripke is an open question. Kripke seems to be concerned not so much with the issue as to whether psychophysical identity can be a posteriori true but rather with the issue as to whether it can be true a posteriori and necessary. Thus for Kripke the fact that none of the concepts flanking the identity sign in psychophysical identity judgments refers contingently is not so much the reason why those judgments cannot be true a posteriori but rather the reason why they cannot be true a posteriori and necessary. Here, however, we need not be concerned with the detailed analysis of neither Kripke's nor Chalmers's argument.

conceptual terms, as a difference at the level of concepts and their functioning and not at the level of expressed properties.

But what could the alternative explanation of conceptual independence be? Loar's answer is that we can see conceptual independence as generated by the fact that different sorts of concepts have different conceptual roles. Loar illustrates his point by the distinction between theoretical-physical concepts and the so-called recognitional concepts. This distinction is important for understanding the conceptual independence of theoretical-physical concepts and phenomenal concepts since phenomenal concepts are a kind of recognitional concepts. Roughly, Loar characterizes recognitional concepts as concepts of the form "x is one of *that* kind". These concepts are type-demonstratives that are grounded in dispositions to classify objects, events, and situations by way of perceptual discriminations.⁸ In general, the reference of these sorts of concepts is fixed by some sort of perceptual experience.⁹ An example of recognitional concepts is the concept of cramp. This concept picks out a muscle contraction by way of a characteristic type of cramp-feeling. Now, consider the relation between the concept of cramp and the concept of a muscle contraction. These two sorts of concepts are coextensive and yet conceptually independent. You can know what a muscle contraction is without knowing that it is cramp since you may not know that a muscle contraction feels like *that*. This independence of the two concepts in question coincides with the fact that they express distinct properties (the property of feeling like *that* and the relevant theoretical-physical property of a muscle contraction, respectively) and we are inclined to see that distinctness of those expressed properties as the reason why the two concepts are conceptually independent. However, Loar argues that the distinctness of expressed properties is not essential to the conceptual independence of recognitional concepts and theoretical-physical concepts. Concepts of the two sorts have different conceptual

⁸ There is an agreement in the current literature that phenomenal concepts are not demonstratives (see Chalmers [2003]; Perry [2001]; Tye [1999]). I take it, though, that Loar's treatment of phenomenal concepts as demonstratives does not affect his argument against the semantic premise. The crucial point made in the argument is independent of that treatment.

⁹ As Loar points out, though, in the case of blindsight we have perceptual discrimination without perceptual experience (Loar [1997] section 4).

roles – recognitional concepts conceive their referents *experientially* and theoretical-physical concepts conceive their referents *theoretically* – and that purely conceptual or functional difference is already sufficient to account for their conceptual independence.¹⁰

Thus Loar claims that conceptual independence can be explained without assuming that two conceptually independent concepts express distinct properties. This means that there is no inconsistency in holding that two coextensive concepts can be conceptually independent even though they may not express distinct properties; in short, the semantic premise is false. Loar emphasizes that this is what we should expect given that conceptual independence is a phenomenon that arises at the level of concepts rather than properties.

Granting this distinction between concepts and properties, we might perhaps still feel a certain resistance towards Loar's view. We might think that conceptual independence does imply the expression of distinct properties if we think of conceptual independence more in terms of there being different modes of presentation associated with conceptually independent concepts rather than in terms of conceptually independent concepts playing different conceptual roles. Assume that the concepts *P* and *Q* refer to their common referent *R* under two different modes of presentation: *P* refers to *R* as *F* and *Q* refers to *R* as *G*. We might think that from the fact that *P* does not present *R* as *G* but as *F* it follows that *P* presents *R* as *non-G* and hence that the property expressed by *P* is different from the property expressed by *Q*. According to Loar, however, this does not follow. Even though *P* does not present *R* as *G* but as *F*, we might still assume that *F* and *G* are one and the same property.¹¹ From the fact that *P* and *Q* are conceptually

¹⁰ According to Loar, another aspect of the conceptual or functional differences between phenomenal and theoretical-physical-functional concepts is that the two sorts of concepts are different psychological entities. The latter are realized in a verbal-theoretical part of the brain and the former are realized in a nonverbal-experiential part of the brain (Loar [1999]).

¹¹ This is the sort of response that Loar gives to the objection that phenomenal concepts could not pick out physical kinds directly given that they conceive their referents under a phenomenal and not a physical description. That is, the objection is that given that phenomenal concepts conceive their referents phenomenally, the properties they express would have to be non-physical. Loar points out that this does not follow. From the fact that phenomenal concepts conceive their referents phenomenally, it does not follow that they present their referents as non-physical (Loar [1997] section 5).

independent and present their common referent differently it only follows that F and G do not seem identical, not that F and G are not identical. This is because the difference at the level of presentation between F and G might be a sort of illusion that arises precisely because P and Q might have different conceptual roles.

