

The Normative Property Dualism Argument

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Abstract:

In this paper I develop an argument against a type of Non-Analytic Normative Naturalism. This argument, the Normative Property Dualism Argument, suggests that, if Non-Analytic Normative Naturalists posit that normative properties are identical to natural properties and that such identities are a posteriori, they will be forced to posit that these properties which are both normative and natural have higher-order normative properties of their own.

Keywords: Metaethics, Normativity, Normative Naturalism, Non-Analytic Normative Naturalism, The Property Dualism Argument.

I. Introduction

In this paper I develop an argument against a type of Non-Analytic Normative Naturalism. This argument, the Normative Property Dualism Argument, suggests that, if Non-Analytic Normative Naturalists posit that normative properties are identical to natural properties and that such identities are *a posteriori*, they will be forced to posit that these properties which are both normative and natural have higher-order normative properties of their own.

The Normative Property Dualism Argument is a metaethical analogue of an argument against a type of Physicalism, the Property Dualism Argument. Consequently, I hope that my discussion will be of interest to both metaethicists and philosophers of mind, helping to illuminate connections between debates and arguments in the two philosophical sub-disciplines.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in Section (II) I introduce Non-Analytic Normative Naturalism ('Non-Analytic Naturalism'). In Section (III) I explain the Normative Property Dualism Argument. In Section (IV) I defend the argument against objections. Section (V) concludes.

II. Non-Analytic Naturalism

I understand Non-Analytic Naturalism to involve two core claims:

NAN1) Normative properties are reducible to natural properties, and

NAN2) Normative concepts are not analysable in non-normative terms.¹

Focusing first on (NAN1), I understand the normative broadly to include deontic, evaluative, and fittingness properties, facts, and concepts.²³ I interpret the claim that normative properties are reducible to natural properties as suggesting that normative properties can be given a real definition in non-normative terms or have essences which specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation (Leary 2020: 479-81; 2021: 805-13).⁴ Also, I'll assume that if normative property F is defined by non-normative condition ϕ , the property of being F = the property of being ϕ (Rosen 2015: Sec. 9). However, the argument I'll develop in this paper will not rest on this way of developing (NAN1). The argument will work using other ways of understanding the idea that normative properties are reducible to natural properties. For instance, the argument will work if Normative Naturalists are understood as claiming that (1) for all normative properties F, for any x , any fact of the form Fx is either identical to or fully grounded in a natural fact (i.e. in the instantiation of a natural property) (cf. Rosen 2018: 151-63) and (2) a natural property is a property which can be non-accidentally ascribed using an expression which doesn't employ normative terms (Dunaway 2015: 631-3; Streumer 2017: 5).⁵

Moving on to (NAN2), this commitment distinguishes Non-Analytic Naturalists from Analytic Naturalists who hold that we establish (NAN1) by analysing normative concepts in non-normative terms. To analyse a concept is to uncover what it takes for something to fall under the concept through reflection on the concept; an analysis provides necessary and/or sufficient conditions for falling under a concept and is arrived at by drawing on one's understanding of the concept. I interpret Non-Analytic Naturalists as denying specifically that

¹ Notable defenders of Non-Analytic Naturalism include Schroeder (2007), Copp (2012), and Dowell and Sobel (2017). Many other philosophers defend Non-Analytic *Moral* Naturalism.

² Reasons may need to be added as an independent entry on this list.

³ For detailed discussion of what makes properties and concepts normative see Eklund (2017: Ch. 4-5).

⁴ I agree with Gideon Rosen (2018: 151) that 'For metaethical purposes, where our aim is to clarify the connection between the normative and the rest, it makes sense to adopt the broad usage in which 'natural' contrasts with 'normative' and means something like 'descriptive'.'

⁵ For more on the idea of non-accidental ascription see Dunaway (2015: 632 & 632, footnote 11).

reflection on normative concepts can uncover non-normative *sufficient* conditions for falling under such concepts (cf. Boghossian 2021: 374).

An implication of Non-Analytic Naturalism as I've defined the position is that there is no conceptual *a priori* entailment from the non-normative truths to the normative truths; no matter how much information one has about the world stated without the use of normative concepts, one won't be able to learn the normative truths through *a priori* means merely in virtue of one's possession of, or competence with, normative concepts (Bedke 2012; Yetter-Chappell and Yetter-Chappell 2013).⁶ In fact, the information needn't be limited to only truths stated without the use of normative concepts; so long as one doesn't have information about the non-normative conditions under which normative properties are instantiated, one will not be able to learn the normative truths through conceptual *a priori* means. Knowing, for instance, about agents' normative beliefs will not put one in a position to learn the normative truths (cf. Bedke 2012: 115). Call a description of the world which excludes such information but is otherwise complete a 'non-normative description of the world'.

III. The Normative Property Dualism Argument

III.1 Preliminaries

The Normative Property Dualism Argument (NPDA) is targeted at those Non-Analytic Naturalist views which hold that normative properties are identical to natural properties and that such identities are *a posteriori*. Suppose that normative property NORM, say, the property of being what one ought to do=natural property NAT, for instance, maximizing net happiness.⁷⁸ The NPDA is built around the fact that an agent could rationally believe that it's not the case that being what one ought to do is identical with maximizing net happiness or any other value

⁶ For background on the idea of conceptual *a priori* entailment see Chalmers and Jackson (2001).

⁷ This is a toy example that I'll use for ease of exposition. Here is an instance of such a view in the literature: Mark Schroeder (2007: Ch. 4) suggests that the property of being a reason=the property of being a fact which explains why performing an action would promote one of an agent's desires. (There are some complications that I'm passing over here, but I'm reasonably confident that Schroeder commits himself to this identity claim.)

