

## Through Thick and Thin with Ned Block: How *Not* to Rebut the Property Dualism Argument

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**Abstract** In “Max Black’s Objection to Mind–Body Identity,” Ned Block seeks to offer a definitive treatment of property dualism arguments that exploit modes of presentation. I will argue that Block’s central response to property dualism is confused. The property dualist can happily grant that mental modes of presentation have a hidden physical nature. What matters for the property dualist is not the hidden physical side of the property, but the apparent mental side. Once that ‘thin’ side is granted, the property dualist has won. I conclude that although Block is wrong to think that the property dualist must argue for so-called thin mental properties, Block, and the physicalist, are able to resist property dualism. But any attempt to bolster this resistance and do more than dogmatically assert the crucial identity runs a serious risk of undermining the physicalism it is meant to save.

**Keywords** Property dualism · Ned Block · Stephen White · Max Black objection · Thick properties · Thin properties · Phenomenal properties · Qualia

In a recent paper, “Max Black’s Objection to Mind–Body Identity,” Ned Block seeks to offer a definitive treatment of property dualism arguments that exploit modes of presentation.<sup>1</sup> Although there is much of value in Block’s exhaustive essay (it runs over seventy pages), I will argue that its central response to property dualism is confused. Block argues that the property dualist requires ‘thin’ modes of presentation for mental concepts and that if the physicalist can establish that those modes of presentation are instead ‘thick,’ with a hidden physical nature, then the physicalist will have carried the day. But this is confused, or so I will contend. The property dualist can happily grant that mental modes of presentation have a hidden physical nature. What matters for the property dualist is not the hidden physical side

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<sup>1</sup>The paper appears in two places: Block (2006a, b). Citations will be to the latter.

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of the property, but the apparent mental side. Once that ‘thin’ side is granted, the property dualist has won.

My paper will break into eight parts. In part one, I present the property dualism argument. In part two, I articulate Block’s explication where he distinguishes three property dualism arguments, depending on which function of modes of presentation is exploited. I move on to criticize Block in parts three and four, contending that his central treatment misidentifies the threat from the property dualist. Central to my criticism of Block will be two ways of understanding what it is for an entity to be both mental and physical. In part five, I consider an objection to my criticisms. In parts six and seven, I introduce an argument to bolster property dualism and assess Block’s prospects for resisting it. I end in part eight with some brief remarks about where the debate stands.

When the dust finally settles, I conclude that although Block is wrong to think that the property dualist must argue for thin properties, Block, and the physicalist, are able to resist property dualism. But any attempt to bolster this resistance and do more than dogmatically assert the crucial identity runs a serious risk of undermining the physicalism it is meant to save.

### The Property Dualism Argument: An Initial Characterization

As there are several arguments for property dualism prominent in the literature, it pays to be explicit about just which of those arguments Block aims to rebut. As his title suggests, the original argument, or kernel of an argument, is to be found in Max Black’s objection (Objection 3) to J. J. C. Smart’s early identity theory. Smart presents the objection as follows:

[I]t may be possible to get out of asserting the existence of irreducibly psychic processes, but not out of asserting the existence of irreducibly psychic properties. For suppose we identify the Morning Star with the Evening Star. Then there must be some properties which logically imply that of being the Morning Star, and quite distinct properties which entail that of being the Evening Star. Again, there must be some properties (for example, that of being a yellow flash) which are logically distinct from those in the physicalist story (p. 172).<sup>2</sup>

Smart’s candidate identity claim here is that a yellowish-orange after-image is identical with some brain process. The objection maintains that even if we grant that the after-image is identical with the brain process, there still is an irreducibly mental property by which we ‘pick out’ the after-image. And that property, by itself, will falsify physicalism.

Block offers the following as a rough characterization of the argument:

The idea of the Property Dualism Argument...is that the mind–body identity approach to phenomenality fails in regard to the phenomenality that is involved in a certain kind of subjective mode of presentation...of a phenomenal state.

<sup>2</sup> References are to the reprinted article, “Sensations and Brain Processes,” as it appears in Rosenthal (1991). The original appeared in Smart (1959).

Even if a mind–body identity claim is true, when we look at the mode of presentation of the mental side of the identity, we are forced to accept a ‘double aspect’ account in which unreduced phenomenal properties remain (p. 251).