4. The Knowledge Argument Refuted?

If the semantic premise is false, the knowledge argument poses no threat to physicalism. As we saw, Loar argues that the whole force of the knowledge argument against physicalism was based on assuming that two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could not pick out the same kind. This assumption (the antiphysicalist assumption) is equivalent to the semantic premise understood as a claim about conceptual independence, that is, the claim that the conceptual independence of coextensive concepts implies the expression of distinct properties. Loar argues then that the semantic premise so understood is false and hence that the antiphysicalist assumption on which the knowledge argument is based must be false as well.

To make it clear, here is again the line of thinking that leads us astray, according to Loar. This is the line of thinking that leads us to assume two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could not be coextensive. Assume that two concepts, P and Q , refer directly and are conceptually independent: P picks out its referent as essentially F and that Q picks out its referent as essentially G . Assuming that P and Q are conceptually independent, we tacitly infer that F and G must be two distinct properties. But if F and G are distinct, then the essential property of the referent of P is different from the essential property of the referent of Q . So assuming further that one and the same referent cannot have two distinct essential properties, we are led to conclude that the referent of P cannot be identical with the referent of Q . According to Loar, the mistake in this line of thinking lies in assuming that the conceptual independence of P and Q implies that F and G must be two distinct properties. This is a mistake since the conceptual independence of P and Q can be explained solely in terms of the difference between the conceptual roles that these concepts play.

We can see how the mistaken assumption regarding the nature of conceptual independence generates the knowledge argument if we can reconstruct the knowledge argument along the line of thinking outlined above. To begin, we grant that Mary learns something new upon her release from the black and white room, that her knowledge of what it is like to see red cannot be inferred a priori from all her physical-functional knowledge. Hence we assume that the phenomenal concept *red* Mary acquires upon her release is conceptually independent of all physical-functional concepts. We then assume that this concept expresses – in virtue of being conceptually independent of all physical-functional concepts – a property Mary did not know before. Assuming further that the new property expressed by the phenomenal concept *red* is the essential property of what Mary conceives under a new mode of presentation, we infer that what Mary conceives under a new mode of presentation cannot be identical with anything that is conceivable to her under old (physical-functional) essential modes of presentation. In effect, we are forced to conclude that Mary comes to know something genuinely new while experiencing color.

According to Loar, the mistaken assumption in this line of thinking is the thought that in order to account for the conceptual independence of the phenomenal concept *red* of all physical-functional concepts we must assume that the phenomenal concept *red* expresses a property Mary did not know prior to her release. This is a mistake since we can account for the conceptual independence in question solely in terms of the fact that the concepts of color experience have a different conceptual role from theoretical-physical-functional concepts.

Obviously, if Loar is right, this is also how we can account for the fact that Mary learns something new. On this account, Mary comes to know something new only in the sense of acquiring a new way of conceptualizing an old kind. She knew color experience all along as a certain physical-functional kind and then, after being released from her black and white room, she only becomes acquainted with that kind experientially. The key point is that this experiential conceptualization does not amount to bringing into attention any property distinct

from the properties involved in the old modes of presentation. The novelty of the conceptualization is purely conceptual.¹²

This account is consistent with physicalism. Physicalism implies that the physical knowledge Mary had in her black and white room is the complete physical knowledge of the world and that intuition is preserved on Loar's account. If the novelty of Mary's information has a purely conceptual explanation, as Loar assumes, then Mary does not learn anything new about the world when she discovers what it is like to see red. She may think she learns something new but then she would be under an illusion, on Loar's account.¹³

5. Antiphysicalist Intuitions and the Expectation of Transparency

I do not find Loar's response to the knowledge argument convincing. The response is plausible only if the property expressed by the phenomenal concept *red* is identical (a posteriori) with the property expressed by the relevant theoretical concept. I will argue, however, that this is hardly intelligible. We do not understand how properties expressed by different concepts could be a posteriori identical. Consequently, I will argue that we do not understand how two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could pick out the same kind; the antiphysicalist assumption that this is impossible is not unjustified. But before I turn to this point, let me say more about what Loar sees as the possible reasons for the antiphysicalist assumption.

¹² A similar response to the knowledge argument has been proposed by Tye [2003].

¹³ Loar's account of the relation between phenomenal and physical-functional concepts, if true, can also be used to disarm the intuition that the conceivability of zombies implies their possibility. To say that zombies are conceivable is to say that the properties expressed by phenomenal concepts (their reference-fixing properties) are conceivably distinct from the properties expressed by theoretical-physical concepts and on Loar's account, the two sorts of properties can, indeed, be conceivably distinct given that the concepts expressing them have different conceptual roles. However, from the fact that the properties expressed by phenomenal and theoretical-physical concepts are conceivably distinct it does not follow, on Loar's account, that those properties are possibly distinct as well. This is because Loar assumes that the two sorts of properties can be a posteriori identical; if they are a posteriori identical in the actual world, then by the principle of the necessity of property-identity they will be identical in all possible worlds. Thus Loar is committed to holding that psychophysical identity can be viewed as what Chalmers calls a *strong necessity*: this is the sort of necessity that has a necessary primary intension and is not explicable by two-dimensional framework. For Chalmers criticism of that view, see Chalmers [1999].

