

Phil 317: Handout #19

Kim: Can Supervenience and 'Non-Strict Laws' Save Anomalous Monism?

Professor JeeLoo Liu

--- A reply to Davidson's 'Thinking Causes'.

1. Have the Critics of AM (or AM + P) Charged it with Inconsistency?

By 'mentality' I was referring to mental properties, not individual mental events.

The difficulty that has been voiced by the many critics... is that the truth of this assertion (the event with some mental property or other are causes of events with some physical property or other) does not ensure the causal efficacy of mental properties.

2. Have the Critics of AM Made an Error in Claiming that AM + P is a Form of Epiphenomenalism?

It must be admitted that Davidson's commentators have not always been careful to distinguish between the following two claims:

- (1) AM + P entails the causal inertness of mental properties, and**
- (2) AM + P fails to provide mental properties with a causal role.**

* According to Davidson, (1) is false; and in this he is arguably right.

If something that purports to be a theory of mental causation assigns no causal role to mental properties -- if it has nothing to say about the causal powers of mental properties while saying plenty about those of physical properties -- the theory can reasonably be said to be epiphenomenalistic with regard to mental properties.

* Plainly (2) is true, and has never been seriously disputed.

Q: Is (2) really true? How would you defend Davidson's view here?

___ The defenders of AM have focused on extending AM by adding a positive account of the causal efficacy of mental properties.

In fact, this is Davidson's own approach: he wants to supplement AM + P with supervenience (S), and also with non-strict laws, to restore causal efficacy to mental properties, tacitly acknowledging that within the framework of AM + P mental properties have not causal role to play.

Q: Is Kim's criticism correct?

3. Have the Critics Tried to Turn the Causal Relation into a Multi-Termed, Description-Dependent, Intensional Relation?

___ Davidson complains that his critics have tried to turn the binary relation of causation, 'c causes e', into a multi-termed, possibly non-extensional, relation by employing such expressions as 'c *qua* P causes e *qua* M', 'c under description D causes e under description D*', etc.

Davidson is anxious to defend causation as an extensional binary relation whose relata are concrete events ('no matter how described').

Kim's reply:

___ What the critics have argued is perfectly consistent with causation itself being a two-termed extensional relation over concrete events; their point is that such a relation isn't enough: we also need a way of talking about the causal role of properties, the role of properties of events in generating, or grounding, these two-termed causal relations between concrete events.

What is necessary is the recognition that it makes sense to ask question of the form [Q] and be able to answer it:

[Q]: What is it about events c and e that makes it the case that c is a cause of e?

[A]: 'Because c is an event of kind F and e is one of kind G => a "nomic conception of causality": there is a law of an appropriate form connecting F-events and G-events.)

Causal relation obtains between a pair of events *because they are events of certain kinds, or have certain properties.*

4. Can You Have Psycho-Physical Supervenience without Psycho-Physical Laws?

Davidson: Supervenience does not imply the existence of psycho-physical laws, because although supervenience entails that any change in a **mental property p** of a particular event **e** will be accompanied by a change in the **physical properties of e**, it does not entail that a **change in p in other events** will be accompanied by an identical change in the **physical properties of those other events**.

=> supervenience ---> e has a mental property p and e has physical properties Qs, such that if e did not have p, e would not have Qs.

But not: supervenience ---> if another event g does not have p, then g would not have Qs.

=> That is to say, there is no law between p and Qs (from p to Qs) that cover both e and g and other individual events.

Kim's reply:

___ Davidson is plainly looking for the wrong kind of law.

Q: Why?

___ When the question of law is discussed in connection with supervenience, it almost always concerns laws *from* the base (or subvenient) properties to the supervenient properties (thus, physical-to-mental laws), not laws going in the opposite direction (mental-to-physical laws).

___ Thus, assuming that two systems are in the same total physical state (at the same or different times); psycho-physical supervenience implies this: *if the systems change in some identical physical respect Q, they must change in an identical psychological respect M.*

Supervenience (Kim):

___ whenever anything has mental property M there is some physical property Q such that it has Q and everything that has Q has M.

[Here Kim seems to be making a mistake in inference, however. If it is the case that everything that has Q has M, that means that sameness of physical states imply sameness of mental states. But it does not imply that difference in physical states would imply difference in mental states. If whenever x and y are the same physically, x and y must be the same mentally, then once we see that x and y are different mentally, we can deduce that they are not the same physically. It could happen, however, that x and y are the same mentally and yet differ in their physical aspects. Thus a change in physical states does not imply a change in mental states.]

[A list of questions:

Q1: Must a mental event have some physical properties?

Q2: How is it possible for another object, y, to have the same physical properties?

Q3: What is a psycho-physical law?] ==> a bridge law

Kim's questions for Davidson:

1. Does Davidson's "weak" supervenience impart to the generalizations an appropriate nomic force?

2. Can Davidson's "weak" supervenience provide the kind of dependency relation that most philosophers want to associate with supervenience?

5. Does AM + P + S Provide a Satisfactory Account of the Causal Relevance of Mental Properties?

* 'Causal relevance' may be one thing; 'causal efficacy' another.

___ Mental properties may be *causally relevant* but they are not *causally efficacious*.

"causal relevance" -- A property p is *causally relevant* if and only if

(i) p is *causally efficacious*; or

(ii) p makes a difference to q *and* q is causally efficacious.

