

MISUNDERSTANDING DAVIDSON

BY

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## ABSTRACT

The main aim of this dissertation is to offer, and to defend, an interpretation of Donald Davidson's classic paper "Mental Events" which interpretation I take to be identical to Davidson's intended interpretation. My contention is that many readers misunderstand this paper. My method for showing this will be, first, to give a brief summary of the surface structure, and the core concepts, of "Mental Events". I will then begin to canvas exemplars of the main lines of (alleged) objection to what "Mental Events" has been supposed to contend. I intend to argue that these objections misunderstand either Davidson's conclusions, or his arguments, or they require material additional to the position that Davidson actually lays out and argues for in "Mental Events" in order to follow. In the latter case I shall attempt to show that these additions are not contentions which Davidson shares by referencing further materials from Davidson's work.

My claim is that in describing anomalous monism Davidson sets up a genuinely novel position as regards the mental, the physical, and relations between them. This position allows genuine causal interaction between mental and physical events. It is consistent with the naturalistic view that every causal relation falls under maximally explanatory and predictive laws, under some description of the events in question. It also explains why mental descriptions of events cannot be nomologically reduced to physical descriptions.

I shall be considering three exemplars of lines of argument against "Mental Events." First, I shall consider the claim that the arguments of "Mental Events" require an unwarranted claim about nomologicality and causality as exemplified by G.E.M. Anscombe's claim in "Causality and Determination". Secondly, I shall examine the claim that the arguments of "Mental Events" entail epiphenomenalism concerning the mental, rather than the supposed novel position of anomalous

monism, a claim presented in the arguments of Jaegwon Kim, across multiple papers. Lastly, I shall consider the argument that “Mental Events” commits a conceptual error in addressing what should be an empirical question (whether there are any social scientific laws) in a priori terms. This last objection I take to be exemplified by Lee McIntyre in his paper “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws”.

My contention is that we dissolve the apparent threat of these objections by following Davidson in keeping clear which theses in “Mental Events” concern ontology, which theses concern explanations, and which theses concern descriptions.

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## INTRODUCTION

I intend to focus on the paper “Mental Events” by Donald Davidson. My project is to offer and defend an interpretation of that paper. I do not mean for this interpretation to be distinct from Davidson’s intent in writing “Mental Events”. My purpose is exegetical. I will argue for my interpretation of “Mental Events” by, first, giving a brief account of the structure, core concepts, and arguments of “Mental Events” as they appear in the paper. This is merely intended as a starting point.

After offering this brief summary I intend to introduce, and use, three exemplars of popular lines of argument against the contentions of “Mental Events”, to help clarify what the position Davidson offers, and the arguments he gives for that position, in fact consist in. My contention is that these objections misunderstand either Davidson’s conclusions, or arguments, or require additional contentions to follow from the position Davidson lays out and argues for in “Mental Events”. In the latter case I shall attempt to show that these additions are not contentions which Davidson shares.

Chapter 1: “Mental Events” gives a summary of the central arguments of Donald Davidson’s paper “Mental Events”<sup>1</sup>. I suggest that “Mental Events” should be seen as presenting an argument for the identity thesis (the thesis that mental *events* are identical with physical *events*), which argument is novel in that it denies the frequently made assumption that principled reduction of mental *description* to physical *description* is a requirement for such a view, and instead takes as a premise

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<sup>1</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Mental Events” in *The Essential Davidson*, 105-121.

the claim that such a reduction is impossible. Davidson labels his novel version of the identity thesis *Anomalous Monism*.

This dissertation will attempt to defend the central arguments of “Mental Events” against the objections viewed as most successfully employed against them, and thereby attempt to provide further exegesis of those arguments and the position which the arguments of “Mental Events” are supposed to help establish.

In Chapter 2: “Causality and Determination”<sup>2</sup> I lay out a set of arguments from G.E.M. Anscombe, which arguments have been taken to undermine a key premise of the central arguments of “Mental Events”. One of the principles Davidson labels (and uses in his novel argument for the identity thesis) in “Mental Events” is the Principle of the Nomological Nature of Causality:

“[E]ach true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.”<sup>3</sup>

In “Causality and Determination” Anscombe argued, to the contrary, that the central feature of the concept of cause is the notion that an effect is somehow derivative, or comes out of, or is contained within, its cause.

Anscombe provided a set of arguments arguing against what she saw as an exhaustive list of possible warrants for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality. Anscombe’s view was that this principle was founded on an illegitimate identification of the causal relation with a necessitation relation. She concluded that this was illegitimate, misconstrued our ordinary concept of cause, and was founded on an unwarranted *assumption* of determinism, and thus that only *necessitating* causes would be backed by laws, with non-necessitating causes merely being constrained by any relevant laws.

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<sup>2</sup> Anscombe, G.E.M “Causality and Determination” in *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind*. 88-104.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Davidson, “Mental Events” in *The Essential Davidson*. 118.

In Chapter 3: “Causal Relations”<sup>4</sup> I argue that to respond to Anscombe we must not only allow that NCC does not *a priori* require that all events related as causes and effects fall under *deterministic* laws, we must also find *warrant* for the requirement that they fall under laws *at all*, in the sense of *strict* laws. I suggest that, for Davidson, the warrant for this would be a variety of naturalism. The thesis is, essentially, that all events can be given *complete* explanations, along with the thesis that complete explanations are *nomological*.

I explore this in the terms offered by Davidson in his paper “Causal Relations” and note how we must amend the simplest-example framework in “Causal Relations” to account for Davidson’s acknowledgement (in “Mental Events”) that our search for causal explanation may end in brute indeterminacy. I attempt, thus, to defend NCC from Anscombe’s objections. In short I suggest that Anscombe failed to rule out all candidates for a warrant for NCC and offer what I take Davidson’s warrant to be.

In Chapter 4: The Threat of Epiphenomenalism I lay out and respond to a family of objections to “Mental Events” which suggest that the view that Davidson’s arguments entail is not truly a version of the identity thesis at all. Instead the lesson these views take from Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” is that causality operates at the level of the physical *properties* they believe strict nomological explanations *reference*. I suggest that the conclusion the proponents of these views draw is only entailed if an assumption which is *additional* to those Davidson makes in “Mental Events” is accepted.

Specifically, one must assume that different descriptions are relevant not merely to what constitutes kinds of causal *explanation* but metaphysically to *causality* itself. In response I suggest that this latter assumption concerning what *description* entails in general is not shared by Davidson, and is *indeed* incompatible

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<sup>4</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Causal Relations”. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64, no. 21, (November 1967).

with his conclusion in “Mental Events” and with making sense of much of his argument in “Causal Relations”. Additionally, I canvas Davidson’s arguments that we ought not make this further assumption.

In chapter 5: “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws” I respond to Lee McIntyre’s arguments that another two of Davidson’s key premises in “Mental Events” are unwarranted. McIntyre denies both the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:

“[T]here are no strict... laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained”<sup>5</sup>

And Davidson’s claim that while coextensivity of sentences constructed using mental or physical predicates is possible, strict bridge laws between mental and physical descriptions are not. I shall call this conclusion regarding psychophysical laws the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism, following McIntyre in this label.

I canvas McIntyre’s arguments to this effect offering responses as I go as to what I take to be McIntyre’s mistaken interpretative assumptions in “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws”. I conclude by noting, as I also note in Chapter 1, that Davidson’s argument for the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism in “Mental Events”, is, indeed, a flawed argument, and that Davidson later admitted that mistake. Davidson did not, however, give up the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism, he offered a different argument for it, in his paper “Could There Be a Science of Rationality?”<sup>6</sup>, which argument is better suited, I will suggest, to the

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<sup>5</sup> “Mental Events.” 106. I note that I am omitting the word “deterministic”. I do this because the requirement that the laws used for predicting and explaining events are deterministic is, according to Davidson (even in the initial statement from which I am excerpting), stronger than his argument requires.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Davidson, “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” in Donald Davidson, *Problems of Rationality*.117-134.

intent of the arguments of “Mental Events”, than the flawed argument to be found therein.

In Chapter 6: “Could There Be a Science of Rationality?” I introduce Davidson’s corrected argument for the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism as I find it in Davidson’s paper “Could There Be a Science of Rationality”. Centrally the point Davidson makes, as it regards the aforementioned principle, is that there are many differences which make a given descriptive vocabulary more or less apt for making lawlike (in the sense of *strict* laws) statements. The vocabulary of physics is at one end of a spectrum of those differences (the most lawlike) and essentially mental descriptions are at the opposite end of that spectrum (the most lawless). Thus Davidson’s contention as to why the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism is true in “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” ties in very neatly with his contention in section III of “Mental Events” that the surprise in his argument is

“...to find the lawlessness of the mental serving to help establish the identity of the mental with that paradigm of the lawlike, the physical.”<sup>7</sup>

And also with his contention in section II of “Mental Events” that:

“Lawlikeness is a matter of degree”<sup>8</sup>

With the corrected argument for the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism in hand I have brought together the minimal materials I think one needs to give a relatively complete description of what Davidson had in mind in “Mental Events”. In chapter 7: “Mental Events”, I will draw the materials from the previous chapters together, fleshing out, and correcting, where necessary, the central arguments of “Mental Events” in the light of both the additional material from Davidson that I

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<sup>7</sup>Donald Davidson, “Mental Events”.118.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid*, 113.

have introduced, and the putative objections to those arguments which I have canvassed.

My conclusion would be that, rather than there being a buffet of almost equally acceptable choices as to why to *reject* the arguments of “Mental Events”, the objections to “Mental Events” I have considered serve, here, instead, as a vehicle to help explain what Davidson was, and was not, actually arguing for in that paper. My goal is not to push the reader into accepting Davidson’s conclusion regarding a new version of the identity theory, rather I merely wish to have made it easier to follow exactly what Davidson is arguing for, and how he actually did so.

My contention is that “Mental Events” is not one of the papers which introduced the notion of higher-order multiply realizable properties. Nor does “Mental Events” establish the position of non-reductive physicalism, or endorse substance monism with property dualism. “Mental Events” contains an argument to the effect that mental and physical predicates apply to the *same* kinds of entities, and it is the nature of the *descriptive vocabulary used*, not the nature of *the things referred to* by those vocabularies, that creates the difference in their conditions of application, and aptness for the formation of laws. In short “Mental” and “Physical” are *descriptive* categories, not metaphysical ones, and, further, descriptive categories do not carry the kind of metaphysical implications that many philosophers have supposed.

## Chapter 1:

Donald Davidson

### MENTAL EVENTS

In this dissertation I shall be focusing on, and attempting both to offer exegesis, and defense of, Donald Davidson's presentation of, and argument for, the position he named Anomalous Monism. The thesis of Anomalous Monism is that mental descriptions and physical descriptions share the same ontology. Yet claims given in one descriptive vocabulary do not reduce to the other. And descriptions in the mental vocabulary, and compound statements containing both vocabularies, cannot be *fully* lawlike (in a sense of lawlike to be described).

My contention will be that the major lines of attack against "Mental Events" either misconstrue the conclusion that the paper arrives at (that is, misconstrue what the thesis of Anomalous Monism amounts to), or they misconstrue the content of, or grounds for, the premises used in reasoning to that conclusion. My hope is that, rather than accepting the thesis of Anomalous Monism, the reader will find my interpretation of "Mental Events" compelling as an interpretation. Indeed, I hope that the reader comes to share that interpretation. This is not to say that alternative interpretations have not brought up interesting issues, rather my contention is that they *misunderstand* Davidson's intent, and arguments, as they are presented in "Mental Events".

In this chapter I will lay out the concerns that prompted Davidson to formulate, and argue for, this view, and present an *initial* interpretation of the arguments, and of the structure of those arguments, that he gave in "Mental Events". In subsequent chapters I will be canvassing various exemplars of the most commonly accepted objections to Davidson's views as presented in "Mental Events". I will be

doing this with the intent to use these objections to clarify, and amend where necessary, the arguments and contentions of “Mental Events”. In service of this goal I will also introduce further material from Davidson’s broader works. I will introduce such material where I feel it is necessary to either defend my particular interpretation, or to amend the arguments of “Mental Events” following later corrections by Davidson. In chapter 7 and the conclusion of this dissertation I will offer a more complete account of my interpretation of the arguments of “Mental Events”, utilizing the materials I will be introducing as I move forward.

In “Mental Events” Davidson attempts to reconcile the apparent conflict between our concepts of the mental and of the physical, and between our commitments as regards naturalistic explanations of the universe. In brief, Davidson is centrally concerned with the apparent conflict created by the fact that mental events seem to causally interact with physical events, yet mental events “resist capture in the nomological net of physical theory”<sup>9</sup>. His suggestion is that a novel version of the thesis that mental events are identical with physical events dissolves the apparent conflict.

While he begins with a nod toward the problem of free will (which he labels, following Kant, “Autonomy”), he notes from the outset that the broader problem is that the mental seems to be *anomalous*. That is, mental relations, as well as mental to physical, and physical to mental relations, seemingly fail to fall under laws, in a sense of law to be described.

Davidson introduces three principles which he believes lead us into this apparent conflict. Then lays out an account of how to interpret these principles in order to achieve consistency between them, and so as to achieve entailment of the identity of mental and physical events from our interpretation of them. If Davidson has succeeded we may have a fully naturalistic view of the universe, while accepting

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<sup>9</sup> Donald, Davidson, “Mental Events.” 105.

mental causes of physical effects, and physical causes of mental effects. Further, we may have these without requiring reduction of mental descriptions to physical descriptions. This is, according to Davidson, an entirely new position. Davidson labels this position: “Anomalous Monism”.

According to Davidson the apparent conflict stems from the following three principles: The first principle Davidson labels “the Principle of Causal Interaction”:

“Some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events.”<sup>10</sup>

That is, mental events may be caused by physical events (for example, an instance of an appropriate physical event giving rise to a perceptual belief) and physical events may be caused by mental events (for example, a bodily movement occurring as a consequence of mental events of certain sorts).

The second principle Davidson labels “the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality”:

“[E]ach true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.”<sup>11</sup>

A “strict” law is a law which is as precise, explicit, and exceptionless as possible. Providing as close to perfect predictability, and total explanation, as brute reality allows<sup>12</sup>.

The third principle Davidson labels the Principle of “the Anomalism of the Mental”:

“there are no strict... laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained”<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Donald Davidson, “Mental Events.” In *The Essential Davidson*. 118.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 4 will discuss Davidson’s suggestion for the format of such a law.

<sup>13</sup> Donald Davidson, “Mental Events.”106. I note that I am omitting the word “deterministic”. I do this because the requirement that the laws used for predicting and explaining events are deterministic is,

The anomalism of the mental is assumed in the introduction to “Mental Events”. Davidson will offer argument for it in section III of “Mental Events”.

The apparent conflict is clear. If the first two principles are true it seems there ought to be strict laws predicting and explaining at least some mental events, yet the third principle denies that there are any at all.

Davidson’s argumentative strategy is first, to outline a view of the mental and physical which he suggests reconciles the above three principles. Second, he lays out an argument for the thesis that there cannot be strict psychophysical laws. Third, he will argue that we may infer first, the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, and then his novel version of the identity thesis (the thesis that mental and physical descriptions pick out a single ontology) from the first two of the above three principles and the argued-for thesis that there cannot be strict psychophysical laws. His suggestion is that, at the very least, he ought to be seen as having provided argument against the view that support for the identity thesis requires the identification of strict psychophysical laws.

“Mental Events” is, accordingly, broken into three sections. In Section I, then, we find Davidson laying out his novel version of the identity thesis.

The first step is to claim that individual mental events are identical with individual physical events. Events are taken to be dated, localized, unique particulars. Davidson notes that we have little trouble making identity statements about events conceived this way, offering the following examples:

The Death of Scott = the death of the author of *Waverly*.

The assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand = the event that started the First World War.

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according to Davidson (even in the initial statement from which I am excerpting), stronger than his argument requires.

The eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 = the cause of the destruction of Pompeii.<sup>14</sup>

Davidson's next step is to suggest that since particular mental events are, ontologically, identical with particular physical events an event is mental so long as it is *describable* as mental. A *description* of an event is a *mental description* so long as the description that picks out the event contains a mental verb *essentially*. Mental verbs are those verbs which are psychological verbs "as used when they create apparently non-extensional contexts"<sup>15</sup> (for example, "believes", "desires", "intends").

Davidson notes that this offered criteria for what constitutes "mental description" can be used to turn a description of almost any event into a mental description. Since he will be asserting unity of ontology for mental and physical descriptions he suggests we can afford "spinozistic extravagance" as regards the mental. His more important concern, given the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, is in making sure that we can pick out what it is that makes a given *description* a *mental description*. In other words, he is more concerned with undercounting *mental* descriptions, than over-counting.

Next Davidson notes that it has commonly been assumed that holding the identity thesis (the thesis that mental events are identical with physical events) requires correlating laws between *kinds* of mental states and physical states. But Davidson's identity thesis is a claim about *particular* events. Laws would only be entailed by the claim that *kinds* of mental and physical events are identical.

Davidson thus suggests that we consider a fourfold classification of theories of the relation between mental and physical events. The distinctions are provided in terms of whether each view accepts or denies the identity thesis (mental events are

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<sup>14</sup> Donald Davidson, "Mental Events." 107.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

identical with physical events), and whether each view accepts or denies that there are psychophysical laws, correlating *types* of mental events with *types* of physical events. This gives us, following Davidson, the following possible theories:

***Nomological monism:*** There are correlating laws between events described as mental and events described as physical, and those events are identical. (This is where standard materialist positions lie. Mental events are physical events, and mental descriptions are reducible to physical descriptions in some systematic way).

***Nomological dualism:*** There are correlating laws between events described as physical and events described as mental, but the events are non-identical. (This is the camp in which Davidson suggests the various versions of parallelism, interactionism, and epiphenomenalism fall.)

***Anomalous Dualism:*** There is a failure of correlating laws, and mental and physical events are non-identical (This, Davidson suggests, is the Cartesian picture).

The fourth and novel position, the position which Davidson is attempting to outline, and for which he will argue in Sections II and III, is then:

***Anomalous Monism:*** There is a failure of correlating laws between events described as mental and events described as physical, yet the events are identical.<sup>16</sup>

Once we have this fourth theoretical option (anomalous monism) in sight, and we correctly identify what it is for an event to be mental, reconciling the principles of causal interaction and nomologicality with the anomalousness of the

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<sup>16</sup> Davidson suggests (by analogy with the fact moral properties don't seem to reduce to descriptive properties, and analogy with the fact that, following Tarski, while we can define truth simpliciter in an object Language L we cannot define a truth predicate of our object language L within our definition of truth-in-L) that the 'lawless monism' of this fourth position is *compatible with* the idea that mental characteristics are, in some sense, dependent or supervenient upon physical characteristics. It is not until Section II that we get real argument for this claim, however. This will be addressed further in chapter 4.

mental becomes relatively straightforward. This reconciliation is supposed to run the following way:

***The identity thesis is an ontological thesis*** (we ought to add events to our ontology, and individual mental events are identical with individual physical events).