The idea, then, is even granting that the mind–body identity claim is true, the subjective mode of presentation of the mental side reintroduces an unreduced phenomenal property. The intuitive force of the argument can be seen if we explore an example. Consider the identity statement ‘*Q* = cortico-thalamic oscillation,’ where ‘*Q*’ refers to (say) the property of being painful and ‘cortico-thalamic oscillation’ refers to the candidate physical property with which being painful is identical. Associated with the concept of *Q* is a certain mental mode of presentation, *M*. And associated with the concept of cortico-thalamic oscillation is a certain, presumably physical, mode of presentation. The argument contends that if *M* is to serve its function as a mode of presentation (more about this below), it will have to be non-physical. So, the argument concludes, any mental–physical identity brings in its wake a mental residue in the form of a mental mode of presentation that serves to falsify the identity theorist’s overall position. If one pushes down the bulge in the carpet by identifying being painful with being cortico-thalamic oscillation, the bulge only reappears with *M*.

The characterization above leaves the heart of the argument unspecified. What is it about *M*, the mental mode of presentation, that precludes its being physical? Block himself will consider three arguments for this claim based on the different functions of modes of presentation. And so, in a way, he explicates not so much the property dualism argument, but rather property dualism arguments. Before turning to those arguments, I want to preempt a certain natural objection that can arise at this point.

One might wonder why it has to be granted that *M* is a mental mode of presentation. Isn’t it possible that *M* is itself physical or topic-neutral? In response, the identity theorist should grant that *M* may itself be a physical or topic-neutral mode of presentation. So, for example, perhaps there is some mode of presentation of being painful that analyzes it in terms of typical input, outputs, and relations to other internal states of a system. And for such modes of presentation, the property dualism argument fails to get traction. The problem for the identity theorist, however, is that there seem to be modes of presentation of mental concepts that are neither explicitly physical nor topic-neutral. For example, being painful arguably has an associated phenomenal mode of presentation, something like the painful feeling itself, or perhaps a Humean ‘copy’ of such a feeling. For this mode of presentation, the property dualist argument can be run. It is no response to such an argument to point out that there are other modes of presentation on which the argument fails. Although true, that fact fails to rebut an argument that exploits such a phenomenal mode of presentation.

A bolder objection would be to deny that there are any phenomenal modes of presentation that cannot be analyzed a priori in physical or functional terms. And certainly there are some philosophers willing to make such a denial. And so, the conclusion of these property dualism arguments is not so much the thesis of property dualism itself, but rather that thesis disjoined with what Block calls deflationism about consciousness, the view that the concepts of consciousness are a priori analyzable in nonphenomenal terms, usually in terms of representation, thought, or function (p. 275). Either there are no conceptually unreducible phenomenal modes of presentation, or

there are mental properties that are distinct from any physical or functional properties. The middle ground that these arguments aim to eliminate is physicalism conjoined with phenomenal realism, the thesis that the concepts of consciousness are not a priori analyzable in non-phenomenal terms. As this is a well populated territory, the arguments, even with their disjunctive conclusion, are worth examining.<sup>3</sup>

### Block's Presentation of the Property Dualism Arguments

According to Block, the orthodox Property Dualism Argument works by listing all the candidates for the nature of M and showing that only a topic-neutral or nonphysical nature is viable. The candidates for the nature of M are:

- (1) Mental,
- (2) Physical,
- (3) Non-physical,
- (4) Topic-neutral or
- (5) Non-existent.

You will recall that the conclusion of the property dualism argument is that M is either non-physical or topic-neutral. For the argument to succeed, it needs to eliminate the other three options. We can see the problem with (1), that M is mental. If M itself is mental, then the problem has simply been relocated. The physicalist needs to show how M can be both mental and physical. Simply claiming that M is mental, although true, does nothing to address the Property Dualism Argument. (5) changes the subject. Even if there is a way for Q to pick out its referent without using a phenomenal mode of presentation, that is not the way that the property dualist is exploiting in his argument.

That leaves (3), that M is physical. It is here that the property dualist will need to do some heavy lifting. From the rough characterization above, Block extracts three arguments for the claim that M cannot be physical. The first is the Regress Argument, the second the Argument from A Priori Availability and the third the Argument based on the Thin/Thick Distinction.

