Preface

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which I successfully defended in August 2018 at Osnabrück University, Germany. When I started this project, I knew that I wanted to work on metaphysical questions concerning physicalism, but it took a while until it began to dawn on me that I did not really know what the thesis of physicalism is in the first place, and this was not due to not knowing the literature on the topic well enough. I thus investigated this question in more detail, singled out further questions I needed to address in order to come closer to an answer, and tried to answer them in a reasonable way. The outcome of the process of thinking hard about these issues for a few years is the book at hand.

The thesis of \textit{physicalism} is the contemporary descendant of early modern materialism, as prominently defended by Thomas Hobbes, combined with some aspects of the positivist views about the priority of physics over the other sciences put forward by Rudolf Carnap and Otto Neurath, who first introduced the term ‘physicalism’ in the early 1930s. Many different variants of physicalism have been proposed by advocates of the view, and rejected by their pluralist rivals. However, not only is it difficult to frame a watertight argument for or against the view, it also turns out to be notoriously difficult to formulate what exactly the thesis of physicalism is in the first place. There are, of course, some rough-and-ready formulations virtually everybody agrees to, which I use as a starting point for my inquiry. One can say either that physicalism is the thesis that (i) \textit{everything} is physical, or that it is the claim that (ii) \textit{there is nothing over and above the physical}. In order to transform these very crude formulations into a substantial one, I address three questions: \textit{First}, drawing on formulation (i), I clarify what it means to say that \textit{everything} is physical. What entities is physicalism concerned with, and what kinds of entities do we have to explicitly ascribe \textit{being physical} to? I suggest that we need to focus on properties of individuals. \textit{Second}, again drawing on formulation (i), I address what it means to say that \textit{everything} is physical, and more specifically, what it means for a property to be a physical property. I consider the options available in the literature, reject the standard views, and develop an alternative account based on the idea that physical properties share a common nature. \textit{Third}, drawing on formulation (ii), I analyze what it means to say that a property is \textit{nothing over and above} certain other properties. Formulation (i) might suggest that the relation in question is identity, but I argue that although identity can indeed account for nothing-over-and-above-ness, a weaker notion of \textit{metaphysical dependence} also suffices to capture the relevant idea of nothing-over-and-above-ness and en-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110688429-001
ables us to properly draw the boundary between physicalist views and their pluralist rivals. However, the required notion of metaphysical dependence goes beyond the purely modal notions of necessitation and supervenience, and more closely resembles the notion of Grounding that has recently taken center stage in the metaphysics literature. In sum, the answers to these three questions provided in this book combine into a comprehensive picture that helps us to better understand physicalism.

A number of people have contributed in different ways to make this project possible, and I am very grateful for their support. Sven Walter has been an excellent advisor. He left me with enough freedom to work on a topic that is somewhat untypical for a dissertation at a cognitive science department, and provided me with many insights and helpful comments, not only regarding the content of this book. Most importantly, he showed me how encouraging and fruitful the relationship between a professor and a doctoral student can be. I am very happy to have him as my Doktorvater.

My current and former colleagues at the cognitive science department as well as the philosophy department at Osnabrück University contributed to the warm and friendly working environment I find myself in. Without them, my time in Osnabrück would not have been the same: Benjamin Angerer, Diego Azevedo Leite, Lasse Bergmann, Frieder Bögner, Susanne Boshammer, Samuel Cosper, Armin Egger, Sascha Fink, André Grahle, Nikola Kompa, Charles Lowe, Imke von Maur, Uwe Meyer, Jumana Yahya (Morciglio), Anna Nuspliger, Asena Paskaleva-Yankova, Andrea Robitzsch, Sebastian Schmoranzer, Stefan Schneider, Kathrin Schuster, Achim Stephan, Jennifer Wagner, Sven Walter, and Carlos Zednik.

I learned a lot about metaphysical dependence from Jessica Wilson during the summer course she taught at the University of Hamburg in 2017. Frances Egan and Brian McLaughlin made possible my research stay at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, USA, in early 2018, funded by the DAAD. I made a lot of progress writing this book during that time. Brian McLaughlin also agreed to join Sven Walter and Achim Stephan in taking up the laborious task of thoroughly reading the dissertation manuscript and writing a referee report. Uwe Meyer and Kai-Uwe Kühnberger joined the defense committee. Malte Achenbach helped me a lot in setting up the index at the end of this book.

A few more people made substantial contributions along the way. Michael Seitlinger, a fellow student at the University of Technology in Graz, Austria, encouraged me to take my very first philosophy class at the University of Graz back in 2004. At the time, I did not even have a clear conception of what philosophy is, but it did not take long before I was hooked. Martina Fürst established the contact to Sven Walter in 2012. Without her, I would probably never have
come to Osnabrück. Last, but not least, thanks to Hannes Fraissler, with whom I had many insightful philosophical discussions over the years since I got to know him as a fellow student at the University of Graz.

On a more personal note, I would like to thank Sabine Weißenberg and her family for their ongoing support since the time I first came to Osnabrück as a visiting student in 2012, and for enduring all my enthusiastic monologues about philosophical issues. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my family for the unconditional support and encouragement they have provided to me throughout my life. This applies in particular to my siblings Markus and Michael, my mother Friederike, as well as my father Josef Hörzer, who sadly did not live to see this project finished. Thanks for everything!

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Osnabrück, February 2020