***The Principle of Causal Interaction is read as applying to events in extension;*** causality like identity is an extensional relation, and operates between events however we describe them.

***The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality, however, is a thesis about explanation.*** We read it as a claim about events related as cause and effect falling under *some* description which allows formulation of a strict law.

***The Anomalism of the Mental is a thesis*** about events described *as* mental. But since events are mental *only as described* and individual mental events are, ontologically speaking, identical with individual physical events, it becomes a thesis ***about certain kinds of descriptions, not an ontological thesis at all.***

Thus this fourth, and novel, position, of Anomalous Monism reconciles all of the three principles with which Davidson began. Section I, however, is merely Davidson attempting to lay out a novel view (anomalous monism). In Sections II and III Davidson provides the actual argument for this view.

In section II Davidson argues for the thesis that the mental is *nomologically irreducible* to the physical. He distinguishes this from the stronger thesis that the mental is not reducible to the physical. Davidson argues for the former, weaker, thesis for two reasons. Firstly, since the events picked out by mental and physical descriptions are one and the same events there could be a physical open sentence coextensive with each mental predicate (in other words the stronger version of the thesis seems to be *at least* possibly false). This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

Secondly, as we shall see in Section III, Davidson believes he only needs the weaker thesis. Thus section II can be seen as arguing that while coextensivity of general claims constructed using mental or physical predicates is possible, strict bridge laws between mental and physical descriptions are not. I shall call<sup>17</sup> this conclusion regarding psychophysical laws the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism.

Davidson suggests three lines of argumentation for the thesis that the mental is nomologically irreducible to the physical. The first two lines he suggests offer “hints” as to why it might be. I take it that the third line of argumentation fleshes out those hints into the actual argument that this is in fact so.

The first hint as to why we might expect nomological irreducibility of the mental to the physical is found in the failure of behaviorism. Davidson suggests that the loss of faith in the promise of behaviorism wasn’t prompted by failure to definitionally reduce the mental to behavior, but rather by the fact that there seemed to be a system in the failures.<sup>18</sup>

Davidson’s point is that in addressing apparent counterexamples to behaviorist reductions theorists are usually pushed back into referencing mental verbs (‘intended’, ‘believed’, ‘meant’ and so on). Moreover, the problem lies in our *identifying/defending* whether the reduction has gone through successfully.

The problem is not so much that synonymy definitively *fails* between Definiens and Definiendum in attempted behavioral reduction, but that we are *inevitably* skeptical about it having succeeded. Davidson’s suggestion is that our skepticism is founded in our implicit grasp of the holism of the mental: Beliefs and

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<sup>17</sup> Following McIntyre who we shall meet in chapter 5.

<sup>18</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Mental Events.” 113.

desires issue in behavior only within the context of interactions with a web of other beliefs and desires<sup>19</sup>.

Our skepticism concerning behaviorist reductions, then, offers our first hint as to the argument for Psychophysical Anomalism. The holism of the mental is our first clue as to the source of the autonomy and the anomalousness of the mental.

Our second hint is to be found in a brief consideration of Goodman's Paradox. Davidson offers the suggestion that Goodman's paradox is an artifact of the fact that the predicates "is Grue" and "is an Emerald" are not *made for each other*. Goodman's contention was that his predicate "is grue" did not operate in a lawlike fashion, and that, perhaps, identifying which *predicates* are lawlike would allow us to construct a definitive criterion of lawlike generalizations. Davidson's contention will be that "lawlike" applies to *statements*, not predicates, and is a matter of degree.

"Grue" is defined by Goodman as "observed before time *t* and green, otherwise blue"<sup>20</sup>. Goodman's suggestion is that a generalization like "All emeralds are green" is lawlike, since its instances confirm it, whereas "All emeralds are grue" is not. Goodman suggests we can see this by simply considering a case where all of our observations were made before time *t*. All of our observations would have uniformly revealed green emeralds, and would have given us no reason to expect blue emeralds.

Davidson's response is to suggest that Goodman has misidentified the problem. The problem is *not* that "grue" is not projectable into the future on the basis only of observations before time *t*, but that "is grue" is ill-suited to being paired with

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<sup>19</sup> It will be my later contention that, in the final analysis, essentially nothing in the argument for the Anomalism of the Mental, and thus for Anomalous Monism, turns on the holism of the mental. Thus, I hope my brevity here will be forgiven. Chapter 1 is intended to present the arguments of "Mental Events" as they appeared. The content of chapter 1 is constrained, to a degree, by a desire on my part to be charitable to those I shall treat as objecting to these arguments. Thus elements of the material presented will turn out to be more, and less, relevant as the dissertation proceeds.

<sup>20</sup> Davidson, Donald, "Mental Events." 113-114. Predicates like "is grue", then, have different standards of application at different times.

“is an emerald”. “Is grue” does not seem problematic in the same sense if we pair it with “is an emerire” where an emerire is defined as “observed before time  $t$  and an emerald, otherwise a sapphire” “All emerires are grue” seems lawlike in just the way that “All emeralds are green” is lawlike. Before time  $t$  each statement seems equally applicable on the basis of the evidence as long as the predicates are paired appropriately. In other words, as long as we use the predicates which are *made for one another*, that is, we pair predicates like “grue” with predicates like “emerire” or predicates like “green” with predicates like “emerald”, for example, predicates which are a priori suited to be, in Goodman’s specific cases, projected together.

Davidson’s suggestion is that what we should take from Goodman’s paradox is the insight that Nomologicality has to do, among other considerations, with a priori consideration of whether predicates are made for one another (in the context of making such generalizations). The hint then, is that psychophysical generalizations are more like “All emeralds are grue” than they are like “All emeralds are green”. Mental and physical predicates are not made for one another.

Davidson concedes that we *do* often have inductive ground for psychophysical generalizations. Lawlikeness is a matter of degree. Mental predicates are not *as* ill-suited for a pairing with physical predicates as are “is an emerald” with “is grue” (after all the degree of mismatch is why Goodman invented the predicate “is grue”). Davidson thus moves on to a detailed discussion of in what way mental predicates are *in fact* ill-suited to a pairing with physical predicates.

This final discussion is preceded by Davidson suggesting a distinction between two kinds of inductive generalization. This distinction is between inductive generalizations considered in their rough initial conditional forms. In other words, the kinds of rough generalizations we make as inferences from one or more cases to expectations of like outcomes in similar future cases. The distinction is made in terms of the a priori relation the vocabulary of such generalizations has to the vocabulary of any potential strict laws. Davidson will suggest that some inductive

generalizations are what he will call *homonomic* (that is, indefinitely refinable in terms of the vocabulary of their current, rough, incarnation) in character, whilst most are what he will describe as *heteronomic* in character (that is, the generalization is not *indefinitely* refinable in its *current vocabulary*).

Davidson concedes that we often make inductive generalizations which are “rude rules of thumb”. Some rude generalizations are such that their positive instances imply that we could formulate, by adding provisos and conditions *stated in the vocabulary of the generalization*, a generalization which provides as complete an explanation, or prediction, as possible. There are other generalizations that imply that<sup>21</sup> there is some underlying generalization which would allow such complete explanation, but whose current vocabularies do not allow such completeness of explanation<sup>22</sup>. The first kind of generalization Davidson labels “homonomic”, the second “heteronomic”. Homonomic generalizations will require re-description or reduction into homonomic vocabulary in order to be apt for the formation of a strict law.

Davidson’s suggestion is that while *most* of our generalizations are in fact *heteronomic* in character<sup>23</sup>, generalizations in the vocabulary of the physical sciences<sup>24</sup> provide examples of homonomic generalization. Within the physical sciences we find generalizations about relations between events described in terms of the concepts of the physical sciences which are indefinitely refinable using only further such physical concepts. In other words, within the physical sciences we find generalizations which lend themselves to refinement into strict laws. Elsewhere we do not. This suggests that we might read the argument for Psychophysical

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<sup>21</sup> This implication will be discussed at length in chapter 3.

<sup>22</sup> For further discussion of why Davidson feels this implication holds see chapter 3.

<sup>23</sup> “I suppose most of our practical lore (and science) is heteronomic” “Mental Events.” 115.

<sup>24</sup> What Davidson means by “the physical sciences” will be refined in later chapters.

Anomalism as an argument to the effect that Psychophysical laws are *essentially* heteronomic<sup>25</sup>.

Before moving to the actual argument for Psychophysical Anomalism Davidson gave us two hints. Firstly, the mental is thoroughly holistic. Secondly, statements will fail to be lawlike (or minimally be *less* lawlike) where the predicates involved are not “made for” one another. The actual argument then, I would suggest, ought to be seen as arguing that psychophysical laws are *insufficiently* lawlike to constitute strict laws. This is so because the predicates of mental descriptions and physical descriptions are unsuited for one another in terms of making *sufficiently* lawlike generalizations.

Davidson notes that it is not merely the holism of the mental that marks the distinction, for there are analogous a priori conceptual interdependencies in physical theory<sup>26</sup>. Nor is it the eligibility of multiple theories built from differing choices of sets of concepts. We are faced with competing theories in the case of accounting for physical evidence as well. Rather, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that translation is indeterminate rather than underdetermined<sup>27</sup>, and that assignments of mental states, fundamentally involve the notion of translation:

“The problem is not bypassed but given center stage by appeal to explicit speech behavior. For we could not begin to decode a man’s sayings if we could not make out his attitude towards his sentences, such as holding, wishing, or wanting them to be true. Beginning from these attitudes, we must

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<sup>25</sup> I shall say much more about the homonomic/heteronomic distinction in Chapters 6 and 7.

<sup>26</sup> See the discussion of the postulate of transitivity & meaning postulate for theories of measurement. Davidson, Donald, “Mental Events.” 115-116

<sup>27</sup> Davidson later amended this claim in the papers “Three Varieties of Knowledge”, and “Could There Be a Science of Rationality”. Since I will be discussing this element of the argument later, in the context of why Davidson *gives it up* as the contributing factor in warranting Psychophysical Anomalism I hope that the brevity/density of my discussion of this element of “Mental Events” may be forgiven.

work out a theory of what he means, thus simultaneously giving content to his attitudes and his words”<sup>28</sup>

The notion that assignments of mental states involve the notion of translation is a consequence of holism. According to Davidson (following Quine, in this case) we may sometimes make the best sense of others by assigning differing beliefs to them (within a background of sufficient general agreement for the identification of a false belief to make sense of them). We might also make sense of others by assigning different meanings to their use of a given segment of language.

Physical theories are underdetermined by data. That is there are an indefinitely large number of theories, and sets of commitments, that account equally well for all the data. Thus choice of theory is arbitrary within the context of choosing between these theories. In the case of translation, however, the constitutive ideal of rationality (the idea that we make sense of others exactly by making them, in so far as possible, make sense, by our own lights), the central commitment of theories of application of mental predicates (according to Davidson) actually affects choice of scheme<sup>29</sup> moment by moment. We cannot simply choose a scheme arbitrarily from various options that meet this ideal. We apply the ideal at every stage of an evolving application of mental predicates to a subject, over time. An arbitrary choice of scheme might preclude a shift (to a new interpretive schema) which made our subject seem more reasonable, violating that central constitutive ideal. We thus cannot choose arbitrarily among theories that account for current data, for this precludes our appropriately meeting our conceptual commitments in future cases.

This contention is why Davidson says:

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>29</sup> A scheme of interpretation is, minimally, the holistic assignment of belief contents and a theory of meaning for an individual’s speech.

“[N]omological slack between the mental and physical is essential as long as we conceive of man as a rational animal”

The notion here is supposed to be that we cannot fix the mental side of a psychophysical generalization in the way we would need to in order to make *strict* psychophysical laws without scrubbing the constitutive ideal of rationality from the picture<sup>30</sup>. Retaining it requires acknowledging indeterminacy. Acknowledging indeterminacy requires acceptance of Psychophysical Anomalism.

With an argument for Psychophysical Anomalism we have all the elements Davidson believes that we need in order to argue for the Anomalism of the Mental, and then to demonstrate the identity between mental and physical events. This is what Davidson proceeds to do in Section III.

I must note that Davidson suggests that what he is presenting falls short of a deductively valid syllogism with the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental as its conclusion. Moreover, I am, at this point in the project, attempting to offer a *basic* account of the surface structure of “Mental Events.” The account that I am giving is currently constrained by considerations of charity in two different ways. Firstly, I am constrained by my intention to be charitable *enough to Davidson* to not *distort* the argumentative structure of “Mental Events”. Secondly, I am constrained (at this point) by my intention to be charitable enough to those I shall take to be objecting to the arguments of “Mental Events”, to offer a version of the arguments which provides fair context for their objections.

With the aforementioned caveats in mind (both Davidson’s and my own) the argument for the Anomalism of the Mental runs, I think, through the following two stages. Firstly:

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<sup>30</sup> *Again* as a note, Davidson later amended this view. This will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

**P<sub>1</sub>: CI:** According to The Principle of Causal Interaction some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events.

**P<sub>2</sub>: NCC:** According to The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality each true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.

**∴ C<sub>1</sub>:** It is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering *all* mental events.

I take it that P<sub>1</sub> and P<sub>2</sub> are supposed to imply C<sub>1</sub> which is then supported as a premise of the following argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental<sup>31</sup>:

**C<sub>1</sub>:** It is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering all mental events.

**P<sub>4</sub>: PA:** According to The Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism mental descriptions are not nomologically reducible to physical descriptions.

**∴ C<sub>2</sub>:** **The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:**  
There are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained.

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<sup>31</sup> Again, this latter argument is not presented by Davidson as a deductive proof of the Anomalism of the Mental, merely as a reason to believe that the principle might well be true. I will suggest a version of the argument which is deductively valid in chapter 7.

Having given reason to believe  $C_2$  we may then use  $C_2 + P_2$  as the fundamental premises in establishing the identity thesis between at least those mental events which are causes or effects of physical events:

1. Suppose  $m$ , a mental event, caused  $p$ , a physical event.
  2. The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality says that under some description  $m$  caused  $p$  must instantiate a strict law.
  3. The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental tells us that this description must be physical rather than mental.
- $\therefore C.$   $m$  must be a physical event under some description, as must any mental event which causes a physical event.

This demonstration runs similarly for every mental event that is an *effect* of a physical event. In order to demonstrate the identity for *all* mental events, all you would have to do is show that all mental events causally interact with physical events. Davidson does not attempt this in “Mental Events”.

If Davidson’s arguments work,<sup>32</sup> we have available the position of anomalous monism. The virtue of the position is that it reconciles our three apparently conflicting principles. This has, I would suggest, the following benefits:

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<sup>32</sup> Davidson himself later amended some parts of his arguments. This will be addressed in subsequent chapters.

We can admit of genuine causal interaction between the mental and physical. We can hold, for example, that explanations of action in terms of the beliefs and motivations of agents, considered as rational animals, constitute actual causal explanations.

We avoid dualism. We don't involve ourselves in ontological commitments to non-physical substances<sup>33</sup>.

We have a principled way to reject the reductionist assumption that avoidance of dualism necessitates demonstrating that mental descriptions reduce in a lawlike way to physical descriptions, or that mental descriptions ought to be abandoned for descriptions in a different vocabulary if they do not. Davidson's demonstration of identity is based on argument for exactly the opposite: It is the a priori fact of nomological irreducibility, along with our other principles, that allows us to identify mental and physical events as one and the same.

Lastly we get to retain the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causation. This is not the smallest virtue. This principle, as I suggest we follow Davidson in reading it, is a thesis about explanation. Specifically, I would suggest, it is the thesis of *naturalism*: That is that every event is fully explainable in terms of its causes<sup>34</sup>.

I will move on by considering our first interlocutor: G.E.M. Anscombe in "Causality and Determination". My response to her concerns will involve fleshing out the claim I made in the preceding paragraph. I shall be suggesting, then, that Anscombe's concerns best relate to the nature and source of the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causation as we consider her as an interlocutor on the arguments contained in "Mental Events".

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<sup>33</sup> I will expand upon this point in chapter 4, in response to Kim's interpretation of Davidson as holding a position which involves *property* dualism.

<sup>34</sup> I will expand greatly upon this claim in chapter 3. I would merely note here that "Mental Events" precedes the 'explication' of naturalism as *either* "methodological" or "metaphysical" naturalism.

**Chapter 2:**  
**G.E.M Anscombe**  
**CAUSALITY AND DETERMINATION**

As we saw in Chapter 1 Davidson's goal in the "Mental Events" paper is to present, and argue for, a novel version of the identity thesis (the thesis that mental events are identical with physical events) which reconciles the three principles which Davidson labels at the beginning of the paper. This view is novel because rather than assuming, or promising, a principled reduction of mental descriptions to physical descriptions, it rests on a demonstration of the identity thesis which takes as a premise the claim that such reduction is impossible.

To establish the identity of mental events and physical events, however, we must, following Davidson (if my analysis is correct), use the Principle of the Nomological Nature of Causality. As Davidson himself notes, however, in "Mental Events" he *assumes* this principle. In the context of this dissertation, then, I propose we may consider G.E.M. Anscombe's "Causality and Determination" as presenting a set of challenges to this assumption.

Centrally "Causality and Determination" is an attack on candidates for warrant for a conceptual association between the concept of cause and the notion of necessity, and an argument for a denial of the claim that there is such a link for all causal relations. For Anscombe what is conceptually basic about the concept of cause is the idea of the singular causal relation (*this* A caused *this* B) and the idea that a particular effect is somehow derivative of its causes.

This view is presented as novel, and as an alternative to the idea that a particular causal claim is best understood as expressing a logical relation of necessitation, as true in virtue of a universal claim (*A-types* cause *B-types*) which expresses such a relation, as implying such a universal claim, or even (and here is where she specifically sets her target on Davidson) implying that *there is* such a universal claim.

I will break down my assessment of “Causality and Determination”, following Anscombe, into assessment of the two sections in which she wrote it. I will respond in terms of the link between causality and necessitation which I think Davidson actually espouses in chapter 3.

Since I am trying to utilize “Causality and Determination” exegetically, for the purpose of explicating Donald Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” for the thesis of anomalous monism, and for explication of the thesis of anomalous monism itself, I am going to offer a breakdown of what I take to be the structure of “Causality and Determination” which is, in a sense, tailored specifically to this purpose. In doing so I do not intend to misrepresent, or uncharitably represent, Anscombe’s views or arguments; indeed, where I make only short note of a line of argument it ought to be viewed as at most a comment on how applicable that line of argument is for the purpose above noted, rather than any form of comment on, or assessment of, the particular line of argument.

Section 1 of “Causality and Determination” argues against what I take it Anscombe thinks is an exhaustive list of suggestions of warrants for a conceptual link between causation and necessity.

Section 2 argues from the (putative) fact that there are cases of causation which are not deterministic in character to the conclusion that we ought to give up our identification of causation and necessitation.