Before turning to the arguments, we need to define some terms. Roughly, a **thick property** is one that has a hidden essence, a **thin property** does not. In general, Putnamian natural kinds are thick, whereas mathematical and functional properties are thin.<sup>4</sup> For example, the property of being water is thick, while the property of being a heart (say) is thin. Being water is thick because “whether something is water goes beyond superficial manifestations of it” (p. 291). Being a heart is thin because its essence is completely revealed in ‘superficial manifestations’ of the property. The dispute between the property dualist and the physicalist is, as Block sees it, whether phenomenal properties are thick or thin.

<sup>3</sup> Perhaps of some historical interest, Smart himself addressed this objection by adopting a topic-neutral analysis of the relevant mode of presentation.

<sup>4</sup> This characterization is rough because, according to Block, if physical properties are thin, the thick/thin distinction will have to be relativized to concepts. See p. 290 for the details. It is not clear to me that the thin/thick distinction won't have to be relativized to concepts in any event. It would seem that subsuming a property under a concept that expresses its essence would make the property thin relative to that concept.

A **cognitive mode of presentation** (CMoP) is “a constellation of mental (cognitive or experiential) and semantic features of a term or mental representation that plays a role in determining its referent, or, alternatively but not equivalently, constitutes the basis of an explanation of how true identities can be informative” (p. 261). The ‘cognitive’ indicates that we are on the mental side, and the two non-equivalent roles correspond to the two functions that modes of presentation play, determining reference and accounting for cognitive significance.

A **metaphysical mode of presentation** (MMoP) is that property of the referent in virtue of which the CMoP determines reference or explains cognitive significance, depending on the function of the CMoP. For example, consider the term ‘Hesperus.’ Its CMoP might be the cognitive features of ‘the evening star.’ Its MMoP would then be the property of rising in the evening.

### The Regress Argument

As we will see, Block himself contends that two of the property dualism arguments (The Regress Argument and The A Priori Availability Argument) reduce to the third (The Thin/Thick Argument). For my criticism, it will be useful to see how this reduction is effected. To keep things manageable, and to avoid tedium, I propose to focus only on the Regress Argument. A similar moral could be drawn from an examination of the A Priori Availability Argument.

The property dualist advances the Regress Argument to show that any attempt to reduce mental to physical properties will have to reintroduce an unreduced mental property. Consider our candidate property identity claim: pain = cortico-thalamic oscillation (c.t.o.). The Regress Argument exploits the cognitive significance function of MoP, the component that, among other things, explains how true identities can be informative. To bring out this function, consider a subject, Al, who believes that pain  $\neq$  c.t.o. Given that what Al believes is necessarily false, how can we explain the apparent coherence of Al’s belief?

The property dualist argues that we must introduce MoP’s to account for this coherence. Let the MMoP of pain be M, the painful feel. Let the MMoP of c.t.o. be, say, a certain reading of a brain scanner.<sup>5</sup> The idea is that, although pain = c.t.o., M  $\neq$  the brain scanner reading, so the coherence of Al’s belief is vindicated.

But now the property dualist shifts attention to M. The issue that confronted pain now confronts M. For any candidate physical property, P, with which M is identical, we can imagine a subject who coherently believes that M  $\neq$  P. This forces us to introduce a MMoP for M, call it M’, to explain the belief’s coherence. But then focus shifts to M’ and the regress is on its way. To explain the cognitive significance of identities, one has to introduce MMoP’s, but the MMoP for the mental side brings with it mentality and the question of its relationship to the physical is reintroduced.

As it stands, the Regress Argument seems to require two key premises.

- (1) To explain the cognitive significance of true identities, we must introduce distinct MMoP for each side of the identity.

<sup>5</sup> It strikes me that it would be more natural to run the argument in terms of CMoP’s. But Block chooses to focus on MMoP’s, so I am obliged to follow.

- (2) If the MMoP of the mental side is to explain the cognitive significance of the mental term, it cannot be physical.

Let us consider the reasons that the property dualist might adduce for (2). Here is the main motivation. When we are thinking about pain in virtue of experiencing the felt painful sensation, there is nothing in that presentation that seems physical. We cannot discern the neurophysiological aspect of the sensation (if indeed it has one) or any other (explicitly) physical aspect. All we have access to from the first person perspective is the painful sensation. If we are to be true to the phenomenology, we have to admit that the MMoP is not physical for the simple reason that from the first person perspective, it does not seem physical.