So far we have discussed the intuition that the antiphysicalist assumption should be justified by our views about the nature of conceptual independence. As we saw, Loar argued that this intuition is not to be trusted. As Loar points out, however, there is a strong intuition in support of the antiphysicalist assumption that seems to be independent of our views about conceptual independence. The intuition is this: if two concepts refer directly, we expect that we should be able to see a priori that they pick out the same property if they do. For concepts that pick out the same property directly conceive of that property *as it is in itself* and not under the guide of some other, contingently related properties.

This expectation – *the expectation of transparency*, as Loar calls it – seems quite natural. Compare the case of two directly referring coextensive concepts with the relation between two coextensive concepts one of which refers indirectly, for example, the relation between the concepts of water and H₂O. Since the concept of water expresses the contingent properties of H₂O (the watery properties, such as being liquid at room temperature, boiling at 212°F, etc.), we cannot know a priori that H₂O has those properties. The possession of those properties by H₂O is contingent upon the laws of nature and we cannot know that H₂O is watery simply in virtue of understanding the concept of H₂O. But if we cannot know a priori that H₂O is watery, we cannot know a priori that H₂O and water are the same kind. That can be found only empirically. On the other hand, it does not seem necessary to do any empirical investigation in order to find out about the coextensiveness of concepts that both refer directly. Assume that both *P* and *Q* refer directly and thereby express the same property – say, the property *F* – as the uniquely identifying, essential property of *P* and *Q*. It seems that in this case we should know a priori that *P* is the *F* and that *Q* is the *F* and hence it should follow a priori that *P* and *Q* are identical. As Loar puts it, we should be able to simply *see* that *P* and *Q* are identical for there is no contingent property “to get in the way” [Loar 1999, p. 468].

Loar points out, however, that things are not that simple. We will need to appeal to an empirical investigation in order to find out that *P* and *Q* are identical if it turns out that the concepts *P* and *Q* have different conceptual roles. Assuming

that these concepts have different conceptual roles, we won't see a priori that they pick out the same property. This is because we won't see a priori that they express the same property *F*.

According to Loar, then, the expectation of transparency is unjustified. The expectation results from not appreciating the fact that the reason why we might not be able to see a priori the coextensiveness of two concepts may lie not in the fact that these concepts express distinct properties but rather in their having different conceptual roles. Thus the expectation rests on the tacit assumption to the effect that the only explanation of the conceptual independence of two coextensive concepts is in terms of the expression of distinct properties by those concepts. But that is precisely the view about conceptual independence that, as Loar argued, motivated the antiphysicalist assumption to begin with. The expectation of transparency seemed to provide an independent support for that assumption but on closer examination, the whole force of that expectation turns out to depend on our views regarding conceptual independence. So we are back where we started.

6. The Expectation of Transparency and the Explanatory Gap

The expectation of transparency might seem to be supported by certain theoretical identifications made in science. Consider the identity of solidity with a certain physical-functional state. Solid things are disposed to retain their shape and volume and science tells us that this disposition comes from the fact that in solid things molecules are fixed and not free to move around. In fact, science tells us that solidity *is* the state of having its molecules fixed. Now, the interesting thing about this identification is that it is true a priori. The fact that in solid things molecules are fixed is discovered to be true a posteriori. However, the very identity of solidity and the state of having its molecules fixed is established a priori. For it is true a priori that once the molecules in a given object are fixed and not free to move around, the object is disposed to retain its shape and volume. The fact that the molecules are fixed explains why the object is solid and that

explanatory relation is a priori in the above sense; the concept of molecules being fixed simply implies a priori the concept of solidity.

Another interesting thing about our identification is that both concepts flanking the identity sign in it refer directly. The concept of solidity picks out solidity as essentially the disposition to retain its shape and volume and the concept of molecules being fixed picks out the state it does as essentially the state of molecules being fixed. It might seem then that in *all cases* when both concepts flanking the identity sign refer directly one of the concepts should imply a priori the other. But Loar argues, again, that this expectation is an illusion. The expectation does not make sense when the concepts flanking the identity sign have different conceptual roles. Thus the expectation does not make sense when the identity sign is flanked with a theoretical-physical concept and a non-theoretical concept that is not understood functionally; for these two sorts of concepts have significantly distinct conceptual roles.

This observation has an interesting consequence for the problem of the explanatory gap, according to Loar. The problem of the explanatory gap arises from two equally compelling and conflicting intuitions: that psychophysical identity *should be* explanatory and that it *cannot be*. As for the second intuition, its motivation is clear. Phenomenal concepts are not functional concepts and therefore conscious experience resists explanation in physical-functional terms. But what about the first intuition? Why do we expect psychophysical identity to be explanatory in the first place? According to Loar, our expectation comes from the expectation of transparency. We expect psychophysical identity to be explanatory since both concepts flanking the identity sign in it refer directly. That is, we expect that if psychophysical identity is true, the theoretical concept flanking the identity sign would imply a priori the relevant phenomenal concept much as the relevant theoretical-physical-functional description implies a priori the concept of solidity.¹⁴ Loar tells us then that this expectation, for the reasons explained above, is an illusion.