Anscombe begins “Causality and Determination” by distinguishing two kinds of possible positions regarding causality, arguing thereafter that the first, default, and dominant, position is, in fact, unwarranted. The two kinds of position are what she describes as the *necessitating* view, and the *non-necessitating* view of causation. Views which share the following common assumption or doctrine:

**“If an effect occurs in one case and a similar effect does not occur in an apparently similar case, there must be a relevant further difference”**

fall under the heading of *necessitating views* of causation. Hereafter I shall call the above assumption or doctrine “the principle of relevant difference” which I shall abbreviate as **RD**. Any views which deny RD are *non-necessitating views*. Of course as Anscombe points out one can deny RD as a universal truth, while retaining it as a defeasible investigative principle. Anscombe will argue that views of the first kind are both unwarranted and confuse the nature of the *concept* of cause. Thus we ought to hold a non-necessitating view of causation.

In section 1 Anscombe offers three lines of argumentation for the thesis that we ought to hold a non-necessitating view of causation, attacking possible reasons one might hold a necessitating view of causation. Anscombe’s first argument is against the idea that causal *claims* somehow involve direct logical implication from cause to effect. Anscombe argues that the idea that the supposed necessary connection involved in causality is a logical connection is merely confused. Anscombe credits Hume with having “overthrown” this view, but criticizes him for having retained the idea of a necessary connection in her second line of argument.

Davidson also argues that interpreting “\_\_caused\_\_” as some form of logical connective is confused, and in somewhat more formal detail. Since Davidson and Anscombe agree I shall not go further as regards this line of argument in this chapter, although I will address it in chapter 3.

Anscombe's second line of argument attacks Hume, and all 'neo-Humean' positions (this is taken to encompass Mill and most of her contemporaries at least in the English speaking west). Her complaint is that such positions suppose that the necessity of the connection between cause and effect derives from a universal causal law, with a statement of initial conditions, and that such laws are somehow alluded to in our identification of the truth of a singular causal claim. This is, for Anscombe, a doubly problematic view<sup>35</sup>.

Firstly, such views according to Anscombe miss the sense of derivativeness of an effect from its causes which is essential to all cases of causality in the sense of all the disparate *uses* of "caused". Here she gives us as an example the case of the features of a child being derived from the genetic characteristics of her parents. The logical sense in which we derive the certainty of, e.g., a hair-color outcome from a scientific law, and a statement about the genetic make-up of the parents', *misses*, for Anscombe, the sense in which the features of the child derive from the features of the parents (that sense being 'fission' according to Anscombe). Nor need any understanding of genetics, or that there is any such thing, be implied by a belief that the parent's features caused their child's.

This contention, I think, needs to be addressed in detail in Chapter 3. Doing so will elucidate some of what is going on in Davidson's argument for anomalous monism. One of the central features of Davidson's argument in "Mental Events" that is often missed is a contention that we must be very clear about the distinction between causality and causal explanation. As a promissory note I shall simply say that explanations that Anscombe contends miss what is "essential" to the causal relation are, according to Davidson, *better* causal explanations.

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<sup>35</sup> Davidson gives up the idea of necessitation, but retains the view that true causal claims imply *that there is* a covering law. Addressing why he believes this is the focus of chapter 3.

Secondly we have the argument that we best (and in fact *only*) *demonstrate possession* of the concept of cause by successful application of causal concepts:

for example: “*scrape, push, wet, carry, eat, burn, knock over, keep off, squash*”<sup>36</sup>

Anscombe’s suggestion is that application of such concepts is best understood as apprehension of the singular causal relation. Thus the singular causal relation (*this* A caused *this* B) is conceptually *prior to*, and not *derivative from* the notion that causal relations fall under universal claims (All A-*types* are followed by B-*types* necessarily).

Since, as I shall lay out in chapter 3, Davidson also thinks that the semantics of individual causal claims are best accounted for in terms of the singular causal relation I shall not focus on this line of argument.

Anscombe’s last line of argument in Section I focuses on her contention that the laws of science ought not be confused with, nor be seen as presuming or entailing, the necessitating view of causation. According to Anscombe the kinds of causal law from which we are supposed to derive the necessity of causal relations, laws of the form “All A-*types* are followed by B-*types*”, do not mirror the structure of scientific laws, and, moreover, are according to Anscombe at the least very difficult, and likely impossible, to spell out:

“[I]f you take a case of cause and effect, and relevantly describe the cause *A* and the effect *B*, and then construct a universal proposition, ‘always given an *A*, a *B* follows, you usually won’t get anything true. You have got to describe the absence of circumstances in which an *A* would not cause a *B*. But the task of excluding all such circumstances can’t be carried out.”

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<sup>36</sup>Anscombe, G.E.M., “Causality and Determination.” 93.

This is because in order for such very broad generalities to be true they must contain within their parts specification not merely of conditions met, but also of possible interventions or frustrating features of the causal environment avoided.

Anscombe moves to section 2 of “Causality and Determination” to close off vulnerability to the accusation of making an appeal to ignorance (just because we do not know, and have not spelled out, any causal laws of such a kind does not mean that there aren’t any). I shall follow her, as this last contention of section 1 looks like it might constitute an argument against the possibility of causal laws which are (in Davidson’s sense) “strict”, and this is, indeed, a relevant attack if it works.

I will cover what form Davidson thinks causal laws might take in Chapter 3 and why he thinks true causal claims imply that there are such laws. For now, I would simply reiterate that Anscombe herself realizes that the way she argues for this contention could be accused of constituting an argument from ignorance.

In Section 2 Anscombe offers cases of causation for our consideration, suggesting that our clearest understanding of them does not warrant the principle of relevant difference in full generality. Anscombe begins section 2 with consideration of a case of application of Newtonian physics, and asks whether we may conclude that science warrants the assumption of necessity in our account of causation. The case in question is a (relatively simple) closed physical system wherein a number of balls are ejected forcibly from an aperture above a number of adjacent pipes, into which the balls must eventually settle.

Anscombe concedes that the experiment will show us that the balls will always build up in *rough* conformity to the same curve, and that we may conclude that there are prior probabilities as to where each, and all, of the balls will come to rest in the vertical pipes.

What Anscombe is interested in is whether if we consider the resting place of a single, individual, ball, *that ball* came to rest where it did *of necessity*, and whether

a belief that it did is warranted as determinists believe. Her contention, of course, will be that it does not (or at the least *may not have*) come to rest where it did of necessity, or at the *very* least that we are not warranted in the belief that it did.

Anscombe's point is that predictions made of even such a relatively simple and closed physical system seem inherently probabilistic. We may increase our probabilities for individual and general outcomes by specifying the initial conditions and forces in operation in greater and greater detail, however we are never going to be able to specify them in fine enough detail to resolve the probability of where an individual ball will come to rest to 1 prior to operating the system<sup>37</sup>.

This is because of both practical (the limitations of our own measurement devices and methodologies) and factual (get to sufficiently fine measurements to move predictability to a probability of 1 and you move into subatomic realms where Newtonian physics does not apply) limits on the exactitude of measurements.

One ought, according to Anscombe, to give up the notion that the resting place of the ball was necessitated, was determined (in the sense in which it would need to be in order to undergird claims of necessitation) by the initial conditions and the laws of physics. For the final resting place of the ball could not have been predicted at a probability of 1. No margin of error which can actually be applied will reduce it to such a degree of certitude. This simple system of balls and pipes does not seem to be deterministic. Or at the least we seem unwarranted, other than dogmatically, in a belief that it is deterministic.

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<sup>37</sup> Anscombe's point seems to me to be to be very close to the claim that stochastic and deterministic (if chaotic) systems are, in fact, observationally equivalent. However, since *I* think it may be an empirical question not an a priori question as to whether we live in a deterministic universe or not, and am thus in *agreement* with Anscombe that determinism ought not be an *assumption* underlying causal laws, or indeed the laws of physics, I am not overly concerned with this, however impressed I might be that Anscombe lit upon it. Of course if stochastic and deterministic systems may be observationally equivalent, and whether we live in a deterministic universe is an empirical question, it looks like it may be an unanswerable one. I *do* think that Davidson points to a very interesting answer to the question of which of a stochastic or a non-stochastic explanation we ought to pick if the two are observationally equivalent.

Anscombe's argument is then that the notion of "determined" that has to be in play, for the laws of physics to undergird the claim that causal connections are necessary, would have to be the notion of the laws of physics making outcomes "pre-determined". Determinism is, then, the underlying assumption behind a necessitating view of causation. But though it is a view *held by many physicists* (Anscombe references Einstein's and Schrödinger's accounts of the goal of physics, which are indeed deterministic, and notes that outcomes which are not determined by a statement of initial conditions and of the laws of physics are often described as "uncaused" by physicists) it is not warranted by *physics* itself.

This is, I think, a deeply interesting contention. However, it *is* contentious and I would argue against its truth in some senses while conceding it in others. This would be an interesting interpretive endeavor and debate to engage in, however since we do in fact have *indeterministic* scientific laws which are widely believed and increasingly well-founded, arguing or discussing this point here will not be *à propos*, since the concession that RD may run out in the face of brute indeterminacy is for the sake of the argument at hand the same concession whether founded on acceptance of this thesis or not.

According to Anscombe we may simply think of the laws of physics as *constraining* possible outcomes, rather than as determining outcomes. She posits a hypothetical physicist who restricts his demand for uniqueness of outcome to such processes where enough variables are constrained in experiment so as to guarantee uniqueness of outcome, or where for the particular predictive purposes at hand unconstrained variables do not matter. Anscombe's suggestion is that the above considerations imply that any general assumption of determinism or universal identification of causation with necessitation simply will not follow under such a picture. Even where the laws are deterministic and not internally probabilistic in character the laws themselves will not imply determinism independent of the restricted contexts that allow their formulation.

Anscombe believed that within such a framework (the framework of her hypothetical physicist) we may *accurately* identify the connection between causation and necessity, and properly identify both necessitating and non-necessitating causes:

“[A] necessitating cause *C* of a given kind of effect *E* is such that it *is* not possible (on the occasion) that *C* should occur and should not cause an *E*, nor should there be anything that prevents an *E* from occurring. A non-necessitating cause is then one that can fail of its effect without the intervention of anything to frustrate it”<sup>38</sup>

Since “cause” is no longer taken to be identical with “necessitating cause” the presence of a caveat clause which amounts to “without something causing *E* to not occur” in the definition of *necessitating* cause is no longer question begging.

As an example of a necessitating cause Anscombe offers infection with rabies inevitably leading to death, since death can only be avoided by the intervention of treatment. As an example of a non-necessitating cause Anscombe offers Richard Feynman’s example of a bomb triggered by a Geiger-counter reading. The particular time that the bomb will go off is not determined, as a matter of the nature of radioactive decay. Yet, as Anscombe points out, there is no doubt as to what caused the bomb to go off if and when it did. Causation and necessitation are thus separated.

The use of an example from explicitly indeterministic physics (where the laws themselves admit of probabilities) as an example of a non-necessitating cause is of course, by Anscombe’s lights, unnecessary:

“It has taken the inventions of indeterministic physics to shake the rather common dogmatic conviction that determinism is a presupposition, or perhaps a conclusion, of scientific knowledge...but indeterministic physics is only culturally, not logically, required to make the deterministic picture

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<sup>38</sup> Anscombe, G.E.M., “Causality and Determination.” 101.

doubtful...It ought not to have mattered whether the laws of nature were or were not deterministic. For them to be deterministic is for them, together with the description of the situation, to entail unique results in situations defined by certain relevant objects and measures, and where no part is played by inconstant factors external to such definition.”<sup>39</sup>

Structured experiments, or situations where the number of relevant variables is constrained or restricted by, for example, scale, allow us, on this picture, to figure out laws of physics which apply at all places and all times, then, in the sense that they *constrain* what outcomes are possible. However, the *implication* that they are *determinative* (in Anscombe’s sense of pre-determination) of *which of what* may as a matter of fact may be some *set* of possible outcomes will actually occur does not follow.

In the terminology of Section 1 we will, according to Anscombe, be dealing with a non-necessitating cause whenever RD runs out of calculable or expressible relevant differences in the terminology of the particular law at play even where that law is not inherently probabilistic.

Anscombe clearly felt that her considerations entailed that Davidson was mistaken in his contention that singular causal claims imply that there is some covering law. So where do the considerations offered in “Causality and Determination” leave us as regards Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” for the thesis of anomalous monism?

As noted in chapter 1, Davidson *assumes* the principle of the nomological character of causality (NCC) as one of the three apparently contradictory principles

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<sup>39</sup> Anscombe, G.E.M., “Causality and Determination.” 103-04.

he wishes to reconcile with the thesis of anomalous monism. That principle being in its initial<sup>40</sup> formulation the following:

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

Davidson *does* drop the “deterministic” from the formulation of NCC in “Mental Events” in the face of the fact that RD does indeed seem to run out as an investigative principle in the face of the brute fact of indeterminacy. This is why my own summation of the arguments of “Mental Events” does not begin with this deterministic version. This is in accordance with Anscombe in the sense that his giving up of the “determinacy” constraint is based on a recognition of the fact that RD can run out, and thus must be treated as an investigative principle rather than a doctrinaire assumption. Following Anscombe we may give up the *identification* of causation with necessitation.

Davidson also accounts for the semantics of singular causal claims in terms of a simple two place relation between cause and effect (although he, unlike Anscombe, takes it that causes and effects are *events*).

Davidson does *not* give up the requirement that there must be *strict* causal laws: That is that caveats concerning them must run out, even if they may run out in the face of brute indeterminacy and a failure to resolve outcomes beyond the probabilistic.

What we need to find is an implication *that there is* a relevant strict causal law following from a true singular causal claim. In addition, we need an account of the connection between the concepts of cause and of necessity which does not

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<sup>40</sup> Although it is worth noting Davidson himself footnotes at that very point of introduction that he will drop the “deterministic” as unnecessary and too strong.

identify causation and necessitation. Moreover, these accounts must not be grounded in an unwarranted assumption of determinism.

My suggestion will be that Davidson's contention is that the conceptual connections between the ideas of cause, of a necessary connection, and of a causal law, have to do with the thesis that effects are *explainable* in terms of their causes, and a suggestion as to what constitutes better, in the sense of deeper, explanation. In order to explain Davidson's contention, I shall look to his broader views. Thus in Chapter 3 I will give a summary of Davidson's paper "The Causal Relation".

**Chapter 3:**  
**Donald Davidson**  
**CAUSAL RELATIONS**

Chapter 3 will be my response to Anscombe. Responding to Anscombe is essential as I would identify her paper “Causal Relations” as the primary source for the denial of the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality, or at the very least as the source of the notion that that principle is in need of active defense. I will offer that response in terms based on the Davidson article which Anscombe herself references in “Causality and Determination”, “Causal Relations”<sup>41</sup>. In Chapter 1 we saw that in “Mental Events” Davidson gave an argument for a new thesis of the identity of mental and physical events which turns centrally on the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality:

“[E]ach true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.”<sup>42</sup>

In Chapter 2 we saw G.E.M Anscombe argue that, instead, the central feature of the concept of cause is the notion that an effect is somehow derivative, or comes out of, or is contained within, its cause. Anscombe provided a set of arguments arguing against what she saw as an exhaustive list of possible warrants for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality. Anscombe’s view was that the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality was founded on an illegitimate identification of the causal relation with a necessitation relation. She concluded that the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality was illegitimate, misconstrued our ordinary concept of cause, and was founded on an unwarranted

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<sup>41</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Causal Relations” *The Journal of Philosophy*, 64, no. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Mental Events.” 118.

*assumption* of determinism, and thus that only *necessitating* causes would be backed by laws, with non-necessitating causes merely being constrained by any relevant laws.

To respond to Anscombe we must not only allow that the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality does not a priori require that all events related as causes and effects fall under *deterministic* laws. We must also find *warrant* for the requirement that they fall under laws *at all*, in the sense of *strict* laws. Without any argument to this effect we are left with a view of any causal laws solely as constraints on events and our expectations of their consequences.

Fundamentally, I think, Davidson's warrant for believing the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality is the notion that causal laws, seen only as constraints on events, are insufficient to do the job for which causal laws are intended. Davidson's view is that the connection between singular causal claims, and causal laws, is that causal laws are meant to provide part of an *explanation* of the mentioned kinds of events. Moreover, we *test* our causal laws not merely by retrodiction (checking to see that they accurately explain past events) but also by prediction; positing the outcomes of future events. It is, after all, by Davidson's lights, the weakness of "rough rules of thumb" in predictive power which leaves *them* as insufficient explanation, and moves us to requiring deeper explanation in vocabularies which allow for the formulation of strict laws.

For Davidson, I would suggest, the warrant for this would be a variety of naturalism; namely all events are nomologically explainable in terms of their causes. This is not identical with Quine's "methodological naturalism" (the view that philosophy is continuous with science and metaphysics ought to be informed by and continuous with the ontology of the natural sciences). Nor is it identical with the "metaphysical naturalist" thesis that no events have supernatural causes. It is a thesis about explanation, not a thesis about methodology, or, particularly, about

metaphysics. The thesis is, essentially, that all events can be given *complete* explanations, along with the thesis that complete explanations are *nomological*.

To do Davidson's view justice I will start with his paper "Causal Relations". In this paper Davidson gives *his* account of what he thinks we may conclude from our use of causal language. Davidson, like Anscombe, begins by considering our *use* of the concept of cause. Moreover, Davidson, like Anscombe, eschews giving explicit definition/analysis of the causal *relation*, preferring instead to examine the proper account of the semantics of singular causal claims. Davidson then moves to consideration of how singular causal claims relate to universal causal laws from the perspective of *his* interpretation of the semantics of singular causal claims.

Unlike Anscombe's ordinary language approach Davidson views the matter from the perspective of attempting to identify *logical form*. The account of the logical form of any kind of sentence should be an account of the grammatical or logical role of the words or longer significant parts of the sentences. This account should be consistent with both the existing entailment relations of such sentences, and the role that those parts or words play in other types of sentences in which they occur. Such an analysis is an analysis of the grammatical or logical form of the sentence type, and of the logical or grammatical roles of its parts, *not* an analysis of the meanings of component logically simple expressions. In looking at logical form we are looking at how the meaning of a sentence depends on its structure<sup>43</sup>.

Often Davidson will attempt to elucidate accurate and inaccurate analyses of logical form by displaying them as offering competing paraphrases of the sentence to be analyzed, or he will attempt to translate a sentence into first-order logic. As he notes,<sup>44</sup> such a translation is supposed to be used as a test of whether logical form has been accurately identified. The virtue of canonical notation is not that it is an improvement over natural language, but that it wears its semantics on its face, and

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<sup>43</sup> See Davidson, Donald, "The Logical Form of Action Sentences" in *The Essential Davidson*. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Footnote 4 of "Causal Relations."

can thus be used to provide a semantic theory for the natural language sentence. First order logic can be unwieldy in a way natural language is not, often where it is *most* useful in elucidating the logical form of the natural language version<sup>45</sup>.

Davidson's attempt to make sense of some of the philosophical issues concerning causal claims, then, is not an account in terms of analyzing the *meaning* of "caused" in "*x caused y*" in terms of how it is ordinarily used, as Anscombe thinks we ought. Rather, Davidson wishes to correctly identify the *logical form* or structure of such causal claims.