Block's response is to charge that (2) begs the question against the physicalist. The property dualist says that if M is to explain cognitive significance, then it has to be mental and if it is mental, it cannot be physical. But Block charges that the physicalist's thesis is that M is both mental and physical. As such, from the fact that M needs to be mental, the property dualist cannot infer that it is not physical. Here is how Block summarizes his criticism of the Regress Argument:

Thus, the Regress Argument in the form I have described it is like the old objection to physicalism that says that brain states involve the instantiation of electrochemical properties, but since pain does not involve the instantiation of such properties, pain can't be a brain state (p. 285).

If this is all that the Regress Argument comes to, then I think we must agree with Block that it is not a real threat to physicalism. After all, perhaps the painful feel, although it does not *seem* physical, *is* nevertheless physical; perhaps it has, as Block puts it, "a hidden physical nature."

I would suggest, however, that there is a more defensible version of the Regress Argument. The property dualist has a stronger argument than simply assuming that pain has no hidden physical nature because it does not seem to have one. The property dualist would be better served by replacing (2) with:

- (2'): If the MMoP of the mental side is to explain the cognitive significance of the mental term, it cannot be *only* physical.

The idea here is that as pain presents itself to us, we have access to some aspect of its nature. Perhaps pain does have a hidden physical nature. The property dualist need not deny this. However, what explains the cognitive significance of pain for us is not that hidden physical nature; it is, after all, hidden. Rather, what explains its cognitive significance is the manifest painful feel, the mental aspect.

There are two ways we might understand M's being both mental and physical.

*The Blob Aspect Reading:* M has no internal structure; it is, metaphysically speaking, a blob. M serves as the truthmaker for both the mental term and some physical term.

*The Two Aspect Reading:* M has internal structure, with a mental aspect, the painful feel, and some physical aspect.

To a great extent, the contrast between these two readings will emerge as our discussion continues. At this juncture, the central idea is that according to the Blob

Aspect Reading, there is a unified entity, a property, and this property, all of it, is that in virtue of which a mental and physical predicate apply to an individual. The Two Aspect Reading denies this unity, distinguishing aspects of the given property. Even if these two aspects mutually metaphysically necessitate one another, or as I will hereafter put it, even if the aspects are metaphysically fused, they are still irreducible to each other.

We have reached a crossroads in the Regress Argument. In order for (2') to be of use to the property dualist, it must be read in terms of the Two Aspect Reading. What arguments can the property dualist muster to support the Two Aspect Reading? On the other side, to offer an effective response to the Regress Argument, the physicalist needs to defend the Blob Aspect Reading or, at the very least, undermine the case for the Two Aspect Reading.

Block does neither. Instead, he contends that the only way that the Regress Argument can be salvaged is if the property dualist can show that mental properties are thin, that is, lacking any hidden physical nature. It is this that constitutes the reduction of the Regress to the Thin/Thick Argument, the idea being that the former cannot stand alone and will only go through if the latter succeeds. In light of this contention, Block takes the task of rebutting the Regress Argument to be to show that the physicalist can maintain that M is physical even if it does not seem physical. But this is insufficient. M may well be physical, but if it is also mental and if that mental aspect is in anyway irreducible to the physical, then the property dualist has carried the day.

### Against Thin Mental Properties

To take stock: Block has argued that the Regress Argument begs the question against physicalism insofar as the physicalist maintains that M is both mental and physical. He also believes that if the property dualist could show that mental properties are thin, then the argument would go through. I have argued that there are two ways M might be both mental and physical and that on the Two Aspect Reading, the property dualist argument goes through. Below I will consider what the property dualist might offer to support the Two Aspect over the Blob Aspect Reading. But for now, I want to follow Block's own rebuttal as he moves on to consider the Thin/Thick Argument. As we follow Block, we will find corroboration of the fact that he has misunderstood the threat from the property dualist argument.

Block considers the claim that not all of a thick property will be relevant to explaining cognitive significance but only an aspect of it. But he responds by arguing that the physicalist can maintain that that very aspect is thick and so, he seems to assume, physicalism would be vindicated.