¹⁴ Levine [1983, 1993, 2001], who raised the problem of the explanatory gap in the current literature, assumes that it is natural to expect that psychophysical identity judgments should have the sort of

If the expectation of transparency is an illusion, the problem of the explanatory gap is an illusion as well. For if we have no reason to think that psychophysical identity should be explanatory, we simply should not be bothered by the fact that psychophysical identity is not explanatory.¹⁵

Instead of expecting psychophysical identity to be explanatory and hence true a priori, we should rather expect it to be true a posteriori given the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts. Now, this by itself

explanatory import that we attribute to a posteriori theoretical identifications involving non-phenomenal natural kind concepts, such as “Water is H₂O” or “Heat is the motion of molecules”. But that does not seem right. In the case of a posteriori identifications that involve non-phenomenal natural kinds, the natural kind concepts refer indirectly, by connoting contingent properties of their referents, and the identifications are explanatory in the sense that they feature as premises in the explanation of why the relevant natural kinds possess the properties that we a priori associate with them as their contingent properties. That sort of explanation is, of course, contingent upon the laws of nature. So, for example, contingent upon the laws of nature, we can explain why water is watery (is liquid at room temperature, boils at 212°F, etc.) once we know that water is H₂O. We cannot, however, expect psychophysical identity judgments to be explanatory in the same way. For phenomenal concepts refer directly and the possession of properties that feature in phenomenal modes of presentation is essential to the phenomenal states that phenomenal concepts pick out; the possession of those properties is not contingent upon the laws of nature.

¹⁵ It may be interesting to compare Loar’s analysis of the explanatory gap with Tye’s [1999]. Tye also argues that the explanatory gap is an illusion. His argument rests on assuming that an explanatory gap exists only if there is something unexplained that needs explaining, and something needs explaining only if it can be explained. Thus Tye claims that we should not expect psychophysical identity judgments to be explanatory for the simple reason that they cannot be explanatory. As for this second point, Tye takes it to come down to the point that psychophysical identity judgments cannot have the explanatory import that can be attributed to a posteriori theoretical identifications, such as “Water is H₂O”. This is because there is a crucial functional difference between phenomenal concepts, on the one hand, and natural kind concepts flanking theoretical identifications, on the other: the latter refer contingently, via a description of objective, physical or functional properties, and the former refer directly, without connoting any such properties. Now, as I explained in the previous note, we do not really expect psychophysical identity judgments to be explanatory in the way in which a posteriori theoretical identifications are explanatory. Rather, we expect those judgments to be explanatory on a priori grounds: we expect that the relevant theoretical-physical concept should imply a priori the relevant phenomenal concept. Equipped with Tye’s assumption, we might still perhaps say that this expectation is an illusion given that psychophysical identity judgments cannot be explanatory in the required sense. However, I do not find this sort of handling the explanatory gap persuasive. The mere fact that there is no a priori relation between phenomenal and physical-functional concepts does not imply that the expectation of transparency with respect to such concepts is an illusion. In order to prove that there is an illusion here one would need to show that there is no inconsistency in holding that we cannot see a priori that phenomenal and physical-functional concepts are coextensive despite the fact that both sorts of concepts refer directly (which is precisely what Loar attempts to do by appealing to functional or conceptual differences between the concepts in question). Otherwise, one could take the expectation of transparency at face value and argue that this expectation, together with the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts, implies that these two sorts of concepts cannot pick out the same kinds. For an account of the explanatory gap similar to Tye’s, see Papineau [1999, 2002], and Sturgeon [1994].

does not imply that psychophysical identity could be a posteriori true. But Loar argues not only that we should expect psychophysical identity to be true a posteriori but also that we have no reason to think that psychophysical identity could not be true a posteriori. This second claim follows from assuming that we have no reason to think that two directly referring concepts could not be coextensive on a posteriori grounds. Antiphysicalists assume that it is incoherent to think so but that assumption, according to Loar, rests on a wrong view about the nature of conceptual independence; that wrong view is the view according to which conceptual independence implies the expression of distinct properties. Thus Loar concludes his defense of physicalism as follows:

We can explain, and indeed we have explained, how a given phenomenal concept can manage to pick out a particular physical-functional property without remainder: the concept discriminates the property but not via a contingent mode of presentation. This in its way closes the explanatory gap between the phenomenal and the physical. We understand how “such and such phenomenal quality” could pick out physical property *P*, even though “such and such phenomenal quality = *P*” does not provide an (a priori) explanation in physical terms of why a given phenomenal quality feels as it does. Since the former, when generalized, would entail that physicalism about phenomenal qualities is true, and since we understand both of these things, we thereby understand how physicalism can be true. [1997, p. 609]

7. Loar’s Account of Conceptual Independence Reconsidered

In what follows I will argue that Loar’s defense of physicalism is not as convincing as it seems. Loar did not show wrong the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence that he sees as the motivation for antiphysicalist arguments, including the knowledge argument and the argument from the explanatory gap, and we do not really understand how two directly referring concepts could be coextensive on a posteriori grounds.