Davidson's account of the logical form of singular causal claims is that they are extensional expressions, with two singular terms, referring to events, in a simple two-place relation, and true, like any such sentence, when the events are an appropriate pair.

Before moving on to attempt to elucidate this, through paraphrase and canonical notation (following Davidson in "Causal Relations"), it is worth noting again that this analysis, in terms of attempting to correctly identify logical form, remains essentially silent on what an *appropriate* pair consists in. In other words, an analysis of the logical form of causal claims will remain silent on whether the causal relation is 'merely', for example, constant conjunction, or in fact, a necessitation relation, or indeed even that one event "contains" another, or one event "comes out of" another. Analysis of "the causal relation" is not what Davidson is about.

Having said that, analysis in terms of logical form *does* allow us to rule out the idea that "...caused..." *expresses* a necessitation relation in the sense of being

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<sup>45</sup> Think of the classic examples: "Everybody loves somebody", "Somebody loves everybody" etc. Davidson gives "Somebody loves somebody" as an example of a claim which does not 'wear its logical form on its face' in "Causal Relations."

analyzable as having the logical form of something much like the material conditional. Davidson takes a simple causal claim<sup>46</sup>:

- (1) The short circuit caused the fire.

And he notes that (since an expression of a necessitation relation would seem to be a sentential connective of some sort), if we were to attempt to give the logical form of (1) we would need to paraphrase so as to have sentences rather than singular terms on either side of that connective, giving us:

- 2) *The fact that there was a short circuit caused it to be the case that there was a fire.*

Here the italicized expressions are supposed, then, to be taken to be a natural language version of something very much like the material conditional.

The material conditional can be interpreted as expressing the claim that the truth of the antecedent sentence is a sufficient condition for the truth of the consequent sentence and, conversely, the truth of the consequent sentence is a necessary condition for the truth of the antecedent sentence. Thus causal claims, interpreted as having this logical form, would express the claim that the cause is sufficient for the effect, and that effects are necessary if their causes are present.

As Davidson notes, however, this account of the logical form of singular causal claims fails one of our tests. If (2) were a correct analysis of logical form we should remain consistent with the ordinary entailment relations of our original sentence, yet we do not. If the italicized phrases *were* analyzable as the material conditional (2) would be logically equivalent to:

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<sup>46</sup> The example sentence is taken by Davidson from J.L. Mackie's, "Causes and Conditions." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 2, 4 (October 1965):245-264. Mackie considers the force of an expert claim that "this short circuit caused this fire" when considering how necessity connects to causal claims.

(2') *If* there was a short circuit *then* there was a fire.

If accurate this account of the logical form of singular causal claims as truth-functional would require that the truth values of such compound expressions would be dependent solely upon the *truth value* of their component sentences. Thus substituting materially equivalent claims should preserve the truth of the compound sentence.

But in fact, if Davidson is right, we preserve the truth of (1) by replacing its components with *co-extensive* and *co-referring* expressions, but we do *not* preserve the truth of (2) by substituting *materially equivalent* claims as we would preserve the truth of (2'). Thus (2) does not seem to give the logical form of (1), and the italicized portion of (2) does not seem to be a sentential connective. Davidson's suggestion is, then, that we give up the claim that (2) gives the logical form of (1) and the claim that the "...caused..." of (1) is some kind of concealed sentential (truth-functional) connective<sup>47</sup>.

Davidson moves on to consideration of six more example sentences (I will label them 3-8 following Davidson) in order to suggest warrant for his interpretation of the logical form of singular causal claims:

(3) *It is a fact that* Jack fell down.

(4) Jack fell down *and* Jack broke his crown.

(5) Jack fell down *before* Jack broke his crown.

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<sup>47</sup> There is a further argument on more complex interpretations of causal claims. I am avoiding that discussion because as it pertains to this dissertation it most clearly relates to Jaegwon Kim's concerns regarding "Mental Events" and I intend to pursue Davidson and Kim's disagreement in different terms than occur in "Causal Relations" over this issue. I will discuss a related argument from Davidson in chapter 4.

- (6) Jack fell down, *which caused it to be the case that* Jack broke his crown.
- (7) *Jones forgot the fact that* Jack fell down.
- (8) *That* Jack fell down *explains the fact that* Jack broke his crown.

Davidson's suggestion is that (3) and (4) are straightforwardly extensional: i.e., substitution of co-referring singular terms, co-extensive predicates, and materially equivalent claims will all preserve truth. (7) And (8), on the other hand, are clearly intensional: i.e., substitution into these sentences is not guaranteed to preserve truth. (5) And (6), Davidson suggests, share a similar middle ground, where substitution of co-referring and co-extensive expressions preserves truth, but substitution of materially equivalent expressions does not. His move will be to suggest that we deal with singular causal claims like (6) as we do singular temporal claims like (5).

Davidson's suggestion is that our account of the logical form of "*x happened before y*" does *not* take it that "before" is a sentential connective. Instead we deal with claims like this by adding times to our ontology, and interpreting such claims as expressing a two place relation between ordered pairs of times<sup>48</sup>. Thus we may account for the logical form of claims like (5) by adding an extra place to the predicates assigning *times*: "Jack fell down at time *t*" and "Jack broke his crown at time *t*" thus, following Davidson, we get:

- (5') There exist times *t* and *t'* such that Jack fell down at *t*, Jack broke his crown at *t'* and *t* preceded *t'*.

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<sup>48</sup> The argument for *not* taking "before" to be a sentential connective would be the same as the argument for our not taking "caused" to be a sentential connective. To do so would require unacceptable revision of the laws of substitution.

Davidson's suggestion is, then, that the similar failures of substitutivity imply similar logical forms for sentences like (5) and (6), and thus that we ought to deal with (6) analogously. Here we best account for logical form by adding *events* to our ontology. Thus Davidson suggests that (6) has the logical form:

- (6') There exist events  $e$  and  $e'$  such that  $e$  is a falling down of Jack,  $e'$  is a breaking of his crown by Jack, and  $e$  caused  $e'$ .

This account of the logical form of sentences like (5) and (6) explains why it is ontology and not material equivalence which is central to preserving truth in making substitutions into such sentences.

It is this recognition of the fact that what is important to the truth of a singular causal claim is *what* events are picked out, not *how* the events are picked out which Davidson believes may provide insight into the philosophical confusion concerning singular causal claims.

To make a *true* singular causal claim is simply to pick out two events which are in the appropriate relation. There is no reason to suppose that any *particular means* of picking out those events will imply, or even suggest the form of, a causal law linking those events together. Thus Anscombe is right. Singular causal claims do not themselves imply, or provide a promissory note as to the form, or vocabulary, of laws, even where they are true.

On the other hand, if someone were to ask, for example, "What did you have for dinner last night?" and received the answer "My dinner" the answer would be factually accurate. It would, in extensional terms, be a perfectly fine answer. While accurate, however, the *means* of picking out an extensionally accurate answer to the question is a poor *description* for the purposes at hand. The problem is not that the answer doesn't *pick out* the right thing, but rather that it ought to provide a *fuller description* to be fit for whatever purpose the questioner had in mind.

*Descriptions* of causes and effects are important, then, beyond whether they manage to pick out the right events, when one has a particular *purpose* in mind for the *description*. This consideration is why we are to recognize that the thought that “we have not specified the whole cause of an event when we have not wholly specified it”<sup>49</sup> is *mistaken*. Wholly specifying a cause, and picking out a cause are different. And picking out a cause *is* picking out *the whole cause*. Causal laws are not *implied by* singular causal statements, nor do they provide *analysis* of them (in that a causal claim is not an elliptical or abbreviated version of a statement of a causal law and the claim that the law obtains in the particular case). The following question, however, Davidson suggests, remains legitimate:

“[W]hat form are causal laws apt to have, if from them, and a premise to the effect that an event of a certain (acceptable) description exists, we are to infer a singular causal statement that the event caused, or was caused by, another”<sup>50</sup>

In other words, what form are causal laws apt to have if causal laws are part of a nomological *explanation* of the occurrence of particular events.

The connection between *descriptions* of causes and effects and between necessary and sufficient conditions is actually the following: the fuller a *description* of a *cause* we give the more suggestive the *description of* the cause is of the fact that the cause was *sufficient* for the effect, while we simultaneously make it seem less likely that the cause *as described* was *necessary* for the effect. Conversely the fuller the *description* of an *effect* we give is, the more suggestive the *description of* the effect is of the fact that the cause was *necessary* for the effect, while we simultaneously make it seem less likely that the cause *as described* was *sufficient* for the effect.

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<sup>49</sup> Donald Davidson, “Causal Relations.” 698. The mistake is attributed by Davidson to John Stuart Mill.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 699.

Davidson's suggestion is that the symmetry of these points suggests that whatever sense (if any) can be made of the fact that *under some description* causes seem sufficient for their effects may as correctly be said about the causes' necessity for their effects.

Davidson thus suggests<sup>51</sup> that causal laws are apt to have the form of a conjunction, where one clause can be used to show that an event under an appropriate description is sufficient for an effect under an appropriate description, and the other clause can be used to show how the event, under that description, is necessary for the effect:

$$(L) \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (S) \quad (e) (n) ((Fe \ \& \ t(e) = n) \rightarrow (\exists !f) (Gf \ \& \ t(f) = n + \epsilon \ \& \ C(e, f))) \text{ and} \\ (N) \quad (e) (n) ((Ge \ \& \ t(e) = n + \epsilon) \rightarrow (\exists !f) (Ff \ \& \ t(f) = n \ \& \ C(f, e))) \end{array} \right. ^{52}$$

Causal laws, then, for Davidson, are important in *explaining* events. *Descriptions* of events matter insofar as they pick out the right event and (in this particular context) insofar as they are apt to allow formulation of a causal law. Causal laws matter insofar as they provide *better* explanation. Davidson asks that we consider the following as a rough template of the situation:

$$(P) \quad (\exists !e) (Fe \ \& \ t(e) = 3)^{53}$$

$$(C) \quad (1e) (Fe \ \& \ t(e) = 3) \text{ caused } (1e) (Ge \ \& \ t(e) = 3 + \epsilon)^{54}$$

<sup>51</sup> This account of the form of a full-fledged causal law does amount to little more than a suggestion. It is not the conclusion of "Causal Relations". Its main role is as a template for the simplest form of a causal law as it relates to better causal explanation.

<sup>52</sup> Davidson, Donald "Causal Relations." 699. The variables (*e* and *f*) range over events. *F* and *G* are appropriate descriptions of events, *n* ranges over numbers so times can be assigned to events (*t* is the function mapping numbers onto events to mark the time at which they occur), and *C*(*e*, *f*) is to be read as expressing a causal relation between *e* and *f*.

<sup>53</sup> (P) is to be read as saying that there exists an event *e* which is describable as *F* and happened at 3 p.m.

<sup>54</sup> (C) is to be read as saying the one and only event which is describable as *F* and happened at 3 p.m. *caused* the one and only event which is describable as *G* and happened after 3 p.m.

Following Davidson let us say that an example is the case of our knowing that “there was a fire in the house at 3.01 p.m.”. The *simplest* form of *explanation* of that fire is that “there was a short circuit at 3.00 p.m.” and the short circuit at 3 p.m. *caused* the fire at 3.01 p.m. (in other words (C)). *This* explanation makes no mention of laws. If we have the appropriate (L) in hand, however, and we have reason to believe that (P), we can reason, with only the resources of deductive logic, to the *conclusion* (C). (C) is, thus, the most *basic* form of causal explanation. But anything we can say *in favor of the truth of* (C) will *improve* the explanation. (P) and (L), taken together, as Davidson puts it “clinch the matter”.

The idea is *not* that sentences of the form “*x caused y*” are *all* backed by causal laws. Many means of picking out events will not be apt for formulation of such laws. Rather, in the simplest cases, the relation is that if a sentence of the form “*x caused y*” is true then there must be *descriptions* of *x* and of *y* such that the result of substituting them for *x* and *y* is entailed by premises of forms (P) and (L)<sup>55</sup>. Why must this be the case? The only possible warrant in play is an assumption that causal claims admit of *complete* explanation. *This* assumption I would label “naturalism”.

The conclusion that would seem warranted here (if it follows) is, of course, stronger than the conclusion Davidson *needs* in the context of this dissertation. I brought in Davidson’s arguments from “Causal Relations” to find warrant for NCC: “[E]ach true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.”<sup>56</sup>

But what we have as I have presented it here, in “Causal Relations”, is suggested warrant for the claim that for every simple causal explanation (C) where the events are described appropriately, there is a (P) and an (L).

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<sup>55</sup> See “Causal Relations.” 701. This is the “covering law” thesis.

<sup>56</sup> Donald Davidson, “Mental Events.” 118.

It is only the excessive strength of this conclusion that we need, following Davidson (since he does the very same in “Mental Events”), give up. As it turns out we must concede, in the face of apparent indeterminism, that the resources of deductive logic may not be sufficient for all causal laws. Some laws may well, it turns out, be probabilistic in character, and appropriate emendations must be made to (L) in such cases.

Our warrant for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality is a variety of naturalism, thought of as a thesis about explanation. The assumption of determinism follows simply from an intuition based on the fact that the fuller a *description* of a *cause* we give the more suggestive the *description* of the cause is of the fact that the cause was *sufficient* for the effect, while simultaneously making it seem less likely that the cause *as described* was *necessary* for the effect. Conversely the fuller the *description* of an *effect* we give is, the more suggestive the *description* of the effect is of the fact that the cause was *necessary* for the effect, while we simultaneously make it seem less likely that the cause *as described* was *sufficient* for the effect. We can simply accept that this intuition may be proven wrong if our investigations reach an end at brute indeterminacy. Thus we do not *a priori* demand *deterministic* laws.

Having appropriately reduced the strength of the conclusion, however, Davidson’s major points in “Causal Relations” remain salient. Those points are, firstly; that causal laws are implied by naturalism, which is a thesis about *explanation*. Secondly; *explanations* relate *statements* to one another. Thirdly; singular causal claims do not relate *statements* to one another. They are extensional; they make a claim about *events*, which are *particulars*, being in a given relation with one another. Notably Davidson makes explicit mention and use of the second and third of these in giving the arguments in “Mental Events”.

For the purposes of this dissertation it is the second and third points which are relevant in dealing with the next objection toward Davidson’s reasoning in “Mental Events” to which I will turn next. Thus in Chapter 4 “The Threat of

Epiphenomenalism” I will move on to a discussion of a different problem which arises, I shall suggest, through a particular interpretation of what the notion of an “appropriate description” of a cause or an effect commits us to.

## Chapter 4: THE THREAT OF EPIPHENOMENALISM

As we saw in Chapter 1 Davidson's goal in "Mental Events" is to present, and argue for, a novel version of the identity thesis (the thesis that mental events are identical with physical events) which reconciles the three principles which Davidson labels at the beginning of the paper. This view is novel because rather than assuming, or promising, a principled reduction of mental descriptions to physical descriptions, it rests on a demonstration of the identity thesis which takes as a premise the claim that such reduction is impossible. In Chapter 4 I will lay out and respond to a family of objections to "Mental Events" which suggest that the view that Davidson's arguments entail is not truly a version of the identity thesis at all. Instead the lesson they take from Davidson's arguments is that causality operates at the level of the physical *properties* they believe strict nomological explanations reference.

In "Mental Events" Davidson says that events are mental in virtue of falling under *mental descriptions*<sup>57</sup>. In "Causal Relations" Davidson gives an analysis of the logical form of singular causal claims, and suggests that nomologicality follows for some *appropriate description* of two events which are causally related. Epiphenomalism threatens if we take two further steps. The first step is to agree with Davidson's contention in "Mental Events" that mental descriptions<sup>58</sup> will never be

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<sup>57</sup> "Let us call a description of the form 'the event that is *M*' or an open sentence of the form 'event *x* is *M*' a *mental description* or *mental open sentence* if and only if the expression contains at least one mental verb essentially (Essentially, so as to rule out cases where the description or open sentence is logically equivalent to one or not containing mental vocabulary)." Donald Davidson, "Mental Events." 108.

<sup>58</sup> Via the Principle of the Anomalism of the mental: There are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted or explained.

the ones which appear in strict nomological explanations of the related events. The second step is to assume that descriptions are relevant not merely to what constitutes kinds of causal *explanation* but metaphysically to *causality* itself. In response I shall suggest that this latter assumption concerning what *description* entails in general is not shared by Davidson, and is *indeed* incompatible with his conclusion in “Mental Events” and with making sense of much of his argument in “Causal Relations”.

In Chapter 1 we saw that Davidson suggests that we consider a fourfold classification of theories of the relation between mental and physical events with distinctions provided in terms of whether each view accepts or denies the identity thesis (mental events are identical with physical events), and whether each view accepts or denies that there are psychophysical laws correlating types of mental descriptions of events with types of physical descriptions of events. This gives us, following Davidson, the following classification of possible theories:

*Nomological monism:* There are correlating laws between events described as mental and events described as physical, and those events are identical.

*Nomological dualism:* There are correlating laws between events described as physical and events described as mental, but the events are non-identical.

*Anomalous Dualism:* There is a failure of correlating laws, and mental and physical events are non-identical (This, Davidson suggests, is the Cartesian picture).

*Anomalous Monism:* There is a failure of correlating laws between events described as mental and events described as physical, yet the events are identical.

Davidson’s suggestion was that epiphenomenalism was a variety of nomological dualism. Things would seem, then, to have gone essentially as badly as is possible with Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” if they entail *this* view as opposed to anomalous monism. I shall begin, then, by giving an account of how it

has been supposed that Davidson's stated views in "Mental Events" *do* entail epiphenomenalism.

I shall focus on Jaegwon Kim's account<sup>59</sup> of the argument that Davidson's views, as expressed in "Mental Events", in fact entail epiphenomenalism concerning the mental, as opposed to anomalous monism. The first point that should be noted, in Kim's favor, is that Kim is at least willing to concede that events describable both as mental and physical may be one and the same event. Kim contends, however, that if we consider an event- let us call it event *e* - then event *e* is describable as a mental event (if it *is* describable as a mental event) in virtue of instantiating some mental property, let us call that property *M*. Whereas if event *e* is describable as a *physical* event, it will be describable as such in virtue of instantiating some *physical* property, let us call that property *P*. Thus Kim sees Davidson's notion of "describable as" as involving a commitment to properties, and, indeed, involving a commitment to *property* dualism. It is not that the *events* are non-identical, it is that the *properties* of events are non-identical. We have monism, as it applies to particulars, to events, but we have dualism when it comes to the properties of events.