⁸ What about Normative Naturalists who say that normative properties are among the set of natural properties but that we lack non-normative vocabulary for these properties? (Cf. Sturgeon 2006: 98-99; 2003: 536-540 on moral properties). I'm going to assume that these philosophers are accurately described as holding that normative properties have essences which specify non-normative sufficient conditions for their instantiation, but that such properties can't be defined in non-normative terms (Leary 2021: 805). Or, to fall back on the alternative account of Normative Naturalism I sketched above, these philosophers hold that normative properties are not identical to properties we can non-accidentally ascribe using non-normative expressions but that instantiations of normative properties are fully grounded in the instantiation of such properties (i.e. in the non-normative facts).

for NAT.⁹ I'll try to show that to make sense of this fact the proponent of non-analytic normative *a posteriori* identities must posit that the property which is both the property of being what an agent ought to do and the property of maximizing net happiness has higher-order normative properties of its own.

As I mentioned above, the NPDA is a metaethical analogue of an argument in the philosophy of mind, the Property Dualism Argument (PDA). The PDA has a long history. The argument can be traced back to an objection to phenomenal/physical identities put to J.J.C. Smart by Max Black (Smart 1959: 148-150). However, my discussion will draw on Stephen White's (2006, 2007, 2010) development of the argument.¹⁰ The PDA is targeted at Type-B (*A Posteriori*) Physicalism. Type-B Physicalists hold that every instantiated phenomenal property is metaphysically necessitated by a physical property, but that there is an epistemic gap between the physical and phenomenal truths in the sense that no matter how much physical (non-phenomenal) information one knows about the world, one will not be able to arrive at the phenomenal truths through *a priori* reasoning. Type-B Physicalism contrasts with Type-A (*A Priori*) Physicalism which denies the existence of this epistemic gap.¹¹ White's argument is targeted at those Type-B Physicalists who hold that phenomenal properties are identical to physical properties – for instance, that pain is identical with mental property M (e.g. C-fibre firing).^{12,13} Call this view 'identity' or 'reductive' Type-B Physicalism. White describes his argument as attempting 'to show that a full explanation of the *a posteriori* character of such mental-physical...identities presupposes a higher level mental-physical dualism (property dualism)' (2007: 210).

The PDA has received far less attention in contemporary philosophy of mind than the conceivability argument against Physicalism. I think that this comparative neglect is unjustified, especially given that the most prominent modern development of the conceivability

⁹ The relevant ought-concept I'm imagining figuring in this agent's belief is the ought *simpliciter*. For defences of the coherence of *simpliciter* normative concepts see Wodak (2019), McPherson (2018) and Case (2016).

¹⁰ A similar argument can be found in McGinn (2001).

¹¹ See Chalmers (2010b: 103-18) for discussion. For defences of Type-B Physicalism see McLaughlin (2001; 2007) and Loar (2017). For Type-A Physicalism see Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson (2007: Ch. 3) and Lewis (1994).

¹² White thinks that the argument can also be employed against Type-B physicalists who posit token identities (2010: 89, 89, footnote 1 & 100). I have some concerns about token identities. See footnote 13 below.

¹³ In the philosophy of mind, it's common to draw a distinction between token and type identity theory. Type identity theory claims that phenomenal properties and physical properties are identical. Token identity theory is often introduced as the view that every mental event is a physical event. However, if this simply means that for every event x , there is some physical particular y such that $x=y$ then token identity theory is compatible with property dualism (Stoljar 2017: §6). This isn't true if we individuate events in terms of property instantiations. However, if we do this, event identity will imply property identity (Kim 2012: 175).

argument – the version of the argument relying on two-dimensional semantics developed by David Chalmers (2010a) – means the arguments have important similarities. However, what is most important for my purposes is that it is more promising, I think, for metaethicists to look to the PDA for inspiration than to the conceivability argument. Vindicating a normative conceivability argument is challenging.¹⁴

I'll now present the NPDA. The NPDA is, for the most part, a reconstruction of White's PDA applied to the normative domain.¹⁵

III.2 Introducing the Normative Property Dualism Argument

The NPDA is complex. Consequently, I'll present the argument piecemeal, stopping to clarify and motivate the premises as I introduce them.

NPDA1) Assume, for the sake of argument, that Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory is true. This entails that, for every normative property NORM, this property is identical with some natural property NAT and that such identities are *a posteriori*.

NPDA2) Therefore, the property of being what one ought to do=NAT (say, maximizing net happiness) and this identity is *a posteriori*. (From NPDA1.)

(NPDA1) is just a statement of Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory and it entails (NPDA2).

NPDA3) To explain how an agent can rationally disbelieve an *a posteriori* identity we must specify a possible world which captures the way this agent takes the world to be.

NPDA4) An agent (call them 'A') can rationally disbelieve that the property of being what one ought to do=the property of maximizing net happiness.

¹⁴ For a development of a normative conceivability argument see Hattiangadi (2018). My chief concern about such arguments is that the apparently *a priori* character of normative principles (conditionals or biconditionals linking the natural and the normative) creates an obstacle to arguing that a world which is identical to our own in terms of its natural properties, but which differs normatively is ideally negatively conceivable in the sense spelled out by Chalmers (2002a: 149-156). Although cf. Hattiangadi (2018: 608).

¹⁵ I make no claim that White would agree with anything I say in this paper. I am using White's PDA as the inspiration for an argument against a type of Non-Analytic Naturalism, drawing on White's discussion of the PDA when I judge that it is useful for the development and defence of this argument and departing from it when I don't think that this is the case.

NPDA5) Therefore, there is a possible world which captures the way A takes the world to be. (From NPDA2, NPDA3, and NPDA4.)

A preliminary step for assessing both (NPDA3) and (NPDA4) is getting clear about how rationality is being understood in the argument. I'm going to stipulate that a belief counts as rational just in case it is internalistically justified. The relevant type of internalism about justification is access internalism according to which A is justified believing that *p* only if she has available to her a good reason for thinking that *p* is true or probable.¹⁶ Considered as a general account of epistemic justification, this form of internalism is controversial and subject to important challenges.¹⁷ On the other hand, this account seems presupposed by the project of critical reflection on our beliefs, where we consider first-personally whether our beliefs are justified (Bonjour 2003: 39-41; Smithies 2015). Also, assuming this account of justification doesn't seem unreasonable in the dialectical context; proponents of *a posteriori* normative/natural identities presumably think that they have available to them good (epistemic) reasons for believing such identities.

