

Phil 317: [handout #6]
Donald Davidson: *Mental Events*

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§ Davidson's Main Goal:

- 1. To discard type identity theory.
- 2. To lay out token identity theory.

§ Terminology:

* "nomological": lawful, obeying laws.

* "anomaly": failure to fall under a law.

"Propositional Attitudes"

e.g. believe, intend, hope, remember, think, know, desire, want, etc.

vs. love, feel happy, etc.

"embedded sentences"

e.g. I believe that he is not coming today. I know that Socrates is the teacher of Plato.

"substitution failure"

e.g. His sister is getting married. → Martha is getting married.

I believe that his sister is getting married. ~→ I believe that Martha is getting married.

I want to go to Paris. ~→ I want to go to the capital of France.

"intentionality": *about other things*

"psychophysical laws": bridge laws between psychology and physics.

§ The issue: the problem of physical determinism and free will

1. Mental events such as perceiving, remembering, decisions, and actions resist capture in the nomological net of physical theory. → We have free will.
2. Causal determinism entails capture in the nomological net.
3. But mental events are in the physical world.
4. Q: How do we reconcile physical determinism and free will?

§ Three Principles that Davidson Accepts:

[A] The Principle of Causal Interaction:

___ **Mental events interact causally with physical events.**

[B] The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality:

___ **Where there is causality, there must be a law: Events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws.**

[C] The Principle of the Anomaly of the Mental:

___ **There are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained.**

==> A Paradox

Q: What is the paradox?

§ Davidson's Theory:

(i) Mental events are identical with physical events.

(ii) "Events": unrepeatable, dated individuals (an individual happening that is spatially and temporally confined.)

(iii) Token Identity Vs. Type Identity

___ **Events as *particulars* vs. event *kinds***

Q: How does he define "mental events" and "physical events"? Are events neutral?

NOTE:

___ **Mental: (i) substitution failure (ii) intentionality**

___ **He claims to be a "monist", not particularly a "materialist."**

§ Four Possible Kinds of Theories:

___ **Two issues: (a) Are mental events identical with physical events?**

(b) Are there psychophysical laws (laws that correlate mental and physical events)?

(1) Nomological Monism

___ **There are mental-physical correlating laws and that the events correlated are one and the same. ['yes' to both (a) and (b), e.g. materialism]**

(2) Nomological Dualism

___ **There are mental-physical correlating laws, but the events correlated are not the same. ['yes' to (b) but 'no' to (a). e.g. parallelism, interactionism, epiphenomenalism.]**

(3) Anomalous Dualism

___ There are no mental-physical correlating laws, since mental events and physical events are not the same. ['no' to both (a) and (b).]

(4) Anomalous Monism

___ Even though mental events are identical with physical events, there are no correlating mental-physical laws. ['yes' to (a) but 'no' to be. e.g. DAVIDSON]

§ Davidson's Anomalous Monism

___ i) it is materialism

___ ii) it is not reductionism

___ iii) it is consistent with the supervenience view

*** "Supervenience"**

___ There cannot be two *events* alike in all physical respects but differing in some mental respect.

___ An *object* cannot alter in some mental respect without altering in some physical respect.

§ Anomalous monism and the Three Principles:

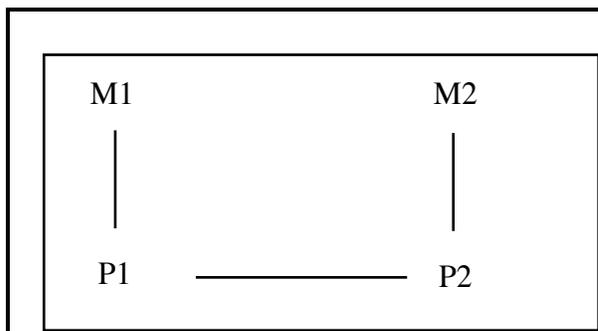
___ 1. Causality and identity are relations between individual events.

___ 2. Laws are linguistic.

___ 3. Individual events can be explained or predicted by laws only as those events are *described* in one way or another.

___ 4. There exists nomological (law-like) principle of causality when individual events are *described* in purely physical terms.

___ 5. But when events are *described* in mental terms, i.e., when we are dealing with mental events, we only have the principle of the anomalism of the mental.



***** Q: Why is the mental *irreducible* to the physical?**

___ **Mental and physical predicates are not made for each other.**

§ **Homonomic vs. heteronomic generalizations:**

___ **homonomic generalizations:** generalizations whose positive instances give us reason to believe the generalization itself could be improved by adding further provisos and conditions stated in the same general vocabulary as the original generalization. (physical sciences)

___ **heteronomic generalizations:** generalizations which when instantiated may give us reason to believe there is a precise law at work, but one that can be stated only by shifting to a different vocabulary. (practical sciences)

§ **Holism**

___ **We cannot intelligibly attribute any propositional attitude to an agent except within the framework of a viable theory of his beliefs, desires, intentions, and decisions.**

§ **Summary:**

1. There is a categorical difference between the mental and the physical.
2. Some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events. (the Principle of the Causal Dependence of the Mental.)
3. Each true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which the events mentioned as cause and effect belong. (the Nomological Character of Causality)
4. The mental does not constitute a closed system.
___ Too much happens to affect the mental that is not itself a systematic part of the mental.
5. No psychophysical statement is, or can be built into, a strict law. (the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental: there are no strict laws at all on the basis of which we can predict and explain mental phenomena.)
6. If a mental event m causes a physical event p , then under some description m and p instantiate a strict law. This strict law can only be physical. But if m falls under a physical law, it has a physical description; which is to say that it is a physical event. So every mental event that is causally related to a physical event is a physical event.

§ **[Davidson's Argument]**

1. **The Nomological Character of Causality: For every true singular causal statement, c causes e , there is a strict law connecting C-type and E-type of events.**
2. **If a mental event m causes a physical event p , then there must be a strict law connecting m and p .**

3. This strict law can only be physical.
4. Physical laws connect physical events (i.e., events described in physical terms.)
5. Therefore, the mental event that is causally related to a physical event is a physical event itself.

§ Conclusion: Autonomy and Freedom

___ Even if someone knew the entire physical history of the world, and every mental event were identical with a physical, it would not follow that he would predict or explain a single mental event (so described.)

___ The anomalism of the mental is thus a necessary condition for viewing action as autonomous.

[Topics for paper]:

1. Can Davidson reconcile freedom of will with the nomological view of causality? (Has Davidson solved the Free Will problem?)
2. Is the anomaly of the mental compatible with the nomologicality of the physical?