Consider the following quotation:

I agree that the two terms of the identity 'Q = cortico-thalamic oscillation' pick out the referent via different aspects of that referent, different MMoPs. And I also agree that the aspect used by the mental term of the identity is available to the first person whereas the aspect used by the physical term is not. But it does not follow that the aspect used by the mental term is thin. It is true that no neurological property is explicitly part of the first person route, but that does



not show that it is not part of the first person route, albeit ontologically rather than explicitly (pp. 292–293).

But again, whether the aspect used by the mental term is thin or thick is beside the point. When Block asserts that the neurological property is part of the first person route, he suggests that there is more to the first person route than the neurological property.<sup>6</sup> It is just that suggestion that the physicalist cannot allow. The physicalist, and Block, need to say that the neurological property is identical with the first person route. It is not *part* of the first person route, *it is* the first person route.

Block comes close to appreciating this point when he writes, “On the physicalist view, the feel and the neurological state are not different aspects of one thing: they are literally identical. If they are aspects, they are identical aspects” (p. 293). Indeed, this is what the physicalist must say. But the real difficulty is to see how such a claim could be true, how could it be the case that the painful feel just is cortico-thalamic oscillation?

There is more to my objection here than a complaint about presentation. First, in framing the issue in terms of thin versus thick properties, Block makes it seem as if all the physicalist needs to do is to undermine the reasons for thinking that phenomenal modes of presentation are thin. But if I am right, this seriously mischaracterizes the threat from the property dualism argument. The physicalist needs to do something a good bit more difficult, namely, explain how the mental mode of presentation just is a physical property, or at the very least, undermine the reasons for thinking that the mental mode of presentation is distinct.

Second, in talking of thick properties with hidden physical essences, Block suggests a certain picture of how to make sense of the relationship between mental and physical aspects. The physical aspects are hidden, whereas the mental aspects are manifest, and somehow these two aspects are fused into a thick property. This picture allows the physicalist to help himself to an illegitimate intelligibility. For in suggesting a picture in which the aspects are distinct, he avoids confronting the difficult issue of what it could mean for a mental and physical aspect to be identical.

## An Objection

I have argued that Block has misunderstood the threat of the property dualist argument. He maintains that M is both mental and physical and takes that assertion to settle the issue. But the property dualist need not deny that M has a hidden physical essence, just so long as it has an irreducible mental aspect physicalism is falsified.

Block might respond to my objection by maintaining that his arguments against thin mental properties are arguments against the Two Aspect Reading. For in essence, he could argue, the Two Aspect Reading requires that there be a thin mental aspect, an aspect whose nature is fully revealed to the first person, that can be

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, to say that the property is part of the route does not entail that it is not the whole of the route. But it would be odd for Block to say that it is part of the route if he was thinking that it was also all of the route.



stripped away from its hidden physical aspect. As such, unless I rebut those arguments (which I have not done), my objection fails.<sup>7</sup>

This response requires that the Two Aspect Reading entails thin mental properties. With that entailment, Block's arguments against thin mental properties would be arguments against the Two Aspect Reading. I deny the entailment. Recall that originally the Two Aspect Reading was one way for M to have a hidden physical nature. It would be surprising, then, if this reading in fact entailed that M, or an aspect of M, has no hidden physical nature.

Here is one test for M's being a thin mental property. If M is thin, it is metaphysically possible for it to exist independently of any physical property. This is one way of capturing the metaphor that the mental aspect of M can be 'stripped away' from its physical aspect. The stripping away here would then simply be M's ability to exist apart from any physical property.

Does the Two Aspect Reading entail this metaphysical possibility? As it is stated, the Two Aspect Reading asserts that M has both a mental and physical aspect. It is silent about the nature of these aspects and about their modal relationship. As I see it, the ground is open for the property dualist to simply assert that the mental and physical aspects are metaphysically joined, that M's mental aspect cannot exist apart from its physical one. As such, if the two aspects cannot exist apart, then the Two Aspect Reading does not entail thin mental properties.

Block might balk at the assertion that the mental and physical aspects must exist together. It is forced, he could argue, since there is no conceptual reason for the two aspects to necessarily co-instantiate. If there were such a necessary connection between the two aspects, it would have to be a brute metaphysical necessity.