While I'm offering this account of rationality as a stipulative definition, the account does bear some resemblance to one prominent idea in the literature on rationality, which holds that rationality is a matter of responding correctly to one's evidence-relative reasons – i.e. having whatever attitudes one has decisive reason to have given one's evidence, where something counts as evidence for an agent only if it meets some sort of accessibility constraint (Kiesewetter 2017: Ch. 7-8).

To motivate (NPDA3), consider how we might explain how an agent can be rational in the relevant sense despite having beliefs with contradictory referential contents, where the referential content of a belief is how it portrays properties and relations as distributed over objects.¹⁸ White suggests that if A believes *y* to be F and also believes *y* not to be F then, if A is rational, 'there must be distinct representational modes of presentation *m* and *m*' such that [A] believes *y* to be F under *m* and disbelieves *y* to be F under *m*' (2010: 89-90).¹⁹ We can extend this claim about modes of presentation to cases in which A believes *y* to be F and also

¹⁶ For a development and defence of this form of internalism see Bonjour (2003). The idea isn't just that a justified belief that *p* requires that one has access to some X that can act as a justification for believing *p*, rather the epistemic fact that X justifies *p* must be accessible to the agent (Bonjour 2003: 24-5; Smithies 2015: 230-1).

¹⁷ Most notably a regress challenge. For discussion and responses to this challenge see Rogers and Matheson (2011).

¹⁸ I take the label 'referential content' from Gray (2020: 78).

¹⁹ I'll move between describing A as believing that *x* has NAT and that *x* does not have NORM and as believing that it's not the case that NORM=NAT. I'll assume A has the latter belief in virtue of having the former belief.

fails to believe y to be F . (What is meant by ‘fails to believe’ here is that A has explicitly considered whether y is F and withheld belief.) If modes of presentation are to play the role of explaining why A is rational despite having beliefs with contradictory referential contents, they must, firstly, be available to A at the personal level and, secondly, tell us about how A is representing the world.

Capturing how an agent who rationally disbelieves an *a posteriori* identity is representing the world seems to require the specification of a possible world. To motivate this claim, consider how we explain how the world presents itself to an agent who rationally denies that Hesperus is identical with Phosphorus. The agent is (e.g.) representing the world as being such that the thing that has the property of being the first heavenly body visible in the evening is not the same as the thing that has the property of being the last heavenly body visible in the morning. Similarly, in the case of an agent who denies that water= H_2O , what the agent is doing is conceiving of a world at which the properties they associate with water (e.g., being colourless, odourless, tasteless, filling lakes and rivers) are instantiated by some substance other than H_2O (White 2010: 93 & 103). These cases – and others which I’ll discuss – involve ‘a world in which the properties that are definitive of the content (for the subject) of the two modes of presentation are not coinstantiated’ (White 2010: 95; cf. McGinn 2001: 286-288).

The idea that we need to posit a possible world to rationalize disbelief in *a posteriori* identities is compatible with Kripke’s treatment of the necessary *a posteriori*. The relevant possible worlds are *not* worlds where it’s false that Hesperus is Phosphorus or where it’s not the case that water is H_2O . The proponent of the NPDA can accept that there are no such worlds. The point of positing a possible world to rationalize disbelief in an *a posteriori* identity is not to find some world at which the agent’s belief is true but rather to capture how an agent justified disbelieving the identity is representing the world.²⁰

However, even if one grants that (NPDA3) doesn’t conflict with the Kripkean necessary *a posteriori*, one might nevertheless reject (NPDA3) by suggesting that while we need an epistemic possibility to rationalize disbelief in *a posteriori* identity (a way the world might be for all we know *a priori*) no metaphysical possibility is required. My response is to invite proponents of this objection to make good on this suggestion. Much of the work I’ll do in Section (IV) defending the NPDA is concerned with establishing that there is no

²⁰ I want to note that the NPDA is not committed to the two-dimensional treatment of the necessary *a posteriori* developed by (among others), David Chalmers (2002a; 2006; 2010a). The NPDA is compatible with orthodox Kripkeanism in a way that this position arguably is not (Mallozzi 2021).

straightforward way of doing so. I admit that this approach to defending (NPDA3) against the objection doesn't conclusively establish the truth of the premise (unlike if I were to adopt the characteristic strategy of proponents of conceivability arguments and argue that epistemic possibility entails metaphysical possibility).²¹ However, I hope that my discussion will justify treating the premise as at least provisionally warranted.²²

Before I move on to (NPDA4) it's helpful, I think, to say a little more about the idea of a mode of presentation. Some philosophers hold that we can believe the same propositional content under different modes of presentation or guises.²³ Other philosophers hold that modes of presentation are themselves constituents of the propositional content of beliefs.²⁴ On either view, modes of presentation are supposed to explain the way that beliefs with the same referential content might differ in cognitive significance for an agent.²⁵ Another important clarificatory point concerns concepts. I'll assume that having a propositional attitude like the belief that John is in pain requires deploying concepts such as the concept *pain*. This claim is compatible with treating concepts as mental representations which have contents or as the constituents of content which are grasped by an agent in having a propositional attitude. Either view of concepts allows one to accept a close connection between concepts and modes of presentation; concepts might be identical to (Peacocke 1992: 2-3) or individuated by modes of presentation (Fodor 1998: 15).

I'm not going to defend (NPDA4) in detail because if one thinks that no one can rationally disbelieve that ought=maximizing net happiness, I could develop the NPDA in terms

²¹ For example, David Chalmers argues for a thesis he labels *metaphysical plenitude* according to which, roughly, if sentence S is epistemically possible then there is a metaphysically possible world in which S is true (Chalmers 2006: 82). See Chalmers (2002a; 2010a) for a detailed defence of this thesis.