With just this much in place we can begin to see how Kim thought that Davidson's arguments entail a *novel* version of epiphenomenalism rather than a novel version of the identity thesis. The argument runs basically as follows: if all causal relations are apt for *strict* nomological explanation under some description, and mental descriptions are not appropriate for allowing the formation of strict nomological explanations, then all causal relations are *apt for* strict nomological explanation in virtue of physical descriptions of the events so related. Up to this

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<sup>59</sup> Kim, Jaegwon, "Causation, Nomic Subsumption and the Concept of Event". *Journal of Philosophy*, 70, no. 8, 217-236, "Concepts of Supervenience", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 45, no. 2, 153-176, "Epiphenomenal and Supervenient Causation", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 9, no. 1, 257-270 etc. Also see, for example, F. Stoutland "Oblique Causation and Reasons for Action", *Synthese*, 43, no. 3, 351-367.

point we are consistent with Davidson in “Mental Events”. It is the next move which I shall argue misses Davidson’s point. The next move is to suggest that a causal claim is thus *true in virtue of* the instantiation of whatever physical properties the events instantiate, *not* in virtue of whatever mental properties the events instantiate. Thus mental properties exist in Davidson’s picture, but they are epiphenomena. They are not causally efficacious.

In terms of our imagined event  $e$ , if it were the case that  $e$  caused some other event  $f$  (“ $Ce,f$ ” in the suggested notation of “Causal Relations”), then any (L) and (P) relevant to ‘clinching the matter’ as to the causal relation between  $e$  and  $f$  would have to be given using physical descriptions - descriptions which picked out *physical properties* of events  $e$  and  $f$ . Any mental description we used might pick out the right  $e$  and  $f$  (indeed under Davidson’s account they must do this much), but  $Ce,f$  would not be *true in virtue of* the fact that they did.

To be appropriately charitable as to why Kim feels warranted in concluding that Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” entail epiphenomenalism regarding the mental I must add a principle to those I previously noted in my account of the arguments of “Mental Events” in Chapter 1. First, I will note, again, my contention is that they do *not*, in fact. I shall argue that Davidson *explicitly* disavows the *extra* commitment necessary for this conclusion to follow. Adding this principle will be the beginning of a process of re-layering some of the nuance back into the arguments of “Mental Events”. Thus far I have attempted to focus on the central points of “Mental Events” and the core concepts necessary to identify why Davidson thinks they ought to be accepted, or at least appealing, and why they imply anomalous monism as a solution to the apparent tension between them.

Let us call this new principle the Principle of the Supervenience of the Mental. Between the end of Section I of “Mental Events” (that section wherein he lays out the position of anomalous monism, and suggests anomalous monism may be seen as dissolving the apparent tension between our various core principles) and the

beginning of Section II of “Mental Events” (that section wherein he argues for the truth of Psychophysical Anomalism) Davidson says the following<sup>60</sup>:

“Although the position I describe denies there are psychophysical laws, it is consistent with the view that mental characteristics are in some sense dependent, or supervenient, on physical characteristics. Such Supervenience might be taken to mean that there cannot be two events alike in all physical respects but differing in some mental respect, or that an object cannot alter in some mental respect without altering in some physical respect.”

With this principle in place, having already noted that Kim interprets the notion of “describable as” as a claim about properties, we can say that Kim interprets the notion of supervenience as claim about necessitation relations between these two types of characteristics (which he interprets as mental properties and physical properties). Further, Kim construes causality as obtaining between an event  $e$  and an event  $f$  in virtue of the properties of those events. Thus if we consider a case of an event  $e$ , which causes an event  $f$ , a claim to this effect would be the claim that, for example,

$e$  caused  $f$  (or  $Ce,f$ ).

On Kim’s reading of supervenience, if  $e$  is a mental event it will be mental in virtue of instantiating some mental property  $M$ . Further,  $e$  instantiates mental property  $M$  in virtue of instantiating some physical property (or group of physical properties)  $P$ . According to supervenience, any difference in mental properties requires a difference in physical properties, thus any particular mental property  $M$  must supervene upon some physical property (or group of physical properties)  $P$ .

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<sup>60</sup> Davidson, Donald, “Mental Events.” 111.

So, on Kim's interpretation of the picture Davidson presents we have event  $e$ , which has the mental property  $M$  and the physical property  $P$ . Now let us say event  $f$  has some physical property  $P'$  and some mental property  $M'$ . It appears (via Davidson's commitment to the anomalism of the mental, and the nomological character of causality) that  $e$  causes  $f$  in virtue of being  $P$ , and that  $f$  has property  $P'$  in virtue of  $e$ 's being  $P$ , and property  $M'$  (if at all) only via supervenience (a change in physical properties requires a change in mental properties so the difference between  $P$  and  $P'$  requires a difference in mental properties). The mental property of event  $e$ , namely  $M$  appears to be epiphenomenal, as does any other mental property. Causal relations go through only in virtue of the physical properties of events.

In the notation of "Causal Relations" the issue is the following. Any *appropriate descriptions* of events  $e$  and  $f$  which appear in the relevant (L), (P) and (C) will be, by the arguments of "Mental Events" using physical descriptions of events. There may be a (C) where we take  $e$  characterized as a mental event by ascription of property  $M$  but no (L) and (P) "clinching the matter" as to  $e$ 's causing  $f$  will be forthcoming using similarly mental descriptions. Referring back to the notation of "Causal Relations" as given in chapter 3 of this dissertation, for any (L):

$$(L) \quad \left\{ \begin{array}{l} (S) \quad (e) (n) ((Fe \ \& \ t(e) = n) \rightarrow (\exists !f) (Gf \ \& \ t(f) = n + \epsilon \ \& \ C(e, f))) \text{ and} \\ (N) \quad (e) (n) ((Ge \ \& \ t(e) = n + \epsilon) \rightarrow (\exists !f) (Ff \ \& \ t(f) = n \ \& \ C(f, e))) \end{array} \right.$$

$$\text{And (P):} \quad (\exists !e) (Fe \ \& \ t(e) = 3)$$

Used in nomological explanation of any (C):

$$(1e) (Fe \ \& \ t(e) = 3) \text{ caused } (1e) (Ge \ \& \ t(e) = 3 + \epsilon)^{61}$$

any  $F$  and  $G$  will have to be *physical* descriptions of events. Kim, then, takes the fact of lawlike *explanation* requiring *physical description* as a demonstration that *causality* operates only at the level of the *physical properties of events* and any

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<sup>61</sup> Again, (C) is to be read as saying the one and only event which is describable as  $F$  and happened at 3 p.m. *caused* the one and only event which is describable as  $G$  and happened after 3 p.m.

mental properties will be *epiphenomena* and part of the causal chain only as effects of the physical properties of events not participating in a causal chain as *causes* of either mental or physical *properties of* events, except indirectly as they supervene on *physical* properties.

For Davidson, however, events are dated unique particulars and the causal relation is a simple two place relation taking place between *events, however described*. Supervenience, under this picture, is entirely agnostic concerning property realism in general and necessity relations between properties in particular.

The notion that an event is physical in virtue of instantiating physical properties and mental in virtue of instantiating mental properties follows only if one interprets Davidson's claim that events are mental in virtue of falling under mental descriptions as entailing it. It does not seem to me to obviously do so. To read it this way one must understand mental predicates as applying to singular terms in virtue of the particulars the singular terms refer to possessing the requisite mental properties. Interpreting predicate semantics this way is contentious at best, and Davidson is certainly not a proponent of such a view.

Davidson's general account does not read off properties directly from predicates. Not even when Davidson thinks claims made using those predicates are objectively true or false. Realism, for Davidson, does not require a one to one relation between predicates and properties<sup>62</sup>. Davidson thus does not hold the view that mental predicates, true of singular terms, require the instantiation of non-physical properties by the particulars to which the singular terms refer.

In fact, it is far more accurate, when discussing Davidson's views, to note that when Davidson talks of properties he usually only means that a given predicate

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<sup>62</sup> This is not unconnected to the fact that Davidson embraces "semantic" rather than "metaphysical" realism. This is an important distinction but beyond the scope of this project.

is, or a class of predicates are, true of some (class of) singular terms<sup>63</sup>. In “Mental Events” Davidson denies there can be a conceptual or explanatory reduction of mental predicates to physical predicates. The ontological reduction, however, goes through<sup>64</sup>. Both mental and physical *predicates* are, in these cases, true of (satisfied by) singular terms of the appropriate kinds. Namely by singular terms picking out events, and, according to Davidson’s semantic views, events are clearly one of the acceptable ontological candidates for the referents of singular terms. No serious commitment to properties, in general, or to a one to one correspondence between properties and predicates, in particular, is, in Davidson’s view, entailed.

As a promissory note I will initially remind the reader that Davidson’s claim is that, *better causal explanations* require us to use “appropriate descriptions”. Let us for now concede that that means descriptions describing events using physical predicates of events<sup>65</sup>. This, of course, does not settle the question between Kim and Davidson. First, Kim concedes that we have identity between particulars, between bearers of properties (the events). Moreover, Davidson also thinks that this explanatory requirement is related to an argument for the *identity* of events, *however* described- an argument which is indeed metaphysical in conclusion, if any argument is. What we need to do, to settle the question, is address whether the notion of descriptions of events can be taken metaphysically seriously as a simple correlation between singular terms and their referents (events) and between predicates and the properties of those events.

To resolve the issue of the threat of epiphenomenalism, then, one must, at least it seems to me, resolve two issues. First whether Davidson is committed to a one to one correlation between predicates and properties. It seems to me that this is clearly not the case. I will attempt to justify this textually in what follows. Second, I

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<sup>63</sup> I am suggesting that the *assumption* that this is identical, or synonymous, with, the serious metaphysical claim that those singular terms instantiate some particular property is just that; an assumption.

<sup>64</sup> Hence anomalous monism rather than non-reductive property dualist substance physicalism.

<sup>65</sup> The notion of “physical” predicate will be explored further in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

must offer some argument as to why we ought not, I would suggest following Davidson, accept the view that there is a one to one correlation between predicates and properties.

Both of these may be done effectively simultaneously. Davidson's account of why we *ought not bring entities*, of whatever kind, for *predicates* to refer to into our account of what it is for say *Me* or *Pe* to be true provides *both* the evidence for my claim that *Davidson* is not adding the extra step I have suggested we must take which causes epiphenomenalism to threaten, and Davidson's account as to why *we*, in general, ought not take this step.

It is not overly helpful that Davidson himself says "*F* and *G* are properties of events" in giving interpretation to (L) in "Causal Relations"<sup>66</sup>. Philosophers are in the habit of adverting to properties and of *thinking* that properties are somehow helpfully explanatory, but any teacher of introductory logic ought to know that confusion, not clarity, follows suggesting to students not yet embedded in a philosophical context that "The things with the property of *being a tree* go in this circle", whereas suggesting "Trees go in this circle" is easily understood.

Davidson actually has an argument (not, in this case, one that he thinks is novel, but instead an argument that is millennia old) as to *why* this is the case. The *habit* of using the word "property" is perhaps forgivable. John Heil<sup>67</sup> suggests that uses of the word "property" such as Davidson's use in "Causal Relations" could be called the "episcopalian" usage, in that Davidson, and those who use the word "property" in a like sense, means only that a predicate is true of an appropriate entity when they use the word, with no deep metaphysical commitment to entities other than those predicated of intended or implied.

Notably, Davidson provides no argument for the non-existence of properties, he does not think he needs one. Instead, Davidson provides an argument to the effect

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<sup>66</sup>Davidson, Donald "Causal Relations." 700.

<sup>67</sup>Heil, John "Anomalous Monism" in H. Dyke (ed.), *From Truth to Reality: New Essays in Logic and Metaphysics*, 85–98.

that properties are not helpfully explanatory in accounting for predication. This argument, if it works, does not have the consequence that there *are no* properties or relations. Metaphysical arguments for their necessity (in general) are not touched. It *does* have the consequence that making sense of *predication* does not require a one to one correspondence between predicates and properties, and that such a correspondence, even were there one, would *not* be explicative of predication.

The problem, as Davidson sees it, for positions, that, like Kim's, attempt to account for the semantics of predication in terms of a one to one relation between predicates and properties, or even assume such a direct relation between predicates and properties, is that such accounts fail to address the problem of predication.

This problem is a central issue (or at least ought to be according to Davidson) whether one considers philosophy from the angle of the philosophy of language (here the problem appears as the issue of the unity of the proposition), the philosophy of mind (here it takes the form of deciding what constitutes a judgement or a case of application of a concept), or in metaphysics (where it appears as the question of how a substance is related to its attributes).<sup>68</sup>

The problem of predication as it relates to this chapter, and dissertation, however, may be restricted to the semantic issue. The issue in the semantic case (in fact as elsewhere) is that accounting for the semantics of predication in terms of predicates corresponding with properties, or indeed any other candidate entities, turns *sentences* into *lists* and thereby creates an infinite explanatory regress.

This is because we explain the content of a sentence by taking it that a singular term picks out an individual entity, and that the verb picks out a form (another entity). This analysis, however, gives us an account of the sentence as two singular terms, and this is a list not a sentence. There is no longer a verb.

We account for *this* by *adding* the *relation* of instantiation, so that we can explain that the singular term *instantiates* (in a true claim) or does not instantiate (in a false claim) the referenced form. But if we continue with prior semantic practice

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<sup>68</sup> Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*. 77.

our account of the meaning of “instantiates” will be that it picks out a form, and now, once again, we have no verb. All elements of the sentence are taken to refer to things and we have a list with no verb.

We can look, with Davidson<sup>69</sup>, at Plato’s dialogue between Parmenides and the Stranger in the *Sophist* for an example millennia old. Here the Stranger, in taking up the challenge of how it is we can say, and think, what is not, considers two sentences,

(1) ‘Theaetetus flies’

and (2) ‘Theaetetus sits’,

one of which is true (2), and the other (1) false. These two short sentences have two parts, which the Stranger calls name and verb. According to the stranger each of them names an entity. In the case of ‘Theaetetus’ it is, obviously, Theaetetus the individual who is picked out. In the case of ‘flies’ and ‘sits’ it is (following Plato) the forms of Sitting and Flying --universals, which universals can be instantiated by many entities-- which are picked out. We are thus able to comprehend, and say, either (1) or (2), though (1) corresponds with no actual fact or state of affairs, but since (1) corresponds to no compound fact<sup>70</sup> (1) is false.

The problem, however, is that the Stranger’s account of how we may entertain false beliefs or claims has, Davidson suggests, three elements. The first element of the account is that sentences like (1) or (2) must be truth evaluable. The second element is that they must minimally contain a name and verb to do that, the third is that these two elements must be different in function. The reason for this last element is that it is the relation between name and verb which creates the unity which is truth evaluable, since collections merely of names or verbs (e.g., “Lion stag horse”, “Walks runs sleeps”)<sup>71</sup> are not so evaluable.

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 80-97.

<sup>70</sup> A compound fact is supposed to be the fact of a singular instantiating a universal.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, 81. Of course we can *make* a singular term truth evaluable by *interpreting* it as the assertion “that is a...”, this is not the problem here.

But having “explained” the meaning of (1) and (2) by suggesting that the meanings are given by, respectively, reference to Theaetetus, and some allusion to the forms of Sitting, and Flying, we have removed the verb from both (1) and (2). Now (1) or (2) are more properly read as a list of names, one picking out an individual (Theaetetus), and the other picking out a universal (the forms either of Sitting or Flying). To explain why (1) is false, and (2) is true, we must note that Theaetetus instantiates the property of sitting, and does not instantiate the property of flying. But if we continue consistent with past semantic practice we must now add a third entity, the *relation* of “instantiation” to our list, and, once again, we have removed the verb. We are off on an infinite explanatory regress. Thus Davidson says:

“There is no objection to taking properties and relations as entities about which we want to think and say things, unless, of course, there are no such entities. I shall not cast doubt on their existence...the more basic question is whether positing the existence of properties and relations helps us to understand the structure and nature of judgements like the judgement that Theaetetus sits”<sup>72</sup>

Davidson’s answer to the above question is, of course, that it does not. Here we have an (extremely) abbreviated account of why Davidson thinks that we ought *not* account for the meanings of predicates, or perhaps better, the semantic contributions of predicates to sentences, in terms of their correspondence to properties *at all*. This is about as far as one can be from believing that accounting for the semantic role of a given predicate *requires* accepting a commitment to a corresponding property for that predicate.

With a very brief account of how Davidson *does* account for the semantic contributions of predicates to the sentences in which they appear we should be able

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<sup>72</sup> Davidson, Donald. *Truth and Predication*, 84-85.

to see clearly whether under *that* picture epiphenomenalism threatens. Davidson's account of the contribution of predicates to the truth-conditions of sentences, and thus of their meanings, is imported from Tarski's "Der wahrheitsbegriff in den formalisierten sprachen"<sup>73</sup>.

Tarski's account of predicate meaning was a formal account of how to define the satisfaction relation for any given predicate. He provided a method to provably show that any given predicate is *satisfied by* or *true of* the members of a set of either individuals or ordered *n*-tuples. Notably while sets are used in the explanatory machinery (set theory is used to define the satisfaction relation for each predicate), and thus an ontological commitment to sets *is* required to accept that explanation, the predicates *themselves* do not in any way refer or advert to the sets. They are, instead, true or false *of the members*, individual or in ordered *n*-tuples, of those sets. Thus Davidson's contention is that Tarski's account of the contribution of predicates to sentences avoids the regress set off by the problem of predication.

Notably this means two things for Davidson's account. Firstly, Davidson's admission that different descriptions pick out events using different predicates, some of which may be mental, some physical, does *not* in itself say anything about the properties of events in anything stronger than the "episcopalian" sense of "property"; it says no more than that those different predicates are *true of* or *satisfied by* the *same* events. There is no implied commitment to property dualism.

Secondly it means that the relative usefulness for mental or physical predicates in *explanations* has to do with the nature of the descriptive framework those vocabularies provide, not the causal powers of the *properties* they advert to. Epiphenomenalism is not a consequence of Davidson's arguments in either "Mental

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<sup>73</sup> Tarski, Alfred. "Der wahrheitsbegriff in den formalisierten sprachen". In *Studia Logica*, 1, 261-405.

Events” or “Causal Relations”. It follows only on acceptance of a direct relationship between predicates and properties which Davidson eschews.

Davidson’s claim that *better causal explanations require appropriate descriptions*, and that those descriptions, as it turns out, must be physical, does not, for Davidson, have metaphysical consequences based on a commitment to a one to one correlation between predicates and properties. Davidson eschews any such commitment. The metaphysical upshot of both “Mental Events” and “Causal Relations” is supposed to be that different descriptions, using mental, or physical, predicates, may be satisfied by, or true of, the same things, namely events, hence monism.

Different predicates pick out events using different vocabulary. Different vocabularies work better and worse for different kinds of explanation. Physical vocabulary works better for nomological causal explanation. The *only* metaphysical point is that the *events* picked out by these vocabularies may be *one and the same events*. Epiphenomenalism does not follow from what Davidson argues in either “Mental Events” or “Causal Relations”. It follows only if one takes a step regarding the explication of the semantic roles of predicates which Davidson specifically views as futile; producing only an infinite explanatory regress, and no explanation of predicate semantics at all.

In Chapter 5 I will move on to consideration of an argument that Davidson is wrong in his contention, and conceptually confused in his arguments for, the claim that mental descriptions are not apt for making lawlike statements. I respond to Lee McIntyre’s arguments<sup>74</sup> that another *two* of Davidson’s key premises in “Mental Events” are unwarranted. McIntyre denies *both* the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental (AotM):

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<sup>74</sup> McIntyre, Lee. “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws”, *Synthese*, 120, no.3, 375-394.