"causal efficacy" -- A property p is *causally efficacious* if and only if p is instantiated by event c *and* p plays a causal role in the causation 'c causes e'.

Kim's claim:

___ Mere causal relevance seems too weak to support the causal-explanatory 'because' in rationalizing explanations.

6. What then of AM + P + NS (The Existence of 'Non-Strict' Psycho-Physical Laws)?

[Q: What exactly is a psycho-physical law?

=> M --> P (If x has the mental state M, then x has the physical state P)?]

Kim: Davidson says that his position is consistent with Fodor's defense of mental causal efficacy based on non-strict laws hedged by 'ceteris paribus' clauses. **But it would be ill-advised for the anomalous monist to buy into Fodor's notion of 'ceteris paribus law'.** For, according to Fodor, such a law has something like this form, 'there exists conditions C_1, \dots, C_m such that when they are satisfied, F-events cause G-events', and when the C_i 's have been identified, that will give us a strict law of the form 'Under C_1^*, \dots, C_m^* , F events cause G-events', where each C_i^* is some value of the variable C_i that satisfies the open inner sentence.

Fodor: Let F stand for some mental property and let G stand for some physical property of the body:

(i) 'F-events cause G-events' is not a strict law; but

(ii) F-events cause G-events, *ceteris paribus* is a strict law.

(iii) Where C_1, \dots, C_m are the *ceteris paribus* conditions, we get a *disjunctive* law like

(L): 'Under C_1^*, \dots, C_m^* , F events cause G-events', where C_i^* satisfies C_i , and (L) is strict.

___ Thus, on this account, a non-strict law is simply a strict law with some of its antecedent conditions existentially quantified.

___ But that means that *where there is a non-strict psycho-physical law, there must be a strict psycho-physical law waiting to be discovered.*

___ I think it is obvious that the anomalous monist must reject this notion of non-strict law.

[Q: If non-strict laws are really not strict, are they still causal laws? If causation is governed under strict causal laws, how can there be causal laws that are non-strict? What guarantees the causal connection such that it is not random or accidental?

Laws -----> statistical laws
 -----> deterministic laws

Q: Are there really deterministic laws or are all laws merely statistical? Do you think statistical laws are laws?]

Kim: It isn't obvious that Davidson's fundamental argument against psycho-physical laws can allow even non-strict laws between the mental and the physical.

[Davidson's Argument Against Strict Psycho-Physical Laws] (according to Kim):

___ (1) The mental domain and the physical domain are each governed by their own special synthetic a priori constitutive constraints;

___ (2) But if there are strict laws connecting the two realms, then one could be reduced to the other and each domain cannot retain its own integrity.

___ (3) Therefore, there cannot be laws connecting the mental realm and the physical realm.

Kim's criticism:

___ It isn't clear why this argument doesn't ban non-strict laws as well.

Kim: I have always thought that the power of the Davidsonian argument for mental anomalous is seen in the fact that, if it works at all, it should work against all kinds of laws.

7. Are there Other Reasons for being Wary of Non-Strict Laws if you are an Anomalous Monist?

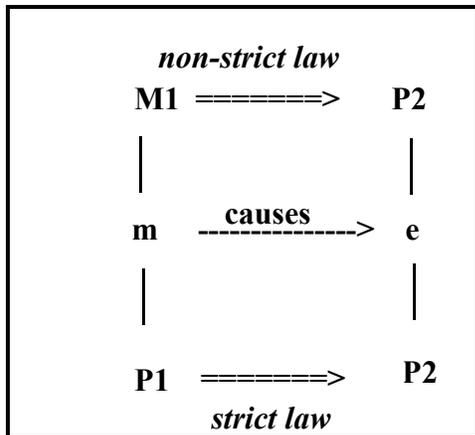
[I] the problem of exclusion:

___ if you accept non-strict laws as nomological grounds of causal relations, you will need a convincing rationale for retaining Davidson's strict law requirement on causation.

Suppose a mental event, *m*, causes an event *e* (which can be either mental or physical); *m*, as a mental event, must have some mental property, *M*, and let's assume that *M*, in virtue of a non-strict psycho-physical law relating it to some physical property of *e*, is causally efficacious in *m*'s causation of *e*. But, given the strict law requirement, *m* must also have a certain basic physical property *P* which is connected, by a strict law, to some basic physical property of *e*, and this fact grounds the causal relation between *m* and *e*. Thus, *m* turns out to have two properties each of which is causally efficacious in *m*'s causation of *e*, and on AM, *M* and *P* are irreducibly distinct.

___ We now face this question: given that the causal relation from *m* to *e* is grounded in the basic physical properties of *m* and *e* and a strict law relating them, *what causal work is there for M to do?*

Assume: M1 is not reducible to P1



There are various moves one can make this point, but the problem is there, especially for the adherents of AM.

[II] the problem of reductionism

One can still hold on to Davidson's claim that psychology is not reducible, by strict law, to some underlying physical theory. But why insist on reduction by strict laws only? *What's wrong with non-strict psycho-physical laws as 'bridge' laws ?*

There seems to be general consensus... that there are no strict laws outside basic physics, and Davidson seems to agree. If this is correct, there isn't going to be, and there has never been, any reduction anywhere in science -- that is, if you insist on reduction via strict laws.

§ [Kim's Conclusion]:

___ I think 'non-strict laws' are bad news for anomalous monists. In embracing them they may end up losing anomalism from anomalous monism.