²² White defends the claim that we need to posit a possible world to rationalize disbelief in *a posteriori* identities by suggesting that if there is no metaphysical possibility that rationalizes disbelief in an identity then the identity is *a priori*. The background assumption seems to be that, in the absence of such a metaphysical possibility, the agent who denies the identity is representing the world in a way that can be ruled out *a priori* (2010: 94; 2007: 212-3). However, White doesn't provide an argument for this assumption. Of course, if he is right, this is good news for the NPDA.

²³ This view features in the work of several proponents of referentialist accounts of propositional content. Referentialists hold that the propositional content of an attitude is exhausted by its referential content. Some referentialists hold that belief is a two-place relation between an agent and a proposition, but this relation is mediated by a guise. Others suggest that belief is a three-place relation between an agent, guise, and proposition. For helpful discussion and references see Braun (2016: 470-8).

²⁴ If one holds that propositions are structured, one can associate modes of presentation with the component parts of propositions. See, for example, Chalmers (2011: 603). Strictly speaking, Chalmers here is associating *intensions* (functions from possibilia of various sorts to extensions) with propositional components, but he thinks of a certain kind of intension ('primary intensions') as playing the role of Fregean modes of presentation (2011: 607).

²⁵ I'm using 'cognitive significance' to encompass a variety of phenomena concerning use in reasoning, connections to linguistic behaviour, and more. For discussion see Gray (2020). Other theorists appeal to pragmatic mechanisms to explain differences in cognitive significance. See Section (IV.4) below for relevant discussion.

of a rational agent *failing to believe* that ought=maximizing net happiness. It should be uncontroversial that an agent might, having considered the matter, be justified in withholding belief about whether ought=maximizing net happiness. This identity is supposedly *a posteriori*, meaning that empirical evidence is required to establish it. If an agent were to lack this empirical evidence (or relevant testimonial evidence), they would be justified withholding belief in the identity.

With (NPDA2)–(NPDA4) in place, (NPDA5) follows: There is a possible world which captures the way that A takes the world to be.

NPDA6) The possible world which captures the way A takes the world to be is one at which the properties A associates with being what one ought to do and maximizing net happiness are not co-instantiated. (To put it another way, it is a world where the properties definitive of the distinct modes of presentation of the property which is both the property of being what one ought to do and the property of maximizing net happiness are not co-instantiated.)

My discussion of (NPDA3) above suggested that, in classic cases of *a posteriori* identities, the worlds which rationalize disbelief in the identities are worlds where the properties definitive of the two modes of presentation of the referent are not co-instantiated. (NPDA6) applies this model to the case of NORM=NAT. I'm uncertain that we must always posit distinct properties – as opposed to just a possible world – to rationalize disbelief in *a posteriori* identities for reasons concerning indexical identities which I'll discuss in Section (IV). For the moment, however, I'm just going to assume that we need to do so in case of ought=maximizing net happiness.

NPDA7) The property A associates with being what one ought to do is either a property which A would ascribe using a normative predicate ('a normatively characterized property') or it is not ('a non-normatively characterized property').

NPDA8) It's not the case that this property is a non-normatively characterized property, given the assumption that Analytic Naturalism is false.

NPDA9) If this property is a normatively characterized property the result is an infinite regress. More slowly, if this property (call it 'P') is a normatively characterized property, it is a normative property and must itself be *a posteriori* identical with a natural property, given (NPDA1). But now we can rerun the NPDA with respect to property P. The property associated with P is either a normatively characterized property or a non-normatively

characterized property. Given (NPDA8) it is not a non-normatively characterized property. But, if it is a normatively characterized property, we are back where we started – and so on, *ad infinitum*.

Suppose, first, that the property A associates with the property of being what one ought to do is a non-normatively characterized property. (For example, ‘is what makes acts such that agents desire to desire to do them’ or ‘is what causally regulates our use of ‘ought’’.) It appears that, for any such property, an agent can believe that ϕ -ing has this property yet not believe that they ought to ϕ . This claim should be accepted by Non-Analytic Naturalists. If there were such a property, an agent would be able to learn the ought truths through conceptual *a priori* reasoning if given a non-normative description of the world; this agent (or a suitably idealized version thereof) could reason the following way: If ϕ -ing has F then ϕ -ing has the property of being what one ought to do; ϕ -ing has F; therefore, ϕ -ing has the property of being what one ought to do.

Might a Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theorist respond to this argument for (NPDA8) by claiming that A could pick out the property of being what an agent ought to do through some non-normatively characterized property yet it fail to be the case that if something has this property then it has the property of being what one ought to do? The problem with this objection is that this property is supposed to help explain how the agent succeeds in picking out the property of being what one ought to do in thought; it provides the agent’s epistemic access to the referent (White 2010: 92-3).

Moving on to (NPDA9), suppose, on the other hand, one posits that the property that A associates with the property of being what one ought to do is a normatively characterized property (e.g. ‘is what makes actions fitting to intend’). If we assume that properties ascribed by normative predicates are normative properties (Streumer 2017: 3 & 66) then we are left with a normative property which, by (NPDA1), must be itself be identical with a natural property. We can now run the NPDA with respect to this normative property, and if one of the modes of presentation of this property is itself a normatively characterized property the dialectic will repeat and so on, threatening an infinite regress. Of course, the regress can be avoided if, at some level, the relevant associated property is a non-normatively characterized property. However, by (NPDA8), this option is not available to the proponent of Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory.

The argument for (NPDA9) I've offered relies on the assumption that properties ascribed by normative predicates are normative properties. However, this assumption is problematic if a normative predicate is simply defined as a predicate which employs normative terms. Consider 'is the natural property that makes actions right'. Non-Naturalists like Derek Parfit (2011: 301) deny that this predicate ascribes a normative property.²⁶ One response is to try to develop an account of normative predicates that doesn't classify examples such as this as normative predicates. A different response involves modifying my characterization of a normatively characterized property. I could hold that a normatively characterized property is a property ascribed using a predicate such that, if something satisfies this predicate, this conceptually entails the existence of a normative property. The predicate 'is the natural property that makes actions right' is such that, if something satisfies this predicate, this conceptually entails the existence of a normative property – namely, the property of being right. This alternative definition of a normatively characterized property also ensures that if the property associated with being what one ought to do is a normatively characterized property, we will be left with a normative property which, by (NPDA1), must be identical with a natural property.