“[T]here are no strict... laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained”<sup>75</sup>

And Davidson’s claim that the mental constitutes an open system.

McIntyre feels that Davidson has attempted to deny *a priori* the *possibility* of nomological social science. Further, he sees Davidson as having claimed to have ruled useless any nomological *investigation* of social scientific questions. I shall attempt to address where I think McIntyre is mistaken in his belief as to what Davidson is up to, or what conclusions Davidson thought he had established, in “Mental Events”, and I shall go on to add one last piece of material from Davidson, in chapter 6 to spell out what Davidson actually thinks he has shown as regards nomologicality and social science.

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<sup>75</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 106. I note that I am omitting the word “deterministic”. I do this because the requirement that the laws used for predicting and explaining events are deterministic is, according to Davidson (even in the initial statement from which I am excerpting), stronger than his argument requires.

## Chapter 5:

### Lee McIntyre

#### DAVIDSON AND SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC LAWS<sup>76</sup>

Lee McIntyre has argued for the thesis that the social sciences are, in fact, *continuous* with the natural sciences. In “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws” he responds to the supposed threat Davidson’s arguments in “Mental Events” present to that thesis. In short, McIntyre believes that Davidson has attempted to rule out *a priori* the very *possibility* of social scientific laws. Further, he sees Davidson as attempting to present an argument with the even stronger conclusion that nomological investigation in the social sciences is *impossible*.

In Chapter 5 I shall lay out and respond to the objections that Lee McIntyre makes to the arguments he takes Davidson to have presented in “Mental Events”. The above note regarding McIntyre’s concerns will be essential to understanding what McIntyre takes Davidson to be arguing.

I shall be taking *McIntyre* to be arguing that another of Davidson’s key premises in “Mental Events” is unwarranted. Centrally McIntyre attempts to deny the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:

“[T]here are no strict... laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> McIntyre, Lee, “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws”, *Synthese*, 120, no.3, 375-394.

<sup>77</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 106. I note that I am omitting the word “deterministic”. I do this because the requirement that the laws used for predicting and explaining events are deterministic is, according to Davidson (even in the initial statement from which I am excerpting), stronger than his argument requires.

McIntyre's argumentative strategy is based on his identification of the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental as following as the conclusion of a lemma with two steps, the *second* of which steps he argues is indefensible.

I shall address both the lemma that McIntyre thinks is the warrant for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental and what I shall suggest is McIntyre's confusion as to the nature of the claim which he takes to be the indefensible second step of this argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. I should note that I largely agree with McIntyre as to the argument Davidson gives for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, and will restate what I take to be the argument in favor of the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental as I previously offered it in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

*McIntyre* interprets Davidson as suggesting that the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental is a consequence of the following lemma involving two steps<sup>78</sup>:

- P<sub>1</sub>: *The Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism* ("There are no [strict]<sup>79</sup> psychophysical laws, that is, laws connecting psychological and physical phenomena").
- P<sub>2</sub>: *The Principle of the Openness of Mental Systems* ("The mental does not constitute a closed system").
- ∴ *The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental* ("There are no strict...laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained"<sup>80</sup>).

Of the above McIntyre states that he believes P<sub>2</sub> is:

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<sup>78</sup> McIntyre, Lee. "Davidson and Social Scientific Laws." 377-378.

<sup>79</sup> The "strict" here is my addition to the premise McIntyre uses.

<sup>80</sup> I note, again, that I have omitted the word "deterministic" as Davidson notes it is too strong immediately following having used this wording. I note also that McIntyre does not. This difference plays no significant role in the reasoning that follows.

“so seriously flawed...that no version of Davidson’s argument which employs it will be able to establish the truth of Anomalism of the Mental”<sup>81</sup>

Before moving on to a discussion of this contention, and what I think ought to be the upshot for how we ought to interpret “Mental Events”, I think I ought to note what I take to be the proper context of my comments.

The first note I must make is that in “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws” McIntyre is interested in “Mental Events” *solely* insofar as he sees it as supposedly containing an a priori argument against the possibility of nomological social science. McIntyre, in fact, sees Davidson as believing he has ruled out not just nomological social science, but nomological *investigation* in social science.

Davidson’s goal, as I have presented it, is, instead, to argue for a novel version of the identity thesis (the thesis that mental events are identical with physical events). This version of the identity thesis is presented by Davidson as novel because rather than assuming, or promising, a principled reduction of mental descriptions to physical descriptions, it rests on a demonstration of identity between the subjects of these descriptions which takes as a premise the claim that such reduction is impossible. This view is also supposed to reconcile apparent conflict between the three principles which Davidson labels at the beginning of “Mental Events”.

In order to give McIntyre’s concerns a context which serves, I hope, to continue to clarify, rather than confuse, the issues with which Davidson is concerned, and positions, and arguments for those positions, which Davidson wishes to espouse, in “Mental Events”, I am going to have to embed McIntyre’s contentions within the context of my prior discussion of “Mental Events”. Any apparent lack of charity toward McIntyre should, I hope, be seen in the context of my attempt use McIntyre’s arguments to provide exegesis of “Mental Events” rather than an intent to provide exegesis of McIntyre’s “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws”.

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 379.

I shall proceed first by offering the reasons that McIntyre gives for believing that  $P_2$  is both so central, and so indefensible. Then I shall offer my interpretation of the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental (in terms which I have already roughly outlined in chapter 1 of this dissertation). Thirdly, I shall address what Davidson actually thinks concerning the importance of the “openness” of the mental. Lastly I shall suggest that perhaps McIntyre would have done better focusing on what he takes to be  $P_1$  of the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism.

McIntyre offers two reasons to believe that  $P_2$  (the Principle of the Openness of the Mental) is unsuited to bear the argumentative load he (McIntyre) thinks Davidson has it carrying, and a third, conceptual, reason to abandon Davidson’s argument. Before responding to these reasons it is, perhaps, best to get clear what “openness” amounts to in this context. I shall concede that Davidson does, indeed, hold that the mental does not constitute a closed system. A closed system is, for Davidson, one where explanatory statements therein may be indefinitely refined using only the concepts *of* that system. This notion of open and closed explanatory systems, remember, underlies Davidson’s distinction between *homonomic* and *heteronomic* generalizations. The former are indefinitely refinable using only further concepts of the explanatory system (e.g., generalizations about the relations between events as characterized in the language of physics), while the latter require concepts from outside of the explanatory system.

The reason that Davidson does not believe that the *mental* constitutes a closed system is his belief in one of the three principles he labels at the start of “Mental Events” -- the Principle of Causal Interaction (“Some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events”<sup>82</sup>). Since some mental events at least are

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<sup>82</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 118.

causes or effects of physical events a full system of explanation for all such events will be required to mention events picked out by physical descriptions.

McIntyre's concerns with what he calls the Principle of the Openness of the Mental are as follows. Firstly, he suggests that not all physical systems of description and explanation are closed. McIntyre notes, for example, that it is acknowledged in meteorology and evolutionary biology that they are not. Secondly, McIntyre asks us to consider whether the mental in fact constitutes a closed, or merely a very large, system. McIntyre suggests that it does not constitute a closed system, merely a very large one. Thirdly, McIntyre accuses Davidson, generally, of engaging in a particular conceptual error, which error McIntyre labels "descriptivism".

I shall take each of these objections in order. In some of my responses to these objections I shall prefigure material which will be properly introduced in chapter 6 of this dissertation, which introduces new material from Davidson from his paper "Could There Be a Science of Rationality"<sup>83</sup>.

As regards McIntyre's first objection, that not all physical systems of description and explanation are closed, Davidson himself notes that the lack of closure taken singly:

"[I]n itself makes psychological theory no less scientific than volcanology, biology, meteorology or the theory of evolution."<sup>84</sup>

Thus Davidson sees openness as common to many systems of explanation and description and indeed not the linchpin of an argument for the impossibility of social scientific laws. Indeed, in "Mental Events" when discussing the *homonomic/heteronomic* distinction Davidson says:

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<sup>83</sup> Donald Davidson, "Could There Be a Science of Rationality?" In *Problems of Rationality*. 117-134.

<sup>84</sup>*Ibid*, 131.

“I suppose that most of our practical lore (and science) is heteronomic”<sup>85</sup>

In order to properly address this first point of McIntyre’s I think it is time to restate what I take to be the structure of the arguments Davidson gives in section III of “Mental Events”. Then we can perhaps better identify where McIntyre’s points tell against Davidson’s reasoning, or if, in fact, they do. My interpretation of section III of “Mental Events” is that the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental runs, I think, through the following two stages.

**P<sub>1</sub>:**    **CI:**    According to The Principle of Causal Interaction some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events.

**P<sub>2</sub>:**    **NCC:** According to The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality each true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.

**∴ C<sub>1</sub>:** It is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering *all* mental events.

I take it that CI + NCC are supposed to imply C<sub>1</sub> which is then supported as a premise of the following argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:

**C<sub>1</sub>:**    It is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering *all* mental events.

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<sup>85</sup>Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 115.

**P4: PA:** The Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism (“[N]o psycho-physical statement is, or can be built into, a strict law.”<sup>86</sup>)

**∴ C2: AotM: The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:**

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

Thus I take it that McIntyre, to his great credit, is very close indeed to identifying the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. As regards McIntyre’s first objection, however, Davidson clearly does not think openness is the feature that makes the mental anomalous, since he overtly states that much of our science shares this feature<sup>87</sup>. It would seem, then, that it is Psychophysical Anomalism upon which McIntyre ought to have concentrated if he wished to avoid Davidson’s conclusion.

McIntyre’s second objection to the claim that the Mental constitutes an open system is as follows. McIntyre asks us to consider whether the mental in fact constitutes a closed, or merely a very large, system. McIntyre’s suggestion is that the mental does not constitute a closed system, merely a very large one. The thrust of McIntyre’s objection is neatly summed up in the following quote:

“[I]f anomalous monism is correct, not only can every mental event be uniquely singled out using only physical concepts, but since the number of events that falls under each mental predicate may, for all we know, be finite, there may well exist a physical open sentence corresponding with each mental predicate.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 118.

<sup>87</sup> I will return to this point in chapters 6 & 7.

<sup>88</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Mental Events.” 112.

This, however, is a quote from Davidson in “Mental Events”. McIntyre seems to be suggesting that the mental (by McIntyre’s account those states which supervene upon brain states) does not constitute a closed system because the number of brain states upon which mental states may supervene is finite.

What McIntyre is missing is that Davidson merely means that mental *descriptions* of events supervene upon physical *descriptions* of events, where the events in question are one-and-the-same events. Talking about brain states *and* mental states is heading back down Kim’s road of taking Davidson to be suggesting a (dualist) ontological relation between properties (here, in McIntyre’s case, *mental states*, which states are taken to supervene upon *brain states*). For a discussion of why this *is* an error *at least of interpretation* I would refer the reader back to chapter 4.

Interpreting Davidson this way *also* overlooks Davidson’s semantic *externalism*. McIntyre says “while it is allowable that even if we are in the same mental state we may be in a different brain state, what is not allowable is that if we are in the same brain states we are in different mental states”<sup>89</sup>. This is *not correct* by Davidson’s lights, since his account of content is externalist. While Davidson concedes that there indeed *must be* a physical difference underlying mental difference, that difference need not lie in the brain state of the individual, it may lie instead in the causal environment within which brains, and their states, reside.

Centrally, the problem with this line of argument from McIntyre is that in giving account of Davidson’s argumentative moves in “Mental Events” we cannot simply move from event, to brain state, to mental state, assuming ontological import, and necessitation relations between differing ontological commitments, while keeping Davidson’s argument clear. Again I refer the reader to chapter 4 of this dissertation as to why not.

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<sup>89</sup> McIntyre, Lee. “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws.” 386.

The Mental is not open because it is infinite, nor is it closed because there may be coextensivity between mental descriptions of events and physical descriptions of events, or because *this* then entails that “the Mental” is finite. The mental is open because *descriptions* that contain mental verbs *essentially* are *inevitably heteronomic* in character, by the Principle of Causal Interaction. That is, essentially mental claims must be relatable to cases of causal interaction between the mental and the physical (most simply to the generation of perceptual beliefs and to the generation of bodily movements which can appropriately be interpreted as intentional action).

McIntyre’s third objection to Davidson’s argument is his accusation that Davidson makes a particular kind of conceptual error, which error McIntyre labels “descriptivism”. This error is, according to McIntyre, as follows:

“Davidson’s view that the subject matter of psychology is not merely human action, but human action as defined within a particular theoretical vocabulary, may rightfully be called ‘descriptivist’. Elsewhere I have defined descriptivism as “the idea that the subject matter of some area of inquiry is not the phenomena as such but the *phenomena as captured by a particular descriptive vocabulary*”.”<sup>90</sup>

McIntyre is an enemy of ‘descriptivism’, and he suggests we ought to be also since:

“In science the quest for explanation is primary. When faced with the dilemma of choosing between a descriptive vocabulary that seems sacred (but is not producing good explanations), and the challenge of producing a new categorization of the phenomena that may yet reveal better explanations, science has relentlessly...chosen the latter course...When science has resisted this path it has eventually mired down in unwieldy explanations.

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<sup>90</sup> McIntyre, Lee, “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws.” 388. Quoting *Lee McIntyre* in the in progress “Redescription and Descriptivism.”

Those episodes in the history of science when investigators insisted, even in the face of growing anomalies, that terms like ‘phlogiston’, ‘caloric’ or ‘ether’ just captured true natural kinds— and that any reasonable scientific explanation must employ them— may serve as examples of the dangers of descriptivism for scientific inquiry.”<sup>91</sup>

Given McIntyre’s prior assumption that Davidson is thinking of mental descriptions (descriptions containing one or more mental verb essentially) as picking out mental states, taken ontologically seriously, which supervene upon the physical states of brains, one can, within this context, see McIntyre’s point. Perhaps “Beliefs” and “Desires” and “Intentions”, considered within such a metaphysically serious framework, are analogues to “Phlogiston” or “Ether”.

There is no such framework at play in Davidson’s account; “x believes y” requires a believer (a person) to take place *x*, and a content ascribing replacement for *y*<sup>92</sup>, what it does *not* require is a property as referent for the predicate (a belief or belief-state). *Again* I refer the reader to chapter 4 as to why not.

Here I will merely reiterate the two consequences for Davidson’s account that follow, I hope, from my reasoning in chapter 4. Firstly, Davidson’s admission that different descriptions pick out events using different predicates, some of which may be mental, some physical, does *not* in itself say anything about the properties of events in anything stronger than the “episcopalian” sense of “property”; it says no more than that those different predicates are *true of* or *satisfied by* the *same* events. There is no implied commitment to property dualism.

Secondly it means that the relative usefulness for mental or physical predicates in *explanations* has to do with the nature of the descriptive frameworks

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<sup>91</sup> McIntyre, Lee. “Davidson and Social Scientific Laws.” 389.

<sup>92</sup> Davidson’s suggestion is that an utterance or inscription of a sentence best fills this place. See Davidson, Donald, “On Saying That.” In *The Essential Davidson*. 171-183.

those vocabularies provide, not the causal powers of the *properties* they advert to. *This* is the central point of both “Mental Events” and “Causal Relations”: that the aptness of a given *vocabulary* for a particular *purpose* is *not necessarily* a consequence of those vocabularies *describing* different *things*.

Davidson’s claim that *better* causal *explanations* require *appropriate descriptions*, and that those descriptions, as it turns out, must be physical, if one wants them to be apt for *strict* nomological explanation, does not, for Davidson, have metaphysical consequences based on a commitment to a one to one correlation between predicates and properties. Davidson eschews any such commitment. The metaphysical upshot of both “Mental Events” and “Causal Relations” is supposed to be that different descriptions, using mental, or physical, predicates, may be satisfied by, or true of, the same things, namely events, hence monism.

McIntyre’s central concern is that he feels Davidson has ruled out the *possibility* of (nomological) social scientific *inquiry* in these contentions. Let us return briefly to what the position of anomalous monism consists in under my interpretation. My suggestion is that the position of anomalous monism consists in the following theses:

***The identity thesis is an ontological thesis*** (we ought to add events to our ontology, and individual mental events are identical with individual physical events).

***The Principle of Causal Interaction is read as applying to events in extension;*** causality, like identity, is an extensional relation, and it operates between events however we describe them.

***The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality, however, is a thesis about explanation.*** We read it as a claim about events related as cause and effect falling under *some* description which allows formulation of a strict law.

*The Anomalism of the Mental is a thesis* about events described *as* mental. But since events are mental *only as described* and individual mental events are, ontologically speaking, identical with individual physical events, it becomes a thesis *about certain kinds of descriptions, not an ontological thesis at all.*

If what McIntyre demands in order that *he* may still see social-scientific inquiry as a viable *scientific* project is that it be couched in a vocabulary that is apt for the formulation of strict laws, then McIntyre may well be disappointed if Davidson is right. But Davidson's argument in *no way* hinges upon a demand that "social" claims be made using a language that picks out "natural kinds" that include "beliefs", "desires", "intentions" and so on. Davidson eschews such an interpretation of the semantics of descriptions that *do* use the predicates "believes", "desires" and so on.

I would contend, however, that McIntyre is misconstruing Davidson in terms of more than just assumptions about correlations between descriptions, redescriptions, and metaphysics. I do not think we ought, or need, to take Davidson as arguing that one or another system of description is, or is not, apt for science, at all.

My suggestion would be that we can best see how Davidson sees his contentions in "Mental Events" and "Causal Relations" as pertaining to debates about what is, and, perhaps is not, science, by considering Davidson's paper "Could There Be a Science of Rationality?".

Moreover, I suspect that if one wants to avoid accepting the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, one would be better served in rejecting the premise of Psychophysical Anomalism, rather than the premise that the mental constitutes an open system. I would suggest that this is so, because it is perhaps more likely that it is the nomological irreducibility of mental descriptions to homonomic descriptions which is the more important step in establishing the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. I would also suggest that the better argument from Davidson in defense

of that principle is to be found in the above noted paper. Thus I will turn to consideration of that paper in order to finish responding to McIntyre's contentions.

## Chapter 6:

Donald Davidson

### COULD THERE BE A SCIENCE OF RATIONALITY<sup>93</sup>

In chapter 6 I will be considering portions of Davidson's paper "Could There Be a Science of Rationality". I will be doing this in response to McIntyre's concerns in order to attempt to draw out how Davidson thinks the arguments of "Causal Relations" and "Mental Events" relate to contentions about what constitutes science, in general (to a limited degree), and most specifically to draw out whether *Davidson* sees himself as having ruled out nomological *investigation* in the social sciences.

I will be suggesting that Davidson's arguments do not constitute argument for the *impossibility* of nomological investigation in the social sciences, or argument for the claim that the social sciences *are not* science. I shall suggest that Davidson, instead, sees his arguments as having the conclusion that any science of the mental will not reduce to the natural sciences.

