

Phil 317: Handout #18
Donald Davidson: *Thinking Causes*

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§ Davidson's Main Thesis:

I. AM is consistent.

II. The denial of strict psychophysical laws would not undermine the claim that mental events are causally efficacious.

§ The three premisses from which AM is derived:

(1) that mental events are causally related to physical events

(2) that singular causal relations are backed by strict laws

(3) that there are no strict psycho-physical laws

⇒ AM + P

§ "supervenience"

___ a predicate p is supervenient on a set of predicates S if and only if p does not distinguish any entities that cannot be distinguished by S.

* The definition of supervenience implies that

___ (i) a change in mental properties is always accompanied by a change in physical properties [same physical properties → same mental properties

~ same mental properties → ~ same physical properties]

but it does not imply that

___ (ii) the same physical properties change with the same mental properties.

§ The Causal Efficacy of Mental Events vs. Mental Properties

[A] The Causal Efficacy of Mental Events

* "Events" = particular time- and space-bound entities

"physical events" = using terms in physics to *describe* these time- and space-bound entities.

"mental events" = using terms in psychology to *describe* these time- and space-bound entities.

Davidson's Claim:

___ It is *events* that have the power to change things, not our various ways of describing them.

[B] The Causal Efficacy of Mental Properties

[Kim's Argument]:

1. Mental events = physical events.
2. But event cause *vis -à- vis* their physical properties; not their mental properties.
3. Therefore, unless we have mental properties = physical properties, mental properties are not causally efficacious.
4. But anomalous monism rejects that mental properties = physical properties.
5. Therefore, under anomalous monism, mental properties are not causally efficacious.

[Davidson's Rebuttal]:

1. While causal explanations must deal with laws, and so with types of events, causal relations hold only between particulars (individual events).
2. Properties are causally efficacious if they make a difference to what *individual* events cause.
3. But under the supervenience thesis, if two *individual* events differ in their mental properties, then they differ in their physical properties.
4. Thus under the supervenience thesis, mental properties make a difference to what physical properties individual events would have.
5. Physical properties are causally efficacious. (Both Kim and Davidson accept this claim.)
6. Therefore, mental properties are also causally efficacious.

§ The Problem of Causal-Explanatory Exclusion

___ Kim: the problem that seems to arise from the fact that a cause, or causal explanation, of an event, when it is regarded as a full, sufficient cause or explanation, appears to *exclude* other *independent* purported causes or causal explanations of it.'

* [Davidson's Reply]

1. Independent cause = a cause that is *ontologically* independent of another cause.
2. Independent causal explanation = an explanation that is *logically* independent of another explanation.
3. Mental causes are not independent causes separate from physical causes, though mental causal explanation can be logically independent of physical explanation.
4. Explanations are sensitive to our interests, and there is no reason to suppose we would lose interest in explanations in mental terms just because we had a complete physical explanation.
5. Therefore, having full and sufficient physical explanation would not "exclude" mental explanation.