NPDA10) If Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory generates an infinite regress it should be rejected.

NPDA11) Therefore, Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory should be rejected. (From NPDA7, NPDA8, NPDA9, and NPDA10.)

Some regresses are regarded as unproblematic.²⁷ So, the fact that Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory generates an infinite regress doesn't obviously mean it should be rejected. However, notice that the regress in question isn't simply a regress of normative properties – it also involves a regress of representations of these properties. It's plausible that we don't have an infinite number of representational states, making the regress in question vicious.²⁸

Summing up, the NPDA challenges proponents of Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory to explain how an agent can rationally disbelieve an *a posteriori* normative/natural identity. It suggests that this requires we posit a possible world where the

²⁶ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this counterexample.

²⁷ For example, the truth regress: if p then p is true, so if p is true then p is true is true, and so on.

²⁸ Nolan (2001: 531) suggests that one way a regress can be vicious is if it 'posits an infinite number of things in a domain we know to be finite.'

properties that characterize the agents' distinct modes of presentation of the property that is both NORM and NAT are not co-instantiated. The argument then suggests that, given the commitments of Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory, the property definitive of the mode of presentation of NORM must itself be a further normative property, setting of a regress.

I hope that my discussion in this section has succeeded in making the NPDA plausible. However, I've issued promissory notes for discussions of complications and challenges. I'll now defend the NPDA in more detail through an examination of several important objections to the argument.

IV. Defending the Normative Property Dualism Argument

IV.1 Modes of Presentation, Properties, and Possible Worlds

I'll first consider whether an objection to White's Property Dualism Argument (PDA) developed by Ned Block threatens the NPDA. Discussing this objection will provide me with an opportunity to say more about the claims about modes of presentation, properties, and possible worlds that underpin the NPDA.

Block objects to the PDA on the grounds that we can have distinct representational/cognitive modes of presentation (CMoPs) without a corresponding difference in properties (which he, following White, calls metaphysical modes of presentation (MMoPs)). Block (2006: 25-6) argues for this conclusion using the following case:

Our subject starts out under the false impression that there were two Paderewskis of the turn of the twentieth century, a Polish politician and a Polish composer. Later, he has forgotten where he learned the two words and remembers nothing about one Paderewski that distinguishes him from the other. That is, he remembers only that both were famous Polish figures of the turn of the twentieth century. Prima facie, the cognitive properties of the two uses of 'Paderewski' are the same. For the referent is the same and every property associated by the subject with these terms is the same. We could give a name to the relevant cognitive difference by saying that the subject has two "mental files" corresponding to the two uses of 'Paderewski' ...[T]here are two CMoPs but only one MMoP, the MMoP being, say, the property of being a famous turn-of-the-twentieth-century Pole named

'Paderewski'. Thus "Paderewski=Paderewski" could be informative to this subject, despite identical MMoPs for the two terms.

I'll argue that, firstly, Block hasn't in fact provided a case which pries apart CMoPs and MMoPs and, secondly, even if I'm wrong about this, it wouldn't establish that the NPDA fails.

Block tells us that the subject acquired the two distinct mental files through two distinct properties of the referent of these files, namely the property of being a Polish politician at the turn of the twentieth century and the property of being a Polish composer at the turn of the twentieth century. While the subject may no longer have any cognitive access to these two properties, the fact that they have the two separate files (and, consequently, the informativeness of the identity for the subject) depends on them having picked out the referent of these files through distinct properties at time t – the time at which the two separate files were created.²⁹ Once we recognize this fact, we can see that Block's case doesn't threaten the idea that we need to posit MMoPs corresponding to CMoPs – at least so long as we are careful about indexing this claim to a time.

Another worry about Block's argument draws on what I think is a compelling case for the conclusion that, where a and b are two names, if a subject competent with these names finds $a=b$ informative, they must associate distinct information (i.e. distinct properties) with a and b . This argument, developed by Aidan Gray (2016), contends that, if a subject did not associate distinct information with a and b , they would be unable to gain knowledge about the bearer of either of those names via utterances which involve the names – something required for competence with the names. To see the problem, consider the following case: suppose a and b are two names both articulated using sign s , e.g. 'John'. A subject needs to disambiguate utterances of 'John' they encounter as concerning either a or b . In order to do this, it appears that they need to associate distinct information with the names a and b . If they did not associate distinct information with a and b , they would have 'no reason to interpret an occurrence of s as an articulation of a rather than as an articulation of b . And so... have no reason to interpret the utterance as conveying information about the bearer of a rather than about the bearer of b ' (2016: 354). Notice that the claim that the disambiguation process usually works by a subject making inferences about the speaker's referential intentions presupposes that the subject can

²⁹ This is something which Block appears to acknowledge. He states that 'Maybe there has to be some difference in properties in the world that explain the arising of the different CMoPs, but that difference can fade away leaving no psychological trace' (2006: 28).

distinguish *a* and *b*; to infer whether the speaker intends to communicate about *a* or *b* one needs to be able to distinguish *a* and *b* in thought.

Gray's argument doesn't map neatly onto Block's Paderewski case because in Block's case there is a single bearer of the subject's two names articulated using 'Paderewski'. However, I think that we can nevertheless raise a problem for Block's case based on Gray's argument. The subject in Block's case won't be able to assign information to one of their 'Paderewski' files rather than the other in anything but an arbitrary way unless they associate distinct information with the two files. Without distinct information, they won't be able to disambiguate occurrences of 'Paderewski' as concerning one or the other of their two Paderewski files. However, competence with these two names plausibly requires that they can assign information to one or the other of the files in a non-arbitrary way. After all, the subject just gets lucky that their files have a shared referent.