I do, however, contend that Davidson's arguments suggest that, as distinct from being straightforwardly continuous with the natural sciences<sup>94</sup>, for Davidson, "mental" explanations (explanations, nomological or otherwise, which contain mental verbs *essentially*) will lie at the far (lawless) end of a continuum of more and less law-like (in the sense of apt for producing *strict* laws) explanatory systems, although systems of explanation all along that spectrum may well remain deserving of the name "science".

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<sup>93</sup> Davidson, Donald. "Could There Be a Science of Rationality?" 117-134.

<sup>94</sup> As I have suggested McIntyre is interested in contending.

The actual argument that no such reduction of any science of the mental to the natural sciences is possible may be seen, within the context of this dissertation, as an argument for what I have previously called the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism. Adding this argument will, I hope, round out my attempt to use putative objections to the arguments of “Mental Events” to instead offer an opportunity to clarify the position Davidson was actually attempting to argue for in that paper.

I shall be suggesting that Davidson’s contention is that there are no hard defining lines as to what does, and does not, constitute science<sup>95</sup>, but that Davidson is, instead, contending that differing explanatory vocabularies and systems will be more, or less apt, for formulating *strict* laws. Along with this Davidson can<sup>96</sup>, I will suggest, be seen as contending that the language of physics is the vocabulary *most* apt for the formulation of *strict* laws, whereas mental descriptions are the *least* apt for such formulations. All of this discussion must be seen within the context of the fact that under my interpretation Davidson does *not* see these vocabularies as picking out different *ontological* categories. Rather, for Davidson, the differences are, instead, in *conceptual* category<sup>97</sup>.

Thus I shall proceed by offering, firstly, what I take to be Davidson’s account of what empirical science consists in. Then I shall consider what features of the *conceptual* category of the “Mental” move it along the spectrum of more and less lawlike systems of explanation to the (as Davidson put it in “Mental Events”) “lawless” end of that spectrum. Lastly, I shall draw conclusions as regards

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<sup>95</sup> Although he does give a rough outline of what he thinks scientific theorizing and investigation involve.

<sup>96</sup> For the purpose of interpreting “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” as an addition to the arguments of “Mental Events”.

<sup>97</sup> Reiterating the conclusion of Chapter 4, seeing a difference in ontological category as *entailed* by a difference in conceptual category is *at least* an *interpretive* error when considering Davidson’s arguments. My suggestion is that, according to Davidson, doing so mistakes the nature of predicate semantics.

McIntyre's contentions, and as regards the arguments of "Mental Events" on the basis of the materials added.

As regards what constitutes empirical science Davidson nowhere provides us with his explicit definition. He does, however, give an example *of psychology* which he suggests *is* empirical science, and tells us what it is about that example which makes it, in his opinion, "scientific". The example Davidson gives is Gustav Theodore Fechner's presentation of

"a general law relating the perceived intensity of sensory stimuli to physically measured aspects of that stimuli"<sup>98</sup>

This example clearly relates to psychology, and might even be said to be an example of a psycho-physical law in the sense that it has to do with relations between the physical (stimuli) and the subjective (in this case perceptions).

What it is *not* is "mental" in the sense in which "Mental Events" is concerned with the "mental". I note this to make two points which I find relevant. Firstly, Davidson is *not* definitionally restricting "psychological" to what can be described in terms of the vocabulary of "belief", "desire", "intention", and so on, contrary to what McIntyre has contended. Secondly, we must restrict the Principles of the Anomalism of the Mental, and of Psychophysical Anomalism, to the mental in the specific sense in which Davidson picks out the mental in "Mental Events". That is, we must restrict it to descriptions that exhibit intensionality.

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<sup>98</sup> Davidson, Donald. "Could There Be a Science of Rationality." 124.

"Roughly: as a physical stimulus increases (say intensity of loudness or pitch in sound), equal increases in the magnitude of the physical stimulus will result in smaller and smaller increases in the felt sensation. The constant varies with the sense involved. This law can of course be tested, and is approximately correct." *Ibid*, 123.

Though Davidson does not give us an explicit definition of what constitutes science he *does* tell us what he thinks Fechner got *right*. Davidson says the following:

“If scientific methods can be applied to the mental, it is by proposing a solid theory and asking how it can be tested and interpreted empirically. Theories describe abstract structures; their empirical interpretations ask whether these structures can be discovered in the real world”<sup>99</sup>

For the purposes at hand I think it is worth noting that Davidson is here suggesting that what Fechner got *right* (in the sense of employing the scientific method) was engaging in nomological inquiry. The Fechner example thus constitutes a definitive refutation of McIntyre’s claim that *Davidson* sees himself as arguing for the impossibility of nomological inquiry in the social sciences, along with a refutation of the claim that Davidson is *definitionally* restricting psychology to the mental in the sense in which he defines it in “Mental Events.”<sup>100</sup> This single example provides a counterexample to both claims, as interpretation of Davidson.

Davidson spends much of the body of “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” asking whether his own ‘Unified Theory of Speech and Action’, a theory of the ‘mental’ in exactly that sense of the mental with which “Mental Events” is concerned, could be considered a science of rationality (he suggests that the results are “mixed”.) I shall not delve too deeply into this part of the paper. Most of the basic contentions as regards the mental that we need to follow Davidson’s

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>100</sup> Davidson also offers the following example: “[I]f you sound two notes some arbitrary distance apart and ask a subject to tune a third note to the perceived mid-point, not only do different hearers arrive at approximately the same pitch, but pitches so determined are related in such a way as to produce an interval scale, that is, numbers can be assigned to various pitches in a way that keeps track of the relations between intervals, not on the basis of physical magnitude, like string length or vibrations per second, but entirely on the basis of what is subjectively perceived. The theory that describes this fact has every right to be called a psychological theory, for it deals with nothing but relations among psychological phenomena”. *Ibid*, 124.

reasoning are, I would suggest, already present in “Mental Events”, thus I will restrain myself to the contentions Davidson makes there as regards the mental.

Having noted, thus far, that Davidson sees scientific investigation as nomological in character, and does not definitionally restrict psychology to the intensional, I will move, instead, to a consideration of what features of a system of explanation might make such a system more or less apt *for the formulation of strict laws*, and then lastly to a consideration of what Davidson offers as the reason we ought to believe the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism, and therefore the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental.

Davidson begins “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” with a discussion of some of the features of the mental that philosophers have suggested, in the past, rule out the mental, under conceptions which contain those features, for serious scientific study. These include the features of holism and externalism. Davidson, to the contrary, finds that there are concepts of other sciences which share these features, many of which sciences are clearly *physical* sciences. He then considers a feature of theories of the mental (including his own Unified Theory) which he suggests has no analogue with other cases. I shall run through each of these features in the above order, discussing first holism, then externalism, then this last feature, allegedly unique to mental descriptions and explanations.

Holism is the view that an element of a system can only be understood in the context of its relations to the other elements of the system. Davidson’s own view as regards the mental is thoroughly holistic. That is, assignments of meaning, of belief, of preference, and so on, make sense only relative to one another. This holism, in itself, however, is common, Davidson suggests (as in section II of “Mental Events”), to *any* system of measurement.

“[I]tems owe their measure to their relations to other items. A meaning could no more be assigned to a sentence in isolation than a weight or location could be assigned to any isolated object.”<sup>101</sup>

Thus *this* feature of the mental “cannot, in itself, be an obstacle to the scientific claims of a theory of the mental”<sup>102</sup>.

Externalism, as it regards the mental, is the view that content (mental or linguistic) supervenes not only on the individual to whom the content is being attributed, but also upon the causal history of that individual. The problem with externalism is thus that it introduces an irreducibly causal element. Davidson, however, gives the concept of “sunburn” as a *non-linguistic* example of a concept whose application requires attention to causal history.

The discussion of this case will, I hope, let us get clearer on what Davidson means by a *relevantly* “physical” predicate, or description, in “Mental Events” as we have, hopefully, become clearer about what constitutes a relevantly “mental” predicate, or description. Such clarification will help resolve the interpretation of what the theses of the Anomalism of the Mental, Psychophysical Anomalism, and Anomalous Monism amount to.

For “*x* is a sunburn” to be true of, for example, the physical state of a given person’s skin, the *cause* must be the correct one<sup>103</sup>. The point, as Davidson sees it, is that sunburn *is* a physical condition. “*x* is a sunburn” is, indeed, a physical predicate, but an *irreducibly causal* one. Thus “sunburn” as a concept, is not appropriate for

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 130.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*. Notably, this means that indeterminacy is, contrary to the argument of Section II of “Mental Events”, *not* the source of the lawlessness of the mental. For if the indeterminacy of translation is *exactly* analogous to the indeterminacy of “weight” or “length” or of any other measurement, and here Davidson suggests that it *is*, then this feature is common to *any* system of measurement. Davidson concedes this error.

<sup>103</sup> Or perhaps one of a set, depending upon how loosely one interprets the predicate.

*physics*. This is not merely because the concept already contains part of the explanation of the phenomena, but, rather, because two states of skin could be in every respect physically identical, yet one be an example of sunburn, and the other *not*. The difference is one of causal history, not of current physical state. Physics, Davidson suggests, is not like this. Physics is notable for removing dispositional and other irreducibly causal concepts from its acceptable predications. For example, the dispositional property (I mean this in the episcopalian sense only) of *solubility* is removed in virtue of a full description of the underlying features of events which explain it.<sup>104</sup>

Thus I would argue that Davidson is not talking about a bivalent system of “mental” and “physical” predicates (or concepts). There are statements that loosely fall under the heading of “psychological” which are *not* mental, in the sense relevant to the above mentioned three theses, as with Fechner’s general law, since they do not exhibit the necessary condition of *intensionality*. Similarly, there are predicates which are clearly “physical” in a broad sense, but which are not examples which are appropriate to be parts of formulations of strict laws.

I *do not* mean to reintroduce the notion, which notion Davidson suggests is Goodman’s error, that some *predicates* are lawlike. It is *statements* which, under Davidson’s account, will be more or less lawlike. I *do* wish to note that “physical” and “mental”, *broadly* conceived, are insufficient to the task, as applied to the predicates thereof, of sorting among descriptive vocabularies for the purpose of identifying whether an explanation built of statements from them will be *homonomic* or *heteronomic*, and thus do not allow us to capture the kinds of distinctions among *statements* to which the theses of the Anomalism of the Mental, Psychophysical Anomalism, and Anomalous Monism are supposed to apply.

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<sup>104</sup> Since Davidson does not think that a lack of causal closure is the feature of the mental which warrants Psychophysical Anomalism I shall ignore claims as to irreducibly causal concepts in physics. (Piers Rawling, and others, have suggested, for example, that electron spin pairing is such a concept).

In any case, Davidson points out that externalism, and other forms of openness of systems of description, are features of concepts within many systems of description and explanation which we *clearly* count as scientific. He gives as examples volcanology, biology, meteorology and the theory of evolution.

Externalism, seen in this context, does set limits on *completeness* of explanation. It does, indeed, make the statements built from a given vocabulary less lawlike. It does not, however, guarantee the impossibility of nomological inquiry (or of a scientific theory built from such concepts), nor is it the feature that he suggests warrants Psychophysical Anomalism. The fact that mental concepts are irreducibly causal makes them unlike the predicates of *physics*<sup>105</sup> but not unlike all *physical* predicates.

Thus the problem of “externalism” as it regards concepts is *a* problem of openness. Another of McIntyre’s contentions, the claim that Davidson’s argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental rests *centrally* on the premise of the Principle of the Openness of the Mental, seems to be exegetically wrong. Many descriptive and explanatory systems are, by Davidson’s own account, open, yet clearly scientific. Thus neither externalism, irreducibly causal concepts, nor other sources of openness of an explanatory system, is, according to Davidson, *the* feature that warrants the outlier (lawless) status of the *mental* system of description. Although *all* of these features *do* make an explanatory vocabulary less apt for the formation of *strict* laws. I shall thus move on to an account of what Davidson *does* suggest is unique to the mental system of description.

The feature of the mental that renders it an outlier of “lawlessness” does indeed *relate* to holism, and to the fact that Davidson (following Quine and Ramsey) sees a serious theory of the mental in the sense in which he is interested in it in

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<sup>105</sup> Again, Davidson may be wrong in this contention, at least as regards the predicates of quantum physics. However, since this is not the feature of the mental which warrants Psychophysical Anomalism this does not affect his overall argument.

“Mental Events”, and throughout his work, as a theory of *measurement*. It is not simply that *it is* holistic, however, nor that, like all systems of measurement, the measures used are *indeterminate* (since exactly analogously there is no factual reason to use, for example centigrade as opposed to Fahrenheit, or feet as opposed to meters, though there may be practical ones). The issue with the mental, in the sense of the mental with which Davidson is concerned, is with the inherently subjective nature of the *measure* we each must use. Davidson’s suggestion is that mental descriptions are unique because:

“the interpretation of the formal theory does not rest entirely upon ordinary intersubjective evidence. In measuring physical magnitudes, we can use the numbers to keep track of properties of events and objects<sup>106</sup> as publically observed. The relevant properties of numbers can also be agreed to by all concerned. But things are different when one mind tries to understand another. People are as publically observable as anything else in nature, but the entities which we use to construct a picture of someone else’s thoughts must be our own sentences, as understood by us...there is no escape from the fact that we cannot check up on the objective credentials of the measure we are using as we can check up on the objective credentials of the numbers; we cannot check up on the objective credentials of our own norms by checking with others, since to do this would make basic use of our own norms once more.”<sup>107</sup>

It is the fact that interpretation of other minds requires (if interpretation is *possible*) that we render the subject intelligible to *us*, and that we do so, *if* we do so, by finding them, insofar as possible, to make sense by our *own* normative standards, that marks the mental as different. Further, when we try to make public the standard by which

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<sup>106</sup> That is, keep track of which *predicates* are *true of* events or objects. I would assert that this is (as always, for Davidson) merely the episcopalian use of the word “property”.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 134.

we are judging, each of us is forced to fall back onto our own norms, once again, to make sense of the contentions of other parties in *that* discussion.<sup>108</sup>

In short, the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism follows from the fact that we are forced to find any mental claims reasonable, by our own lights, whereas we are not so required as regards physical phenomena. The criteria of application of the relevant predicates are not reconcilable since one set (the mental, in the sense in which Davidson is interested in it) is irreducibly normative.

As Davidson says in “Problems in the Explanation of Action”:

“The reason mental concepts cannot be reduced to physical concepts is the normative character of mental concepts... The semantic contents of attitudes and beliefs determine their relations to one another and to the world in ways that meet at least rough standards of consistency and correctness. Unless such standards are met to an adequate degree, nothing can count as being a belief, a pro-attitude, or an intention. But these standards are norms, our norms, there being no others... The point is... that in explaining action we are identifying the phenomena to be explained, and the phenomena that do the explaining, as directly answering to our own norms...”<sup>109</sup>

Thus, as suggested in the introduction to this chapter, *Davidson* sees himself as offering an argument against the *reduction* of mental concepts to physical concepts, rather than an argument that one set of concepts is appropriate to nomological investigation, and the other set not. I will return to this argument in chapter 7 when I return to the arguments of “Mental Events”.

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<sup>108</sup> This contention is rendered, I think, less worrying by some other features of Davidson’s systematic view, including his identification of a *third* dogma of empiricism, and his accounts of first person, second person and third person knowledge. Here, however, I am more interested in offering an account of the position Davidson, in fact, lays out, rather than defending that account, since doing so would involve bringing in such a broad expanse of extra material.

<sup>109</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Problems in the Explanation of Action.” In *Problems of Rationality*, 114-15.

We see examples of what Davidson takes to *be* psychological (in the sense of relating the subjective to the subjective) and psychophysical (in the sense of relating the subjective to quantifiable stimuli) laws in “Could There Be a Science of Rationality”, although these laws are not “Mental” laws in the sense in which Davidson is interested in the mental. Thus Davidson is *not* defining the word “psychological” to rule out explanations which are not mental in the sense in which he is interested in the mental. Rather, Davidson is attending to, and offering an argument about, a *subset* of broadly psychological claims which are marked by the feature of the mental he picks out in “Mental Events”.

Davidson has also, in considering features of the mental which have previously been taken to rule it out as the subject of serious science, offered considerations which he suggests make systems of explanation, instead, more and less apt for formulation of *strict* laws.

Holism is not a barrier to such a system in and of itself, since it is a requirement of *any* system of explanation using measurement for quantization/identification of the features of the elements of the system.

Explanatory systems which contain externalist, or otherwise irreducibly causal, concepts, or which are explanatorily open, will be less apt for the formulation of strict laws. Such systems of explanation include descriptions like those of biology, meteorology, and so on, however, which systems Davidson takes to be uncontroversially scientific in character. That a system is more or less apt for the formulation of strict laws, then, is not the mark of science, at least as far as Davidson is concerned.

Thus, I would contend, McIntyre is simply mistaken in his interpretation of what Davidson is up to in “Mental Events”. As regards the very possibility of social

science<sup>110</sup> Davidson has not only not ruled it out a priori, but is not concerned with doing so. Add these contentions to the observation that McIntyre's chief complaint with Davidson (the supposed conceptual error McIntyre labels descriptivism) misses the central point of "Mental Events" -- that differences in conceptualization need not be reflected by differences in ontology.

Lastly, I would point out that what Davidson *is* arguing is somewhat contrary to McIntyre's broader view that the social sciences are straightforwardly continuous with the natural sciences. Davidson's contention, I have suggested, is *not* that some systems of explanation count as science and some not<sup>111</sup>. I do, however, take Davidson to be contending that specifically *physics* is the system of explanation which is the most apt to allow the formulation of strict laws (if any system of explanation we have access to is), and that the system of explanation which falls under the mental, in the sense with which Davidson is concerned with it in "Mental Events", is the least apt for such formulations. The physical (conceived of as the explanatory system provided by a completed physics) and the mental (conceived of as those claims which exhibit intensionality) are at opposite ends of a *continuum* of more and less lawlike systems of explanation. If Davidson is right, they are *not* continuous with one another.

In chapter 7 I will bring together the materials from the preceding chapters in order to offer a full account of what I take Davidson to be arguing for in "Mental Events", along with as full an account of what arguments he gives for it, and as full an account as I can, bearing in mind the materials I have brought to hand as to what each Principle and claim maintained amounts to.

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<sup>110</sup> By "social" science I mean simply any scientific account of the interactions and behaviors of creatures which exhibit intensionality.

<sup>111</sup> All Davidson strongly contends is that an inquiry must be nomological (as opposed to strictly nomological), and set up so as to be testable in its assertions, to be counted as empirical science.

## **Chapter 7:**

**Donald Davidson**

### **MENTAL EVENTS**

In chapter 7 I shall return to the arguments of “Mental Events”. Specifically, I will focus on what I take to be the three stages of the argument for the identity of mental and physical events. I shall, in brief, be looking at how, under my interpretation, Anscombe’s, McIntyre’s, and Kim’s contentions present an opportunity to fill out those arguments to help make clear, I hope, exactly what Davidson was arguing for, and how he was arguing for it. This is as opposed to their objections representing a buffet of reasons to reject Davidson’s contentions in “Mental Events”.