Here is the first point. Contrary to what Loar says, Loar did not show that the conceptual independence of coextensive concepts can be explained purely

conceptually, without assuming that given concepts express distinct properties. Loar's argument in support of that claim rests on the simple observation that different concepts may have different conceptual roles, where the difference between conceptual roles is spelled out without mentioning any difference between expressed properties. However, from the mere fact that different concepts have different conceptual roles it just does not follow that the conceptual independence of such concepts can be explained without assuming that they express distinct properties. The inference would be valid only if the difference between conceptual roles was a purely conceptual difference that did not imply the distinctness of expressed properties. But whether or not this is true is contentious. There is no inconsistency in assuming that the difference between conceptual roles does imply the expression of distinct properties. In other words, it is not obvious that the difference between conceptual roles is a purely conceptual difference, as Loar tacitly assumes.

Loar's tacit assumption is vivid in his argument against the expectation of transparency. Here is, once again, Loar's reasoning. Take two directly referring concepts and assume that they are coextensive. Loar argues that *assuming further* that such concepts have different conceptual roles, we won't see a priori that they pick out the same property; the concepts' connection would have to be established a posteriori. But the key question is why we should assume, as Loar does, that two directly referring coextensive concepts could have different conceptual roles. Clearly, that assumption comes down to the point that the difference between conceptual roles does not imply the expression of distinct properties and that, as I said, is not at all obvious.

Thus I do not think that Loar is entitled to say that the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence is wrong or that the expectation of transparency that rests on that view is an illusion. All that Loar can claim is that it is not obvious why conceptual independence should imply the expression of distinct properties given that different concepts have different conceptual roles. That claim has, of course, enough significance *if* it is true, as Loar assumes, that antiphysicalist arguments are motivated by the view that conceptual

independence implies the expression of distinct properties. For then it would follow that the justification of antiphysicalist arguments is quite dubious. In particular, assuming that our views about the nature of conceptual independence motivate the antiphysicalist assumption to the effect that two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts cannot be coextensive, it would follow that we can simply refuse to give that assumption any credit. In the next section, however, I will argue that there is an independent justification for that assumption.

8. Can Property Identity Be True A Posteriori?

I agree with Loar that the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence becomes problematic in the light of the fact that concepts have different conceptual roles. But I do not think, contrary to Loar, that this implies that we are free to reject the antiphysicalist assumption. This is because I do not think that the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence is the only reason, which could motivate that assumption. It seems to me clear that this assumption can be motivated and, in fact, justified without making any explicit commitment as to the nature of conceptual independence. In other words, the reasons why it is questionable whether two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could pick out the same kind can be spelled out independently of any explicit considerations about conceptual independence.

Assume for the sake of argument that physicalism is the correct picture of the relation between phenomenal and physical-functional concepts. Within that picture, two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts can be coextensive assuming that the conceptual independence of such concepts comes down to different conceptual roles that they play and does not involve the expression of distinct properties. Now, this picture commits us to the view that we cannot see a priori that the properties expressed by the concepts in question are identical. The identity of those expressed properties would have to be true a posteriori. But do we really understand the idea of properties being a posteriori identical? In what follows I will argue that we do not.

You might think that the a posteriori identity of properties is something we are well familiar with. After all, we know that water and H₂O are a posteriori identical or that heat and molecular motion are a posteriori identical. But strictly speaking, these are not identities of properties, only identities of kinds of stuff. The kind of stuff that we call water is identical with the kind of stuff that we call H₂O and the kind of stuff that we call heat is identical with the kind of stuff that we call molecular motion. Secondly, the justification of these identities of kinds, even though a posteriori, is never based on identifying on a posteriori grounds any properties of those kinds. For example, when we identify water and H₂O, we do not identify on a posteriori grounds the properties that we associate a priori with water (the watery properties) with the properties that we associate a priori with H₂O (the property of being composed of H₂O molecules). Let me explain.

According to the standard picture, the identity of water and H₂O follows from the following two premises: (i) Water = the stuff that has the watery properties; and (ii) H₂O = the stuff that has the watery properties. The first premise is true a priori and the second is true a posteriori. The first premise mentions the properties that we associate with water a priori as the properties that fix the reference of 'water', whereas the second premise reports the empirical observation that those properties are possessed by H₂O.