Suppose for the sake of argument that my responses to Block fail and he is correct that his Paderewski case shows that we can have distinct CMoPs without distinct MMoPs.³⁰ This wouldn't show that the NPDA fails. My statement of the NPDA doesn't commit me to the position that to rationalize disbelief in an *a posteriori* identity we must always posit distinct properties corresponding to the distinct modes of presentation of the referent. The NPDA is committed to the position that when we have an *a posteriori* identity, we need a possible world to rationalize disbelief in the identity. Block's case doesn't challenge this claim. To explain how a subject could rationally disbelieve what they would express with 'It's not the case that Paderewski is Paderewski' we need a possible world, namely a world in which there were two distinct famous turn-of-the-twentieth-century Poles named 'Paderewski'.³¹

To expand on my points in the previous paragraph, consider indexical identities – e.g. I=Jesse Hamby. I think that it's plausible that if there are any examples of *a posteriori* identities where we have distinct cognitive modes of presentation without distinct associated properties they will be indexical identities (cf. Chalmers 2010a, 196-8).³² However, once again,

³⁰ For White's own response to Block see White (2006: 94-6).

³¹ *Contra* what Block (2006: 28-9) appears to say.

³² Chalmers takes issue with the PDA by appealing to indexical identities. Chalmers suggests that the PDA relies on 'the distinct property thesis' according to which when an identity claim $a=b$ is not *a priori*, *a* and *b* pick out their referents via distinct properties (cf. White 2010: 104). Chalmers then argues that this thesis closely resembles a thesis he endorses, namely that when an identity claim $a=b$ is not *a priori*, *a* and *b* have distinct primary intensions – i.e. distinct functions from scenarios to extensions. (Scenarios here are being understood, roughly speaking, as centred worlds considered as actual ways that the world might be for all we know *a priori*.) This latter thesis is superior, Chalmers contends, because in the case of indexical *a posteriori* identity claims such as

even if this is true, it doesn't show that we don't need a possible world to explain how I could rationally believe what I would express with, 'I am not Jesse Hambly'. In fact, what we need is a centred world: a possible world with a 'you are here marker'.³³ I am taking the centred world to be one where the individual at the centre is not Jesse Hambly.

An opponent of the NPDA might respond by conceding that we need (centred) possible worlds to rationalize disbelief in *a posteriori* identities but maintain that normative/natural identities do, or at least might, function like indexical identities. This objection does succeed in threatening the NPDA by challenging (NPDA6). This premise claims that the possible world which rationalizes disbelief in a normative/natural identity is one at which the properties the agent associates with NORM and NAT are not co-instantiated.

My first point in response to this objection is that the case which is the focus of the NPDA involves a property identity. To explain how a rational agent could disbelieve other *a posteriori* property identities – such as the case of water=H₂O I gave above and the case of heat=molecular kinetic energy which I'll discuss shortly – we need to posit a possible world where we have distinct properties of the referent. Secondly, there are significant problems with treating normative thought as analogous to indexical thought. To vindicate this claim, I'll draw on David Chalmers' (2004) response to attempts to draw an analogy between phenomenal knowledge and indexical knowledge to explain why there is an epistemic gap between the phenomenal and the physical. Chalmers observes that a physically omniscient subject might be ignorant of whether they are in Australia or America when they consider whether this is the case in a way that they would express using the sentence 'Am I in Australia or America?' (Assume that there are qualitative duplicates in both places.) Now imagine a physically omniscient observer considering this subject third-personally. The observer has no corresponding ignorance – they know that A is in Australia, B is America, and so on; there is nothing else for them to learn about the subject's situation. Chalmers draws the conclusion that the subject's 'ignorance is *essentially* indexical, and evaporates from the objective viewpoint' (2004: 187). On other hand, consider (Frank Jackson's) Mary's ignorance in her black and white room about what it will be like for her to see red. This ignorance doesn't evaporate from the third-person perspective: a physically omniscient observer may also not know what it will be like for Mary to see red when thinking about this fact in a third-personal way. Chalmers

'I am Jesse Hambly', it's difficult to identify a property associated with the indexical 'I'. It's not entirely clear to me that Chalmers' challenge succeeds. The property associated with 'I' might be something like the property of being the entity having these mental states (McGinn 2001: 288).

³³ For discussion of the need for centred worlds see Chalmers (2002b: 155-6)

concludes that this suggests that phenomenal knowledge is not a variety of indexical knowledge; rather it is objective knowledge of the world which is not tied to a viewpoint (2004: 187). We can make the same sort of argument with respect to normative knowledge: normative ignorance similarly doesn't evaporate from the third-person perspective. A naturalistically omniscient observer may be just as ignorant of whether a naturalistically omniscient subject ought to ϕ as the subject themselves.

IV.2 The Mode of Presentation of NAT

The next objection to the NPDA I'll consider claims that the argument fails because we can rationalize our agent, A, by positing that A takes the world to be one where the property of being what an agent ought to do is not co-instantiated with some property which they associate with maximizing net happiness. This response picks up on the fact that (NPDA6) is compatible with the claim that the possible world needed to rationalize the agent's belief is one where the property characterizing one (but only one) of the modes of presentation is the referent itself. This response might be supplemented with an account of how the concept *ought* refers directly – perhaps modelled on accounts of how phenomenal concepts like *pain* refer directly developed by Type-B Physicalists.³⁴

The most straightforward problem with this objection is that we can easily imagine an agent for whom this world doesn't capture the belief that they would express with 'It's not the case that the property of being what one ought to do is identical with the property of maximizing net happiness.' An agent could, it seems, rationally believe this without taking the world to be such that the property of being what one ought to do is not identical with, say, Jeremy Bentham's favourite property. Here is a helpful analogy: Kripke (1980) famously argues that we can't explain away the apparent contingency of pain=C-fibre firing in the same way we can explain away the apparent contingency of necessary *a posteriori* identities like heat=molecular kinetic energy. According to Kripke, when agents think that they can conceive of molecular kinetic energy without heat what they are conceiving of is the possibility of molecular kinetic energy without the appearance of heat (the sensation of heat). However,

³⁴ I'm suspicious that the various proposals that have been offered to explain how phenomenal concepts refer directly – i.e. refer in such a way that removes the need to posit a mode of presentation of their referent or at least a property definitive of the mode of the presentation – fail or are inconsistent with the truth of Type-B Physicalism. I can't defend this claim here, but see Demircioglu (2013), Goff (2011), Levine (2007), and White (2010: 104-109).