But Block is barred from objecting to brute metaphysical necessities here. For the physicalist position he is defending endorses phenomenal realism, the thesis that the concepts of consciousness are not *a priori* analyzable in non-phenomenal terms. As such, in the end on this view, there will be no conceptual reasons for the mental and physical to necessarily co-instantiate. Given that Block himself will have to countenance brute metaphysical necessities on his view, he is in no position to object to the property dualist's use of them here.

So: the property dualist is free to assert that there is a brute metaphysical necessity between the mental and physical aspects and so free to deny the entailment between the Two Aspect Reading and thin mental properties. Even granting Block's arguments against the latter, the former remains unfalsified.

## Two Aspect vs. Blob

The property dualist still owes us an argument in favor of the Two Aspect Reading of M's being both mental and physical. As it stands now, Block, as a representative physicalist, can just dig in and assert the Blob Aspect Reading. In a minute, I will offer an argument on the property dualist's behalf. To anticipate, shortly, I will contend that the argument fails and that Block can assert the crucial identity between

<sup>7</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous referee for raising this objection.

the mental and physical. But an important conclusion for the physicalist will emerge: that he can do little more than dogmatically assert the identity lest he slide into the property dualism he is trying to avoid.

I propose pressing an argument inspired by Terry Horgan and John Tienson into service at this crucial juncture.<sup>8</sup>

- (1) In being aware of a phenomenal property, I am aware of it as it is, i.e., my awareness is veridical.
- (2) In being aware of it, I am not aware of any physical nature as such.
- (3) In being aware of it, I am aware of its having some qualitative character.
- (4) In being aware of it, I am aware of a non-physical character. (2) and (3)
- (5) There is a non-physical character. (1) and (4).

Before turning to a defense of this argument, let me compare it to the original Regress Argument. That argument sought to exploit the cognitive significance function of MoP's to establish property dualism. It did so by looking at a case in which a true identity was denied. The argument here, what we might call the Awareness Argument, seeks to exploit the cognitive significance function of MoP's more directly, arguing from the character of phenomenal awareness to property dualism. The need to rationalize necessarily false beliefs does not enter into the argument.<sup>9</sup>

The denial of premise (1) is a non-starter, as it amounts to eliminativism regarding phenomenology. As Block himself is seeking to defend phenomenal realism, he cannot deny (1). It is important to appreciate just what (1) commits us to. It does not commit us to the view that when someone instantiates a phenomenological property, she is aware of its complete nature. It only maintains that her awareness, whether complete or incomplete, is not mistaken.

Premise (2) is supported by phenomenological experience. When I am experiencing an intense pain, I have no explicit access to its physical nature. I am not able to discern its physical description simply from experiencing it. It is not clear that a physicalist could deny (2) without embracing some form of conceptual reduction of the mental to the physical. But even leaving that aside, phenomenological experiences themselves attest to (2). In any event, Block is happy to grant (2) (see pp. 292–293).

Premise (3) maintains that our awareness of a phenomenological property is an awareness of its having some qualitative character. Even if one wants to distinguish different kinds of awareness, at least some of the awareness we have of phenomenological properties is of a kind that involves a manifest qualitative character. Our awareness is not like a case of Super Blind Sight or a simply bare inner demonstrative. It is hard to see how Block, as a phenomenal realist, can deny (3).

What about the inference to (4)? Here is the idea: I am aware of something and I am aware of it as having some kind of quality but my awareness of that quality is not awareness of a physical quality as such. Therefore, I am aware of the phenomenal

<sup>8</sup> See Horgan & Tienson (2001). The argument in the text differs somewhat from theirs. But the central move from awareness to reality remains the same.

<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the form of The Awareness Argument also differs significantly from White (2006a, b), both of which focus on the need for the physicalist to rationalize a necessarily false belief.

property's having some non-physical quality. But given that my awareness is veridical, there must be some non-physical quality to be the object of my awareness. And we have arrived at (5), which falsifies physicalism.

As it stands, the Awareness Argument suffers a fatal flaw: it proves too much. It argues from a veridical awareness of a property that is not explicitly physical to the falsity of physicalism. But one can legitimately wonder whether the premises here are too weak to derive the conclusion. After all, consider an analogue. I am currently aware of a truck. Grant that this awareness is veridical; there really is a truck of which I am aware. The property of being a truck is not explicitly physical; however, my awareness of it has some kind of character. It is not a case of Super Blind Sight or a bare demonstrative. So: the property of being a truck is non-physical. So: physicalism is false. But surely this is a *reductio*. Any reasonable form of physicalism cannot be committed to the denial that some times we are aware of trucks as such.