The crucial premise in the context of our considerations is the second one. This is the a posteriori truth that justifies the identity of water and H₂O. Since H₂O is defined a priori as the kind of stuff that is composed of H₂O molecules, the second premise comes down to this: "the kind of stuff that is composed of H₂O molecules = the kind of stuff that has the watery properties". Clearly, this premise does not state the identity of properties that we associate a priori with water and the properties that we associate a priori with H₂O. The premise does not state that the property of being composed of H₂O molecules is identical with the watery properties.¹⁶

¹⁶ In the case of water and H₂O, the watery properties are actually explained in terms of the property of being composed of H₂O molecules. That is, the fact that water has watery properties, for example, that it is liquid at room temperature, is explained by the fact that water is composed of H₂O molecules. I am not assuming that any such story has to be a part of the justification of the

Similarly, when we identify heat with molecular motion on the a posteriori ground that molecular motion is what causes the sensation of heat, we do not identify any properties, either; what the a posteriori premise states is rather that one phenomenon causes another.

The a posteriori identities of kinds then are not the sort of identities that involve the a posteriori identity of properties. Reflecting upon the identity of kinds suggests that while we understand what it takes to identify on a posteriori grounds the kind of stuff that has one sort of property with the kind of stuff that has another sort of property, we do not really understand what it takes to identify empirically one property with another.

Think in this context about the identity of dispositional properties, such as solidity, with physical-functional properties. Solidity is identical with the property of there being fixed molecules in a given object.¹⁷ Clearly, this is the case of the identity of properties. Solidity is defined as a dispositional property, that is, as an object's disposition to retain its shape and volume and that property is identified with a certain property of molecules in solid objects, namely the property of being fixed. Now, you might think it took us some empirical investigation to find out that the properties in question are identical and that therefore this identity must be true a posteriori. But that is an illusion. As I indicated earlier, while discussing the expectation of transparency, the identity of solidity and the property of molecules being fixed is true a priori. Although we found out empirically that in solid things molecules are fixed, we did not find out empirically that solidity *is* the property of molecules being fixed. The reason why we identified the two properties was that we found out that facts about solidity are a priori implied by facts about molecules being fixed. Likewise physical-functional facts should imply a priori facts about liquidity, elasticity, boiling, valency and the like.

identity of water and H₂O. As it has been pointed out by Papineau (Papineau [2002] chapter 5), we knew that water was H₂O long before we could explain the manifest properties of water in terms of its molecular composition.

¹⁷ Strictly speaking, the relation between these two properties is supervenience rather than identity. Solidity, understood as a dispositional property, supervenes upon the property of molecules being fixed.

Now, if we cannot think of any examples of properties that would be identical a posteriori, we do not really understand how two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could be coextensive. For as we argued, the coextensiveness of two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts would require that the properties expressed by such concepts be a posteriori identical. Consequently, we have to admit that the antiphysicalist assumption is not unjustified.

To make it clear, think again of two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts, *P* and *Q*, and assume that they express the properties *F* and *G*, respectively, as the essential properties of their referents. The identity of *P* and *Q* would then have to follow from these premises: (i) *P* = the *F*; and (ii) *Q* = the *F*. Given that *Q* is defined a priori as the stuff that is *G*, (ii) would come down to the claim: “the *G* stuff = the *F* stuff”. But notice that now we cannot interpret this claim as the claim to the effect that the kind of stuff that has one sort of property (the *G* property) is identical with the kind of stuff that has another sort of property (the *F* property). Assuming that *P* and *Q* refer directly, the *F* property is an essential property of *P* and the *G* property is an essential property of *Q*; hence the *F* stuff is essentially *F* and the *G* stuff is essentially *G*. But then, assuming that the *G* stuff is identical with the *F* stuff, the *F* property and the *G* property must be identical. And the trouble is that this identity of properties would have to be true a posteriori. For *P* and *Q* were, by assumption, conceptually independent, which means that we assumed that we could not see a priori that the *F* stuff is identical with the *G* stuff and hence that we could not see a priori that the *F* property is identical with the *G* property.

The difficulty I am pointing out here has the consequence that we do not understand how physicalism can be true. For we do not understand how phenomenal and physical-functional concepts could be coextensive. These two sorts of concepts could be coextensive only if the phenomenal properties that identify phenomenal states could be a posteriori identical with the essential properties of the relevant physical-functional states, such as states of the brain. But that, I argued, is hardly intelligible.

It should be clear that the difficulty I am pointing out is not motivated by our views about the nature of conceptual independence. That we do not understand how properties could be a posteriori identical is a matter of our intuitions regarding identity and identity is not a conceptual phenomenon. Thus my diagnosis of the difficulty in seeing how physicalism could be true is different from Loar's. Loar thinks that it is our view about the nature of conceptual independence that motivates the antiphysicalist assumption to the effect that two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could not be coextensive. He also thinks that this view motivates the expectation of transparency, which gives the antiphysicalist assumption intuitive support. He then argues that it is not obvious why the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence should be true given that different concepts have different conceptual roles and this is how he gets to the conclusion that the antiphysicalist assumption along with the expectation of transparency are not justified. My diagnosis of the motivation that leads us to the antiphysicalist assumption (and the expectation of transparency) is different. We do not understand how two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could be coextensive (and we expect that we should be able to see a priori whether or not two directly referring concepts are coextensive) simply because we do not understand how properties expressed by such concepts could be identical a posteriori.