Kripke suggests that there is no analogous explanation for why pain=C-fibre firing seems contingent. Anything that has the appearance of pain (the felt quality of pain) just is pain. So, to have C-fibre firing without the appearance of pain would be to have C-fibre firing without pain (1980: 150-3). One response to Kripke's argument is to claim that when agents think that they can conceive of C-fibre firing without pain what they are conceiving of is the appearance of C-fibre firing – for instance, certain instrument readings – without pain. The problem with this proposal is that it's implausible that an agent has confused the proposition that there can be C-fibre firing without pain with the proposition that there can be certain instrument readings without pain. Also, even an agent is guilty of this confusion, they might continue to insist, after the matter has been cleared up (for instance, after it is made clear that 'C-fibre firing' is being used as a natural kind term) that they can also conceive of C-fibre firing itself without pain (Stoljar 2006: 187-8; White 2010: 98-9).

IV.3 Senses, Reference-Fixers, and the NPDA

Another objection to the NPDA takes as its starting point the thought that the argument is fundamentally misconceived because Kripke and Putnam (among others) taught us that there are nothing like descriptive senses when it comes to a variety of concepts and the NPDA conflicts with this lesson. Whether or not this is in fact what Kripke and Putnam taught us, the Property Dualism Argument is compatible with the view that the property through which a concept featuring in an *a posteriori* identity picks out its referent is merely a reference-fixer; it does not give the meaning/content of the relevant concept. Following Kripke, we can think of a reference-fixer as providing some property F through which we identify the referent of an expression or concept. For instance, to take a famous example, we might fix the referent of 'meter' by holding that 'one meter is the length of stick S at *t*' (1980: 54-5). That there are such reference-fixers is crucial to Kripke's account of modal error – i.e. his attempt to explain away the apparent conceivability of, for example, molecular kinetic energy without heat (see Section IV.2 above). He tells us that 'heat' has its reference fixed by the description 'that which is sensed by sensation S' (1980: 136).³⁵ Of course, one might insist that Kripke simply made a mistake here. One might even argue for this conclusion using Kripke's own semantic and epistemic arguments against reference-fixers in the case of names (1980: Lecture II). However,

³⁵ Kripke claims that "Heat=that which is sensed by sensation S'. Once again, the identity fixes a reference: it therefore is *a priori*, but not necessary, since heat might have existed, though we did not. 'Heat', like 'gold', is a rigid designator, whose reference is fixed by its 'definition'" (1980: 136).

simply insisting that the Property Dualism Argument fails because it presupposes something like senses or reference-fixers is unsatisfying in the absence of some alternative explanation of how agents can rationally disbelieve *a posteriori* identities.³⁶

IV.4 Dowell and Sobel on Informative Identities

The final challenge to the NPDA I'll consider emerges from a response to Derek Parfit's (2011: Ch. 26) Triviality Objection to Non-Analytic Naturalism, which is the closest relative to the NPDA in the metaethical literature.³⁷ I think that this response to the Triviality Objection, developed by J.L. Dowell and David Sobel (2017), works better as a reply to the NPDA.

Dowell and Sobel provide an account of how normative/natural identity claims might be informative, drawing on Robert Stalnaker's work on assertion. Dowell and Sobel ask us to consider a context in which two agents have agreed that a certain set of actions, A's act at t_1 ...and A_n 's act at t_n , share the property of being what one ought to do. These agents are wondering whether the property of being what one ought to do is the property of maximizing net happiness or the property of complying with the categorical imperative, having ruled out alternative hypotheses.³⁸ Suppose the agents determine that this set of actions are not instances of complying with the categorical imperative and one of them says, 'Being what one ought to do is maximizing net happiness'. Given a view on which assertions are understood as narrowing the space of possible worlds and a semantic theory according to which this utterance semantically expresses a proposition true in all possible worlds, the information communicated by this assertion can't be found by looking to its semantics – it doesn't rule out any possible worlds.³⁹ Dowell and Sobel claim that we need to look to pragmatics to explain the informational potential of the utterance, suggesting that this utterance might pragmatically

³⁶ Senses or reference-fixers are arguably needed for other purposes like explaining the semantic contribution of empty names and empty natural kind terms. They are also arguably presupposed by folk-psychology. For defence of these points see Segal (2000) and Wikforss (2006). Also, I have some sympathy for the view that Kripke (and Putnam's) arguments in fact presuppose that we possess something like a recipe or criterion for determining the extension of an expression or concept at a world. This view is defended by, amongst others, Frank Jackson (1998; 2007; 2009). See Kroon (2009) for a helpful reconstruction and defence of Jackson's argument.

³⁷ Unfortunately, considerations of space mean that I can't consider the relationship between the NPDA and Parfit's Triviality Objection in detail here. I'll have to limit myself to observing that the Triviality Objection turns on whether proponents of Non-Analytic Normative Identity Theory can vindicate the claim that normative concepts are indispensable (cf. Copp 2017). This issue doesn't bear on the success or failure of the NPDA.

³⁸ Note, I'm modifying Dowell and Sobel's case here for the sake of continuity with my discussion. Dowell and Sobel focus on a case in which the agents in the scenario described are concerned to discover whether rightness=maximizing net happiness or complying with the categorical imperative (2017: 166).