Although some philosophers have argued for the elimination of macro-objects, I am not inclined to saddle the property dualist with such a radical form of eliminativism when it comes to non-mental macro properties. Instead, let's grant the objection and seek an emendation that will avoid it. I propose the following:

(3.5) In being aware of a phenomenal property, the qualitative character of which I am aware is not exhaustively characterizable in functional terms.

The proposal here is that what distinguishes phenomenal properties from other properties is that the latter, unlike the former, are completely functionalizable.<sup>10</sup> As such, in being aware of such properties, although they are not explicitly physical, they do not constitute a threat to physicalism, as they are straightforwardly realizable by physical properties.

As Block himself is committed to denying that the phenomenal can be characterized topic-neutrally, and so functionally, he will have to accept (3.5). The proponent of the Awareness Argument does take on a certain liability in asserting (3.5). She commits herself to the idea that either the properties of which we are veridically aware are explicitly physical or functional or such properties are plausible candidates for falsifying physicalism. I do not think it is obvious that this commitment can be met. In particular, I have my reservations about whether our property dualist can show that all of our more commonsense properties are completely functionalizable. But here at least the property dualist has entered on familiar ground, populated by other philosophers including Jaegwon Kim and David Chalmers.<sup>11</sup>

Even granting that the property dualist can meet the commitment above, I suspect that Block would dig in and deny the inference from (2), (3), and (3.5) to (4). That is, Block will argue that just because we are veridically aware of something that does not seem physical, it does not follow that it is not physical.

<sup>10</sup> An anonymous referee questioned the rationale for restricting the class of properties to those that are functionalizable. The justification is dialectical: I want the narrowest class that will plausibly address the problem cases. There's no reason to expand the class of properties and incur any added epistemic burden if functional properties alone will fill the bill.

<sup>11</sup> See Chalmers (1996) and Kim (1998).

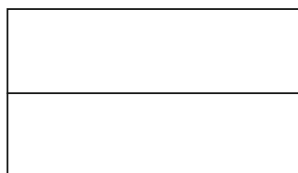
But to this reply, the property dualist can respond that she is not claiming that the qualitative character of which we are aware is not physical. Rather, she is saying that it is not only physical. Why? because we are veridically aware of it as non-physical and so, unless we are going to argue that we are mistaken in thinking of it as non-physical, and so deny veridicality, we must, says the property dualist, admit that there is a non-physical qualitative character of which we are aware.

Can Block plausibly contend that the Awareness Argument begs the question against the physicalist? Does it somehow illicitly assume the Two Aspect Reading and thereby assume just what is at stake? What I have in mind is that at this crucial inference, Block could try to hunker down and advocate the Blob Aspect Reading of M's being both mental and physical.

### **Blob vs. Two Aspect**

Does the Awareness Argument beg the question against Block? Here is the case for its not begging the question. It starts with veridical awareness that is not of a functional property nor of an explicitly physical property. It then infers the existence of a non-physical qualitative character. It makes no further claims about this character. Perhaps it is in addition physical, although its physicality is not revealed in our first person awareness of it. Perhaps its relationship to the physical is such that it is not metaphysically possible for this non-physical aspect to exist alone. Nothing in the argument prejudges any of these issues. It simply says that there is something non-physical of which we are aware, else we have to deny that our awareness is veridical.

Perhaps there is a sliver of space for Block to maneuver here. We might be able to describe this space by returning to the two readings of M's being both mental and physical and considering the metaphysical pictures that underlie them. The Two Aspect Reading suggests the following picture of a property's being both mental and physical. Take pain as an example. According to the property dualist, we can represent the pain property as follows:



Note the internal structure here, with a subjective aspect above and (say) a neurophysiological aspect below.

With the internal structure of the pain property, the property dualist has a ready explanation of how it can be both mental and physical (it has mental and physical aspects) and how our awareness of it can fail to reach down to its physical nature (we have access only to the mental aspect). When we apply the concept of pain based on our first person awareness, the truthmaker for its application is the subjective aspect of the pain property, not its neurophysiological aspect, or so the property dualist contends.

