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Author(s): Tim Crane

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## *Reply to Pettit*

TIM CRANE

In an earlier paper [3], D. H. Mellor and I argued that physicalism faces a dilemma: 'physical' is either taken in very restrictive sense, in which case physicalism is clearly false; or it is taken in a very broad sense, in which case the doctrine is almost empty. The challenge to the physicalist is to define a doctrine which is both defensible and substantial.

Philip Pettit [4] accepts this challenge, and responds with a definition of physicalism which he thinks avoids the dilemma. Pettit's definition of physicalism involves four claims, two about entities, two about laws. Claims 1 and 3, concerning the existence of microphysical entities and microphysical laws, should not be questioned. Claims 2 and 4 are what make Pettit's theory physicalist: 2 says that microphysical entities constitute everything, 4 says that microphysical laws govern everything. I shall argue that the various ways Pettit offers of understanding these claims are in tension with one another, with the result that his definition does not avoid the dilemma posed in [3].

Claim 2 says that (A) everything empirical is composed out of microphysical entities, and that (B) no two things can differ without differing microphysically. Pettit rightly says that (A) would be denied by a dualist who holds that immaterial minds inhabit the empirical world but are not composed of anything. Fair enough; Mellor and I exaggerated when we said that there is no *question* of physicalism whatsoever: there is the question of whether this sort of dualism is true.

But does (A) itself get you to physicalism? It seems not: a non-physicalist could accept that all empirical particulars either are physical or are composed out of microphysical parts (Mellor and I accept this claim: [3] p. 189). For non-physicalism could plausibly be a thesis about *properties*, not *particulars*: physical particulars can have irreducible non-physical properties. I am a physical particular since I have parts which either are physical or have themselves only physical parts. But I also have mental properties. This non-physicalism would deny therefore that the 'empirical world contains just what a true complete physics would say it contains'.

This answer understands composition as a relation between a particular and its parts. But perhaps it shouldn't be understood in this way. Pettit offers a number of other varieties of 'composition' that physicalism could employ: identity, member-set, token-type, realizer-role ([4] p. 215). Could these apply to the relation between (say) mental and physical properties? The ideas that mental properties might be sets of which physical properties

are members (or vice versa), or types of which physical properties are tokens, scarcely make sense. This leaves the familiar answers that mental properties are identical with physical properties, or that they are 'roles', 'realized by' physical properties.

The property identity theory does hold that the empirical world contains just what a true complete physics would say it contains: all properties are physical properties. But in our paper Mellor and I offered arguments against the physicalist assumptions underlying the identity theory.<sup>1</sup> And as it happens, Pettit says that this reductive view is not part of *his* definition of physicalism ([4] p. 219), so I shall ignore it here.

Understanding composition as identity brings Pettit's physicalism close to the first horn of the dilemma. Understanding it as the 'role-realizer' relation, however, brings his physicalism close to the second horn. For either mental 'role' properties are postulated by a true complete physics, or they aren't. If they are, then the mental is trivially physical. If they aren't, then either they do not exist or there is more to the world than the true complete physics says there is.

Pettit will not take either of these latter options; so he will presumably say that the true completed physics does not deny that mental 'role' properties exist. His definition of physicalism

means, at least in one sense, that the empirical world contains *just what* a true complete physics would say it contains; anything not explicitly recognized in physics will belong still to the physical dispensation, according to these claims: it will be physically constituted and physically governed. ([4], p. 213; my italics)

But this surely is only physicalism because of a gratuitous redefinition of 'just what'. Mellor and I understood 'the empirical world contains just what a true complete physics would say it contains' as: 'the empirical world contains all and only those entities postulated by a true complete physics'. But since Pettit allows that entities not postulated by physics can be acceptable to a physicalist by being subject to physical law or made of physical parts, his physicalism turns into the practically empty claim on the second horn of the dilemma. So, putting to one side Pettit's correct claim about Cartesian dualism, his Claim 2 goes no way towards avoiding the dilemma posed in [3].