Loar seems to be taking for granted that the properties expressed by two directly referring concepts can be a posteriori identical. This is clear from his comparison of phenomenal concepts with other kinds of recognitional concepts. Loar says in this context that "it is not mysterious how phenomenal concepts might pick out states of the brain: they do so in the manner of all recognitional concepts, viz. by discriminating them" [Loar 1999, p. 471]. Loar's reasoning must be as follows. It is not mysterious how recognitional concepts other than phenomenal concepts pick out physical-functional states. For example, it is not mysterious how the concept of cramp picks out a certain muscle contraction: the concept discriminates that state perceptually or experientially, by conceiving it

under an experiential mode of presentation. So given that phenomenal concepts are recognitional concepts, there should be no mystery as to how phenomenal concepts might pick out physical-functional states: they would do so experientially as well. *The only* difference between recognitional-phenomenal concepts and non-phenomenal recognitional concepts is that the former discriminate their reference essentially or directly. But that is not a problem for physicalism, Loar suggests. He says:

On the face of it this point is neutral between physicalism and anti-physicalism. The physicalist says it is merely an interesting fact about our cognitive structure that we are able to pick out certain of our own physical properties “directly”, i.e. not in the manner of other experiential concepts like ‘cramp’, which picks out a physical property by way of a distinct feeling-property. [1999, p. 468]

This passage suggests that Loar sees no problem in assuming that the very properties expressed by phenomenal concepts are identical (a posteriori) with physical-functional properties expressed by theoretical-physical concepts. Elsewhere, speaking of the property of cramp feeling, he says that “the idea that one picks out the phenomenal quality of cramp feeling by way of a particular feeling of cramp (or image, etc.) is hardly incompatible with holding that that phenomenal quality is a physical property” [Loar 1997, pp. 604-605]. Loar thinks that the problem which requires explanation is only this: how to account for the conceptual independence or cognitive separation of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts assuming that they express the same properties. This is then where his point about different conceptual roles comes into play: two concepts can express the same property and yet be conceptually independent in virtue of having different conceptual roles.¹⁸

¹⁸ Instead of saying that the conceptual difference between phenomenal and physical-functional concepts explains their conceptual independence, Loar also speaks of that difference as providing the explanation of the a posteriori status of true psychophysical identity judgments. I find this way of putting things very misleading. In one sense, the explanation of the a posteriori status of psychophysical identity judgments can mean the explanation of why psychophysical identity judgments cannot be true a priori, and in another sense, it can mean the explanation of why or how psychophysical identity judgments are or can be true a posteriori. Clearly, the story about the different conceptual roles of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts can only provide the

I think we are now in a position to see that Loar's dialectic is badly flawed. Loar is not only wrong about his tacit assumption to the effect that the properties expressed by phenomenal concepts are (a posteriori) identical with physical-functional properties is hardly intelligible. If that assumption is wrong, then Loar's treatment of conceptual independence cannot work, either. For assuming that the assumption in question is wrong, it follows that, contrary to what Loar thinks, two directly referring concepts cannot be coextensive on a posteriori grounds and hence that two directly referring coextensive concepts cannot be conceptually independent. This means that two coextensive concepts expressing the same property cannot be conceptually independent. In other words, there is no room for assuming that conceptual independence can be explained solely in terms of the difference between conceptual roles that different concepts have and without assuming that the properties expressed are distinct as well.

If that is so, the standard view about the nature of conceptual independence is right after all. This is not to deny Loar's point that concepts have different conceptual roles. What we have to deny is the idea that this sort of difference between concepts is a purely conceptual difference that does not imply the expression of distinct properties.

9. Natural Kinds, Properties and Their Essential Descriptions

I have argued that we do not understand how two directly referring and conceptually independent concepts could pick out the same natural kind. Thus I have argued that we do not understand how there could be two different essential descriptions of one and the same kind. As I have indicated, there are two problems with that view, depending on whether we assume that the properties expressed by different essential descriptions are distinct or identical. Under the first assumption, the view in question does not seem *prima facie* coherent; it just does not seem coherent to suppose that one and the same kind could have two

explanation of the first sort. The second sort of explanation would require justifying on a posteriori grounds why or how the states picked out by phenomenal and physical-functional concepts are or can be identical.

distinct essential properties.¹⁹ Loar himself does not even take this view into consideration assuming that the properties expressed by two different essential descriptions of one and the same kind would have to be identical. I have argued, however, that this second assumption is problematic as well. For assuming that two essential descriptions are conceptually independent, the identity of properties they express would have to be true a posteriori and that is hardly intelligible.