There is something (nearly) overwhelmingly natural about this picture when we consider phenomenal properties, or so at least it seems to me. Its naturalness is abetted by the fact that it seems deeply puzzling how a phenomenal aspect itself, how the pained feel of a pain, could be ‘nothing but’ a physical property. To avoid the puzzle, we separate the aspects, even if somehow fusing them into a single property.

To counter this natural picture, the physicalist offers the Blob Aspect Reading. He accuses the property dualist of reifying aspects. When considering the truthmaker for the concept of pain, there is simply the physical property. That very same physical property is the truthmaker for some neurophysiological concept. The property has no internal structure, no distinct aspects in virtue of which the different concepts apply (hence, it is a blob). This one property, with its unitary nature, serves as the truthmaker for both a mental and a physical concept. Its physicality is that in virtue of which the mental concept applies. Its mentality is that in virtue of which the physical concept applies. Its physicality *is* its mentality.

Armed with the blob, the physicalist can try to block the key inference of the Awareness Argument. We are aware of a phenomenal property, and although our awareness is not of something that is explicitly physical, it is an awareness of something that is physical (and mental). Its physicalness is its mentalness. Being aware of the latter is being aware of the former, for there is only one thing, a blob, that is both mental and physical. To think that its mentalness cannot be its physicalness is simply a prejudice based on the facile inference from its being mental to its being non-physical, or so says the physicalist. To get the conclusion that there is a non-physical nature, the property dualist has to separate out the mental aspect as an irreducible entity. But the physicalist can obstinately dig in and assert that the mental aspect is the physical aspect. To assume otherwise is to beg the question against him. This is the sliver of space on which Block can make his stand.

## Taking Stock

In this exchange, who wins? It looks to be a draw. The property dualist can push the Awareness Argument, but the key inference can be resisted with a commitment to the idea that the mental is ‘nothing but’ the physical. And of course, given that the argument was put forward by the property dualist, a draw means the physicalist has won, as he has successfully resisted property dualism.

But there is a real danger here that the physicalist’s victory will prove illusory. The danger arises along two distinct fronts. First, does the Blob Aspect Reading collapse into neutral monism?<sup>12</sup> On one understanding, the neutral monist holds that there is a class of entities that figure in the reduction base of both mental and physical non-basic identities.<sup>13</sup> It’s not difficult to see how the blobs required for the physicalist here might be taken to meet this definition. Block, and physicalists more generally, need to say much more about how the Blob Aspect Reading can simultaneously secure physicalism and avoid neutral monism. On the face of it, the

<sup>12</sup> Many thanks to Robert Schroer for suggesting this line of criticism.

<sup>13</sup> For this formulation of neutral monism, see Stubenberg (2005).

task seems daunting. To avoid the Two Aspect Reading, the physicalist looks forced to embrace some form of a neutral entity that can serve as the truthmaker for both mental and physical concepts. But then it is unclear whether this view can do justice to the core physicalist's notion that, in some sense, the physical is ontologically and explanatorily basic.

The other danger arises once we consider what kind of understanding we have achieved of the relationship between the mental and physical. We hold out hope for a view that can relieve our puzzlement concerning just how the mental, and in particular, the phenomenal, could be 'nothing but' the physical. One gets the impression that the physicalist here says: "Puzzlement be damned, 'they' just are the same." Even if this hunkering down succeeds in resisting the property dualist's argument, it strikes one as dogmatic, as simply asserting the crucial claim without doing enough to make it intelligible. Any attempt to flesh the claim out, however, runs the risk of needing to articulate the truthmaker for the distinct concepts and thereby, falling back into the Two Aspect Reading.

We have reached the following conclusion: Block provides little illumination concerning the mental/physical (apparent) divide. Block's appeal to the thin/thick distinction is, at best, misleading, at worst, conceding the issue to the property dualist. The real work in his response comes with the assertion that the mental aspect just is the physical aspect, that is, with the Blob Aspect Reading. But he does little more than baldly assert it. If physicalism has been saved from the property dualist, it hardly has come through unscathed, for serious questions remain about whether what the physicalist needs, blobs, can be squared with his commitment to physicalism.

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