³⁹ Propositions are being understood here as sets of possible worlds.

communicate that it's not the case that the set of actions in question – where this is to be understood *de dicto*, so in some worlds the relevant individuals performed acts at the relevant times other than the ones they actually did – have the property of complying with the categorical imperative (2017: 166-7).⁴⁰⁴¹

The general lesson that Dowell and Sobel draw from their discussion is that ‘the informativeness of an assertion of the form NORM=NAT will depend upon which, likely inessential, *a posteriori* features for NORM are used by interlocutors to pick it out in specific contexts’ (2017: 166). This lesson might be extended to cases in which a subject rejects a normative/natural identity – i.e. the kind of case which is the focus of the NPDA. Dowell and Sobel might suggest that if one of the subjects in the scenario they describe were to assert, ‘It’s not the case that the property of being what one ought do is identical with maximizing net happiness’ – something necessarily false so uninformative in virtue of its semantic content on the view of assertion and propositional content they accept – the subject would communicate something like the proposition that it’s not the case that the property that A’s act at t_1 ...and A_n ’s act at t_n have in common is maximizing net happiness.

We can fruitfully see Dowell and Sobel’s work as offering a way to challenge (NPDA8). Recall that (NPDA8) suggests that it’s not the case that the property that the agent associates with being what one ought to do is a non-normatively characterized property, given the assumption that Analytic Naturalism is false. The argument for (NPDA8) I gave was that if this property were a non-normatively characterized property the agent would be in a position to learn the ought truths through conceptual *a priori* reasoning if given a complete non-normative description of the world. However, Dowell and Sobel might suggest that this argument only works if we assume that this property – call it ‘P’ – is not such that the agent learns about its connection with the property of being what one ought to do *a posteriori*. If the connection between P and the property of being what one ought do is an *a posteriori* discovery, the agent will not be in a position to learn the ought truths simply in virtue of their understanding of *ought* and knowledge of the non-normative truths.

⁴⁰ For a detailed attempt to explain the informativeness of identity statements (and anti-substitution intuitions in propositional attitude contexts) by appealing to broadly pragmatic mechanisms see Soames (2002: Ch. 2 & 8). For some worries about this approach see Braun (1998, 2002).

⁴¹ I’m focusing here on one of the several suggestions Dowell and Sobel offer about the proposition which might be pragmatically expressed by this assertion. The points I’ll go on to make concerning this proposal can be applied to their other suggestions.

To see the problem with this challenge to the NPDA, focus on how an agent is supposed to discover the connection between P and the property of being what one ought to do if this is an *a posteriori* matter. For instance, returning to Dowell and Sobel's example, the subject acquires evidence that the property that A's act at t_1 ...and A_n 's act at t_n have in common is the property of being what one ought to do.⁴² But notice that this presupposes that the subject already has some other way of picking out the property of being what one ought to do in thought; they must have some way of picking out the property of being what one ought to do independently of property P in order to establish this connection. But now it should be clear that P can't be used to explain how the subject is representing the world when they deny that the property of being what one ought to do is identical with maximizing net happiness because, as we have seen, P does not serve as the property they use to pick out the property of being what one ought to do.

My discussion of Dowell and Sobel's argument helpfully illustrates what I think is a key idea underpinning the NPDA: If $NORM=NAT$ is *a posteriori* we need to be told what sort of empirical evidence justifies believing the identity. This story will involve positing some way of establishing the presence of $NORM$. (An analogous epistemological point is central to the original presentation of the PDA in Smart (1959: 149). As Smart puts it, the issue is how to 'pin down' one-half of the identity.) The NPDA suggests that proponents of Non-Analytic Normative *A Posteriori* Identity Theory are unable to provide a plausible account of how we establish the presence of $NORM$, consistent with the commitments of the theory. It is this story about how we establish the presence of $NORM$ which explains how agents can rationally disbelieve the identity; what justifies an agent disbelieving the identity is that they have evidence that the property that they use to establish the presence of $NORM$ isn't co-instantiated with the property they use to establish the presence of NAT . The fact that the NPDA is intimately tied up with the epistemology of *a posteriori* identities in this way helps to distinguish the argument from normative conceivability arguments, which lack this focus.⁴³ This feature of the NPDA also connects the argument to Frank Jackson's work (1998: Ch. 6; 2003) on Moral Naturalism. Jackson argues for the conclusion that there is an *a priori* element to how we establish necessary *a posteriori* identities and draws the lesson that this makes such identities unpromising as models for developing Non-Analytic Moral Naturalism.

⁴² This example is in some ways not ideal because it's likely that A's act at t_1 ...and A_n 's act at t_n share many different properties. For example, the actions presumably all share the feature of being performed by human beings.

⁴³ Cf. White (2007: 225-6) on the difference between the PDA and conceivability arguments.

In Section (IV) I've tried to show that the NPDA can be defended against objections. However, I want to be clear about the limitations of the argument. The NPDA is targeted exclusively at those Non-Analytic Naturalist views which hold that normative properties are identical to natural properties and that such identities are *a posteriori*. Consequently, there are two ways of escaping the argument available to the Non-Analytic Naturalist: deny that normative/natural identities are *a posteriori* or deny that normative properties are identical to natural properties. The first strategy threatens to collapse Non-Analytic Naturalism into Analytic Naturalism.⁴⁴ The second strategy is, I think, more promising. The NPDA leaves Non-Identity Non-Analytic Naturalism unscathed.

V. Conclusion

My aim in this paper has been to offer an argument against a form of Non-Analytic Naturalism. A secondary aim has been to show how arguments in the philosophy of mind can help illuminate metaethical debates. To these ends, I've argued that we can transpose the Property Dualism Argument to the metaethical domain to show that normative properties are not *a posteriori* identical with natural properties.

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⁴⁴ A Non-Analytic Naturalist might hold that normative/natural identities are synthetic *a priori* truths and so avoid their position collapsing into Analytic Naturalism. (I'm assuming here that Analytic Naturalists are committed to holding that any normative/natural identities are (at least in part) epistemically analytic, in the sense spelled out in Boghossian (2021)). However, I'm not aware of any proponent of Non-Analytic Normative Naturalism (or Non-Analytic Moral Naturalism) who explicitly affirms the view that normative/natural identities are synthetic *a priori*, probably because the position is in tension with the sorts of background epistemological views that tend to be accepted by proponents of Normative Naturalism (and perhaps also because the position is inconsistent with some accounts of what it is to be a natural property in the metaethical literature). Although cf. Rosen (2020: 216).

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