There is also another way of seeing why the coextensiveness of two different essential descriptions is problematic under the assumption that the properties expressed by such descriptions are identical – in other words, under the assumption that the descriptions attribute only one essential property to the kind they pick out. The problem is that the nature of kinds that fall under such descriptions would be quite obscure. This is because the nature of the essential property of kinds that fall under such descriptions would be quite obscure: that essential property itself would be conceivable under different descriptions. Assume that the kind *P* has one essential property and two different essential descriptions, '*F*' and '*G*'. If we ask about the essence of *P*, we would have to say that relative to the description '*F*', *P* is essentially *F*, and that relative to the description '*G*', *P* is essentially *G*. We could not specify the essence of *P* without relativizing it to a description even though, by assumption, *P* has only one essential property. Of course, the trouble is that this is not how we normally think of essences. Essential properties are not supposed to be relative to descriptions in this sense. Think about natural kinds, such as water. Water is essentially composed of H₂O molecules and that essential property of water was discovered empirically. When we think of the essence of water in terms of H₂O, we think of that essence as dependent on the intrinsic constitution of water and not on the way we describe water.

The contrast I want to draw here between natural kinds, such as water, and kinds conceivable under different essential descriptions does not depend on assuming that water is essentially H₂O in some deep, metaphysical sense. Of course, when we talk about the essence of water, we might refuse to give this talk

¹⁹ Recall the discussion of this point in section 2.

any deep, metaphysical significance. No doubt, certain properties of water, such as its molecular composition, are discovered empirically. But this does not yet commit us to holding that those properties are the essential properties of water in some absolute sense. Why should the molecular composition of water be more intrinsic to water than its watery properties? The most natural thing to say is that if the kind we call water in the actual world is to be essentially composed of H₂O molecules, it can be so only relative to the description 'H₂O'; relative to the description 'the watery stuff', water would be essentially watery.

I take it that we need to distinguish two issues here. One issue is whether or not there are essences of kinds in some absolute, metaphysical sense, unrelativized to any sort of conceptual framework whatsoever. I take it that we have no reason to believe in essences of that sort. Without relativization to any conceptual framework, water is no more intrinsically H₂O than it is watery. Still, we might think that there are essential properties of kinds within their scientific, theoretical conceptualization. If we think of essences in this less robust sense, we can still draw some useful contrast among kinds that have one essential property within their theoretical conceptualization: the contrast between kinds that allow only one description of their essential property, such as water, and kinds that would have to allow different descriptions of their essential property assuming that certain theoretical identifications were true.

An exemplification of kinds that would fall into the second category would be phenomenal kinds assuming that phenomenal and theoretical-physical-functional kinds are a posteriori identical. Assuming that this identity is true, we might say – within a theoretical conceptualization of phenomenal kinds – that they are intrinsically states of the brain, say. In fact, that is what physicalists (at least some of them) want to say. But that physicalistic description becomes problematic once we realize that phenomenal concepts – even within the theoretical conceptualization of phenomenal kinds – refer directly. For then we are committed to holding that phenomenal kinds are essentially phenomenal. The trouble with that view, of course, is that it implies that we cannot say about phenomenal kinds that they are intrinsically states of the brain – in an

unrelativized sense – even within their theoretical conceptualization. For even within that conceptualization, the description of phenomenal kinds as states of the brain is only one possible description of what those kinds essentially are.

The feeling that there is a difficulty here will not go away if you invoke the examples of dispositional properties with two essential descriptions, such as solidity. For in the case of such properties, there is no corresponding sense of relativity in describing their essence. True, solidity allows two essential descriptions. There is one description of solidity associated with the concept of solidity understood pretheoretically, namely the description of solidity as an object's disposition to retain its shape and volume, and there is another description associated with the relevant theoretical-physical concept. These two descriptions are different to the extent that the first does not imply the second. Despite that difference, though, there is an a priori link between the two concepts that goes in the opposite direction: the description associated with the theoretical concept implies the description associated with the concept of solidity understood pretheoretically. This means that what is true about solidity under the theoretical description is also true under the pretheoretical description. So given that solidity is intrinsically a certain theoretical-physical property (the property of molecules being fixed) under the theoretical description, this intrinsic nature does not change under the description associated with the concept of solidity understood pretheoretically. The intrinsic nature of solidity, revealed by the theoretical concept, is not relative to the description associated with that concept.

Of course, given the conceptual independence of phenomenal and physical-functional concepts, we cannot appeal to any a priori link between these concepts in order to avoid relativity in the description of phenomenal kinds. No such a priori link between these concepts is to be found. Therefore, we cannot say that the alleged intrinsic nature of phenomenal kinds that is revealed by theoretical science is the intrinsic nature of phenomenal kinds under their phenomenal description. Assuming that phenomenal and theoretical-physical kinds are identical, the nature of phenomenal kinds becomes, indeed, very obscure.²⁰

²⁰ By parity of reasoning, the nature of theoretical-physical kinds becomes equally mysterious.

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