

Phil 317: Handout #17
Jaegwon Kim: *Epiphenomenal and Supervenient Causation*

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§ Kim's Claims

- (1) Macrocausation should be viewed as a kind of epiphenomenal causation.**
- (2) Macrocausation as epiphenomenal causation should be explained as "supervenient causation".**
- (3) Psychological causation (causation involving psychological events) is plausibly assimilated to macrocausation; that is, it is to be construed supervenient epiphenomenal causation.**

1. Epiphenomenal Causation

___ three analogies: (i) mirror (ii) reflections on the wall (iii) symptoms of a disease
 => They all involve at least *apparent* causal relations that are *grounded* in some underlying causal processes. These causal relations, whether only apparent or real, *are reducible to more fundamental causal relations*.

2. Macrocausation:

___ Causal relations involving macroevents and states, where a macroevent or state is understood as the exemplification of a macroproperty by an object at a time.

3. Macrocausation and Supervenience:

___ Macroproperties are determined by, or supervenient upon, microproperties.

(1) Property Supervenience: The *supervenience of a family A of properties on another family B* can be explained as follows:

___ The supervenient properties are in some sense *determined by*, or *dependent on*, the properties on which they supervene.

___ Necessarily, for any property F in A, if any objects x has F, then there exists a property G in B such that x has G, and necessarily anything having G has F.

Q: How does this solve the problem of multiple realizability?

(2) Event supervenience:

___ An event, x's having F, supervenes on the event, x's having G, just in case x has G and G is a supervenience base of F.

4. Supervenient causation:

___ x's having F supervenes on x's having m(F), y's having G supervenes on y's having m(G), where m(F) and m(G) are microproperties relative to F and G, and there is an appropriate causal connection between x's having m(F) and y's having m(G).

*** The world -- at least, the physical world -- is the way it is because the microworld is the way it is.

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5. Mereological Supervenience and Microdeterminism

*** Mereological supervenience:

___ A general thesis affirming the supervenience of the characteristics of wholes on the properties and relationships characterizing their proper part.

*** Microdeterminism:

___ Worlds that are microphysically identical are one and the same (physical) world.

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Mereological supervenience views the world as determined along the part-whole dimension, whereas causal determinism views it as determined along the temporal dimension; they respectively provide a metaphysical basis for the method of microreduction and that of causal explanation.

§ The Task:

- (i) Give the mental a substantial enough causal role to let us avoid "the great paradox of epiphenomenalism" and
- (ii) Do so without infringing upon the closedness of physical causal system.

6. Criticism of Davidson's View:

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___ Davidson's anomalous monism fails to do full justice to psychophysical causation -- that is, it fails to provide an account of psychophysical causation in which the mental *qua mental* has any real causal role to play. Consider Davidson's account: whether or not a given event has a mental description seems entirely irrelevant to what causal relations it enters into. Its causal powers are wholly determined by the physical description or characteristic that holds for it; for it is under its physical description that it may be subsumed under a causal law.

7. Kim's Proposal: Psychological causation (causation involving psychological events) is to be construed as supervenient epiphenomenal causation.

***** Epiphenomenal supervenient causal relations:**

___ When a mental event M causes a physical event P, this is so because M is supervenient upon a physical event, P*, and P* causes P.

___ When mental event M causes another mental event M*, this is so because M supervenes on a physical state P, and similarly M* on P*, and P causes P*.

8. Kim's Conclusion:

(1) Mental causation does take place; it is only that it is epiphenomenal causation, that is, a causal relation that is reducible to, or explainable by, the causal processes taking place at a more basic physical level.

(2) Epiphenomenal causal relations involving psychological events are no less real or substantial than those involving macrophysical events. They are both supervenient causal relations.

(3) Mental events do not become part of the fundamental physical causal chain any more than macrophysical events become part of the microphysical causal chain that underlie them.