What about Pettit's Claim 4? The Claim itself – that microphysical laws govern everything – is innocuous enough, since there is an obvious sense in which *all* laws govern everything. (This is explicit in the philosopher's typical law-schema:  $(x)(Fx \rightarrow Gx)$ .) Moreover, if everything empirical has

<sup>1</sup> For these arguments, see [3], §2. Mellor and I do not explicitly discuss the identity theory in [3]; for an explicit discussion, see [2].

microphysical parts then microphysical laws will govern the behaviour of these parts. And these laws will govern the behaviour of the wholes too, in the uncontroversial sense that the behaviour will not conflict with these laws. Part (B) of Pettit's Claim 4, then, is neither controversial nor especially physicalist; as Mellor and I say, it is just a special case of the fact that 'all truths must be consistent with each other' ([3], p. 202).<sup>2</sup>

Part (A) of Claim 4 says that macro-laws do not 'complement' microphysical laws, 'taking up some degree of slack' or 'filling in gaps' left by the microphysical laws ([4], pp. 217, 218). How are we to make sense of the idea that microphysical laws might leave 'gaps'? Pettit's idea seems to be that there would be such 'gaps' if macro-laws were *required* to determine some of the behaviour of microphysical entities. But they are not required: microphysical laws suffice to fix the behaviour of microphysical entities. When it comes to microphysical events, macro-laws are not 'another shoulder at the wheel' ([4], p. 221).

I propose to grant this claim for the sake of argument. For it does not get you physicalism unless you believe that microphysical entities are all that exist — which Pettit denies. What I shall briefly examine is Pettit's subsequent and independent claim that the *macro-laws* 'are fixed in place by the regime which the microphysical laws establish' ([4], p. 218). Not only do the macro-laws not interfere with the micro 'regime' but they themselves are entirely fixed by that regime: they do not 'reflect any independent dispensation in the government of things' ([4], p. 220).

But if this is the situation, why should we believe in these macro-laws at all? The macro-laws seem mere shadows cast by the underlying microphysical laws; they fix nothing that is not already fixed by the microphysical laws. This claim about laws now seems very close to the first horn of the dilemma.

Pettit denies this: he explicitly says that this claim is not eliminative, reductive or epiphenomenalist ([4], p. 219). He does believe that there are macro-laws—but what does this amount to, given his belief that they merely 'reflect at a coarse level a dispensation that is fully manifested, in finer grain, within the realm of microphysical laws' ([4], p. 220)?

Pettit will reply that the macro-laws supervene on the microphysical laws: given the microphysical laws, the macro-laws (to use Peter Smith's phrase) 'come for free'. The macro-laws pick out regularities already fixed at the microphysical level, so in worlds like ours, we just couldn't have the

<sup>2</sup> I should note in passing, however, that Pettit's (B) contains two distinct ideas: (i) macro-laws should be consistent with microphysical laws, and (ii) macro-laws should not behave as 'extra boosters' for events fixed by microphysical laws. These are distinct because (i) could be held while denying (ii). As I understand Pettit here, (ii) should really be in part (A) of Claim 4.

microphysical regularities without the macro-laws too. But how are the macro-laws supposed to come for free? They are not of course logically derivable from the microphysical laws alone, and on Pettit's view they are not reducible to them. And the mere fact that they do not *conflict* with the microphysical laws does not on its own explain the supervenience picture ([3], p. 202). So Pettit needs to tell us exactly how the macro and micro 'levels' are connected. If he cannot do this, then he has failed to adequately define his physicalism.

The obvious answer is that if the macro and micro levels are systematically connected, then the connections between them will be laws. But since these laws are obviously not part of physics (non-trivially understood), they will not be physical laws – statements of these laws will mention irreducible mental properties. So there is room for the non-physicalist to argue that the physical-mental connections are just more non-physical laws, which undermines any non-trivial version of physicalism (for the details, see [1]).

Many physicalists still think that even in this form, supervenience is a substantial version of physicalism. But the onus is on them to show this. Mellor and I would give a non-physicalist description of the situation: there are physical properties, and irreducible mental properties, and they are linked by (non-physical) psychophysical laws. What alternative description could supervenience physicalists give? There are two options. First, they could give an account of the connections between the mental and physical properties, but not in terms of psychophysical laws. But if this is Pettit's position, he needs to give the details of what these connections are supposed to be. Second, supervenience physicalists could accept that the connections are laws, but insist that all the phenomena governed by these psychophysical laws are nonetheless physical because they are also governed by physical laws. However, if this is Pettit's position, it differs only in terminology from the non-physicalist position described by Mellor and me.

*University College London  
Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT*

### *References*

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- [4] Philip Pettit, 'A Definition of Physicalism' *Analysis* 53 (1993) 213–223.