Accordingly, I shall be focusing, centrally, on what I take to be the argumentative structure of Section III of “Mental Events” with this exegetical goal in mind. I will be addressing the content of Davidson’s contentions, including laying out the principles he uses in the arguments, and uses in defense of the arguments’ premises, as I go, with an eye to making Davidson’s commitments clear, and to identifying how the relationships between these contentions are supposed to further Davidson’s argumentative goals.

I will be following the structure of those arguments as I suggest that structure appears in “Mental Events”, noting concerns raised, then making additions and clarifications to address those concerns as I go. Hopefully, with the material already presented in mind, this will give the reader a clearer understanding of Davidson’s contentions, argumentative strategy, and argumentative goals.

My goal is not to force acceptance of the position of Anomalous Monism, or to provide an unassailable defense of the *multiple* contentions involved in arguing for that thesis. More basically, I simply wish to make a clear (and I hope correct) case as to what position *Davidson* is arguing for, and how *Davidson* argued for it. This *interpretation* of “Mental Events” is controversial. It is clearly, if I have been accurate in my depictions of our three interlocutor’s positions, a novel interpretation for many readers. I do not, however, intend my interpretation to be distinct from *Davidson*’s.

I suggested in chapter 1 that the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental runs through two stages. The first stage presents an argument for what *McIntyre* calls “The Principle of the Openness of the Mental”. In presenting this stage of the argument I shall address how *Anscombe*’s concerns regarding the, in her view, *unwarranted assumption*, of the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality are, I would suggest, misdirected as regards that thesis as it appears in *Davidson*’s argument. This is, I have contended, because *Anscombe* views the thesis as an unwarranted logical, epistemological, or metaphysical, assumption. Instead, I would suggest that we read the thesis *exactly* as *Davidson* suggests we ought in “Mental Events”, as a thesis about *explanation*.

The second stage of the argument, I contend, depends, minimally, both upon what *McIntyre* calls the Principle of the Openness of the Mental, and upon the thesis of Psychophysical Anomalism. In addressing this stage of the argument I shall address *McIntyre*’s concerns as regards the Principle of the Openness of the Mental, and, in addition, I will address what I take to be the ground for the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism. This latter clarification is needed since, by *Davidson*’s own account, the argument for that thesis, as it appears in Section II of “Mental Events”, *mistakenly* claims that the indeterminacy of translation warrants Psychophysical Anomalism.

The third argumentative step attempts to use the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental to establish the identity of mental and physical events. Here I will address Jaegwon Kim's concerns about epiphenomenalism.

In chapter 1 I suggested that the first stage of the argument for the Anomalism of the Mental is structured in roughly the following way:

- P1: CI:** According to The Principle of Causal Interaction some mental events at least are causes or effects of physical events.
- P2: NCC:** According to The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality each true singular causal statement is backed by a strict law connecting events of kinds to which events mentioned as cause and effect belong.
- ∴ C1:** It is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering *all* mental events.

The Principle of Causal Interaction is, indeed, controverted, but it is not a controversy I have had room to introduce, or discuss, within the context of this dissertation. Let us then, having noted that it *is* contended, simply be clear that what is being asserted is that, for example, the physical motions of the body that we interpret as intentional action, are cases of mental to physical causation, and, for example, the formation of perceptual beliefs<sup>112</sup> presents a case of physical to mental causation. *Both* of these contentions are *essential* to Davidson's broader views, as well as essential to this particular argument, but defending them is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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<sup>112</sup> For Davidson stages prior to those allowing an ascription of a belief do not count as part of the intensional picture.

I shall focus instead on the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality. This Principle is the claim that there are (strictly) lawlike explanations of all events which causally interact with one another under *some description* of those events. I have spent two chapters of this dissertation in discussion of this claim.

In chapter 2 I discussed G.E.M. Anscombe's "Causality and Determination". I suggested that Anscombe's contention is that this Principle is supposedly "warranted" by an *illegitimate* identification of causation and necessitation. Anscombe attacked what she considers the conceits that notions of either logical necessitation (this, she suggested consisted in misidentifying "...caused..." as a kind of logical connective, or operator), or metaphysical necessitation (this, she suggested, followed from an unwarranted *assumption of* metaphysical determinism) were involved in our concept of "cause".

In chapter 3 I explored some of the contentions of Davidson's paper "Causal Relations". I noted that Davidson, like Anscombe, thinks that singular causal claims are extensional, rather than logical, in character. I further suggested that, to respond to Anscombe, we must not only allow that the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causation does not *a priori* require that all events related as causes and effects fall under *deterministic* laws; we must also find *warrant* for the requirement that they fall under laws *at all*, in the sense of *strict* laws.

I suggested that Davidson's warrant for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality is, essentially, the thesis that all events can be given *complete* explanations, along with the thesis that *complete* explanations are *nomological*. I named this a variety of *naturalism*. I would suspect that it might, perhaps, be Anscombe's deism which left naturalism off her list of possible warrants for the covering law hypothesis. Nevertheless, this account of a warrant for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality seems to me essentially to *be* the claim that

what Anscombe called the Principle of Relevant Difference<sup>113</sup> is an investigative principle, one which should be employed unless or until it runs out in the face of brute indeterminacy. Of course it does come with Davidson's insistence that we may only be able to *find* all relevant differences under some *appropriate description* of the events.

What I called C<sub>1</sub>, in chapter 1, then -- what McIntyre names the Principle of the Openness of the Mental -- is supposed to follow from the claims that for example, intentional actions, and the formation of perceptual beliefs, are genuinely causal interactions between mental and physical events, along with the claim that there must be a (strict) nomological explanation of these events.

To provide strict laws covering *all* mental events, then, we will, accordingly, have to have laws governing the cases of events described as physical causing events described as mental (perceptual beliefs), and laws governing the cases of events described as mental causing events described as physical (the bodily motions attending intentional actions). Thus *the mental does not constitute a closed system of description*.

With what McIntyre calls the Principle of the Openness of the Mental in hand we can move on to the second stage of the argument presented in Section III of "Mental Events", the argument for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. In chapter 1 I suggested that this argument had the following structure:

**C<sub>1</sub>:**            According to the Principle of the Openness of the Mental it is not plausible that mental concepts alone can provide the basis of strict laws covering *all* mental events.

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<sup>113</sup> "If an effect occurs in one case and a similar effect does not occur in an apparently similar case, there must be a relevant further difference". Anscombe, G.E.M. "Causality and Determination." 86.

**P<sub>4</sub>:** According to The Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism mental descriptions are not nomologically reducible to physical descriptions.

**∴ C<sub>2</sub>:** **The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental:**  
There are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained.

This follows (if it does) because for a law *to be strict* it *must be* part of a *comprehensive* system of explanation. That is, it must be part of a system guaranteed to offer description of *all* events which fall under that system of explanation. In other words, a strict law must be *homonomic*. This is because if it is *not* part of such a system, its laws will *have* to have caveat clauses bailing it out of covering those cases which *are not* covered. By The Principle of Causal Interaction, the system of mental description is not comprehensive, and by the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism, it is not reducible to a system of description which *is* comprehensive. Because the mental system of description is thus *essentially heteronomic* it cannot contain strict laws. In simplest terms, then, I think we can infer that the second stage of the argument for the Anomalism of the Mental, actually runs as follows:

- P<sub>a</sub>** Either a descriptive system must be conceptually closed (comprehensive), or it must be nomologically reducible to a descriptive system which is closed, if it is to be apt for the formation of strict laws.
- P<sub>b</sub>** The mental is both an open system of description, and not nomologically reducible to a closed system of description.
- ∴ C** The mental system of description is not apt for the formulation of strict laws.

This is an instance of Modus Tollens. It in fact does represent a valid inference with the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental as its conclusion.

As I noted, in chapter 5, and in introducing this chapter, McIntyre challenges what I labelled **C<sub>1</sub>**, what he called the Principle of the Openness of Mental Systems. The grounds he challenges it on, however, seem to me to misunderstand what is being contended. As I argue in chapter 5, the “mental” is open because *descriptions* that contain mental verbs *essentially* are *inevitably heteronomic* in character, by the Principle of Causal Interaction.

McIntyre seems to think that the Principle of the Openness of Mental Systems cannot be true *because it entails Anomalism* and openness is true of *many* systems we clearly accept as science. This, however, simply does not follow. There are *other claims* necessary in arriving at the conclusion of Anomalism as it regards the mental, and Davidson notes, with McIntyre, that many descriptive systems, systems which we consider scientific, are indeed so open<sup>114</sup>.

Thus, if McIntyre were being charitable to Davidson, he ought to have assumed that, by Davidson’s concession of the fact that many admittedly scientific systems of description are open, it must be the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism which distinguishes the mental system of description from other open systems of description in warranting the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. McIntyre would, then, I suggest, have done better challenging what I have labelled **P<sub>4</sub>**, what he calls the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism, in order to take this line of attack.

My suggestion, then, is that it is the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism which needs defense at this stage of the argument. In chapter 6 I suggested that the Principle of Psychophysical Anomalism follows, on Davidson’s *later* account, from the fact that we are forced to find the mental reasonable by our own lights, whereas

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<sup>114</sup> For example, volcanism, meteorology, biology, etc.

we are not so required as regards physical phenomena. That is, the criteria of application of the relevant predicates of mental descriptions and physical descriptions (in the sense of the descriptions built from the predicates of a completed physics), are not reconcilable, since one set (the mental, in the sense in which Davidson is interested in it), is irreducibly normative, and the norms it is irreducibly tied to are our own norms. This represents a failure to meet the standards of intersubjectivity that we find in the explanations and commitments of, say, physics. The norms of physics are public/intersubjective in a way that the norms of the mental cannot be.

It is *this* feature of the mental (in the sense in which Davidson is interested in the mental) which Davidson thinks presents reason to believe that the mental system of description should be placed at the far (lawless) end of a continuum of more and less lawlike systems of description (with physics, as opposed to “physical” systems of description in a broader sense) sitting at the opposite end. To reiterate my defense against Anscombe, this is *not* to say that *physics* is being presumed to be, or can be assumed *a priori* to be, *necessarily* deterministic.

Secondly, McIntyre is, I think, *misidentifying* Anomalism as the contention that there *can be* no science of the mental. Anomalism is merely the contention that mental descriptions escape the nomological net of physical science<sup>115</sup>. For Davidson to be arguing that there *can be no* science of the mental he would have to assert, and argue for, the claim that *only* systems of description which support the formation of strict laws, or reduce to a system of description which does, count as *science*. He does not do so, even, as I discussed in chapter 6, in a paper titled “Could There Be a Science of Rationality”. Davidson is explicitly equivocal as regards the answer to this very question even as applied to his *own* theory of the mental, the Unified

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<sup>115</sup> And by “physical science” Davidson means the language of physics, possibly of chemistry, explicitly *not* that of biology.

Theory of Speech and Action. In fact, in “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” Davidson states the following concerning that theory:

“Such a theory is not, I think it is clear, reducible to a science like physics or neurobiology: its basic concepts cannot be defined in the vocabulary of any physical science, and there are no precise bridging laws that firmly or reliably relate events...as described in the psychological vocabulary<sup>116</sup>, with events... described in the vocabulary of a physical science. But it would be uninteresting to define science as what can be reduced to physics.”<sup>117</sup>

McIntyre’s last and, he claims, most serious complaint, is his assertion that Davidson commits the conceptual error of “descriptivism”. This complaint will, I think, serve to lead us in to Jaegwon Kim’s concerns with the last part of the argument from Section III of “Mental Events”. This is not because McIntyre’s objection relates to the argument for the identity of mental and physical events, but instead because the response I offer to McIntyre’s claim that *Davidson* is committing a conceptual error is to suggest, instead, that *McIntyre shares* a conceptual error with *Kim*. Further, addressing the conceptual error that I think Davidson would ascribe to McIntyre and Kim is, under my interpretation, the central *point* of “Mental Events”.

Remember that explaining how Davidson *might* be committing the conceptual error McIntyre labels ‘descriptivism’ *required* noting McIntyre’s prior *assumption* that Davidson is thinking of mental descriptions (descriptions containing one or more mental verb essentially) as picking out mental states, *taken ontologically seriously*. Which states supervene upon the physical states of brains. “Beliefs” and “Desires” and “Intentions”, considered within such a metaphysically serious framework, might be considered analogues to “Phlogiston” or “Ether”. Certainly many reductivists concerning the mental have suggested that they *are* so analogous.

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<sup>116</sup>I take it that Davidson, here, means the ‘folk psychological’ vocabulary, i.e., the attribution of beliefs, desires, and intentions, to individuals.

<sup>117</sup> Davidson, Donald. “Could There Be a Science of Rationality” 129.

There is, however, no such framework at play in Davidson's account; "*x* believes *y*" simply requires a believer (a person) to take place *x*, and a content ascribing replacement for *y*; what it does *not* require is a *property* as referent for the predicate (a belief or belief-state).

For Davidson predicates *require no properties* (unless they are predicates of properties)<sup>118</sup>. Nor are properties *explicative* of predication. Instead, in Davidson's opinion, properties set off an infinite explanatory regress if we take them (or "incomplete objects" or "universals" or *anything else*) as *referents* for predicates and assume that this relation of reference is explanatory of judgements, or statements, made using them.

Turning to the last argument of Section III of "Mental Events", in chapter 1 I suggested that this last argument runs, roughly, the following way:

1. Suppose *m*, a mental event, caused *p*, a physical event.
  2. The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality says that under some description *m* caused *p* must instantiate a strict law.
  3. The Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental tells us that this description must be physical rather than mental.
- ∴ C. *m* must be a physical event under some description, as must any mental event which causes a physical event.

Remember that Kim's problem with *this* argument was that, while it might get you identity of *events*, Kim contended that it entailed that the mental *properties*

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<sup>118</sup> See "Comments on Karlovy Vary Papers." In *Interpreting Davidson*, 285-308.

of events were *epiphenomena*, that is, located in causality only as effects, but never as causes. The answer to Kim, from Davidson's perspective, is the same as the answer to McIntyre's accusation that Davidson commits the conceptual error of 'descriptivism'.

The problem with Kim's argument, as I suggested in chapter 4, was that it is only entailed by Davidson's arguments if one makes the *added* assumption that there *must* be a one to one correspondence between predicates and properties. That is a commitment Davidson specifically eschews, and inveighs against, for reasons just noted in discussion of McIntyre's accusation that Davidson makes the conceptual error of 'descriptivism'.

In short, Kim agrees that we get identity of *m* and *p*, and thus can see that they are one and the same event *e*. However, for Kim, that *e* is a mental event, *Me*, is true *in virtue of* the fact that *e* *instantiates mental property M*, whereas that *e* is a physical event, *Pe*, will be true *in virtue of* the fact that *e* *instantiates physical property P*. For Davidson this is simply to misunderstand predicate semantics, and, instead, both the mental *description M*, and the physical *description P* are *true of* event *e*.

Having, I hope, reminded the reader of what I take to be Davidson's arguments for the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental, and having clarified and supplemented those arguments, my contention is that the arguments of those I have treated as interlocutors have largely misidentified either Davidson's conclusions, argumentative intent, or reasoning.

Far from presenting a selection of reasons to reject Anomalous Monism they have, I hope, served instead, to draw out the broader commitments necessary to either understanding Davidson's arguments, or to finding these supposed objections to Davidson's arguments compelling. I have suggested Davidson does not share some of the broader commitments of his objectors. In addition, I hope, drawing out

these broader commitments helps clarify what Davidson's own commitments are, and helps clarify what Davidson is, and is not, contending.

With a last eye toward demonstrating this I will move, in my conclusion, to a filled out account of how Davidson reconciles the apparent difficulty with which he begins "Mental Events". I hope that the consistency of this filled out account with the contentions of "Mental Events", as expressed therein, and as expressed in chapter 1 of this dissertation, will stand as evidence that my account of Davidson's arguments is interpretively correct.

## CONCLUSION

I have suggested that Davidson's purpose in writing "Mental Events" was to lay out, and argue for, a novel version of the identity thesis. That is, a novel version of the thesis that mental events and physical events are one and the same events. Davidson labeled this position "Anomalous Monism". Anomalous Monism is the thesis that mental descriptions and physical descriptions do not reduce one to the other, but share an ontology. In conclusion I would like to lay out, once more, how I interpret that position. I will then reiterate the problem that Davidson suggests that Anomalous Monism dissolves, and how it is supposed, by Davidson, to do so. My hope is that, in doing this, I will demonstrate two things.

Firstly, I hope to show that those popular objections to Davidson's arguments in "Mental Events" that I have canvassed either misconstrue what Davidson is arguing for or how Davidson argues for it. Or, these objectors' arguments require assumptions, additional to the position that Davidson presents in "Mental Events", in order to apply, or to follow as consequences from Davidson's arguments as they actually appear. I have suggested that these are additional assumptions that Davidson does not share, and in some cases explicitly eschews.

Secondly, I hope that this demonstrates that my interpretation of "Mental Events" is thus more charitable than those of the objectors I have canvassed, and I hope that this fact makes my interpretation more convincing. I suspect many philosophers will still be interested in the position they had previously interpreted Davidson as arguing for in "Mental Events". I have no problem with this interest. I would simply hope to have given credence to the claim that this does not constitute much more than a peripheral interest in what *Davidson* argued for in "Mental Events".

In terms of the fourfold set of possible positions, as regards the relation of the mental to the physical, Davidson himself suggested that we consider-- that is, the four possible views which we arrive at if we separate views of the relation between the mental and the physical on the basis of whether each accepts, or denies, the identity thesis, and whether each view accepts or denies that there are psychophysical laws correlating *types* of mental events with *types* of physical events, Anomalous Monism is very easy to define -- Anomalous Monism is the position which states that there is a failure of correlating laws between events described as mental and events described as physical, yet that holds that the events so described are ontologically one and the same events.

I hope that the body of this dissertation, and my attempt to remind the reader of how the arguments of “Mental Events” proceed, and to summarize the objections to those arguments which I have canvassed in chapter 7, together help clarify what, exactly, Davidson thinks is required for, and entailed by, Anomalous Monism. I would move on by reminding readers that “Mental Events”, and the position of Anomalous Monism that it espouses, is supposed to deal with a problem.

Centrally, that problem is, for Davidson, that the mental seems to be *anomalous*. That is, mental relations, as well as mental to physical, and physical to mental, relations, seemingly fail to fall under strict laws. Further, Davidson suggested that the level of concern this generates is a product of the fact that our recognition of this anomalousness was one of a set of apparently inconsistent principles. Thus, Davidson began “Mental Events” by labelling the principles, as he thought they were involved, and then attempted to resolve the problem by suggesting that his (novel) position of Anomalous Monism dissolved the apparent inconsistency between these principles. Instead, Davidson offered an interpretation of the principles that did not lead to that inconsistency. I shall, once again, follow this format.

The problem arises because the Principle of Causal Interaction and the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality taken together imply that there should be (strict) laws which apply to at least some mental events (minimally, those which are causes, or effects, of physical events). The third principle, however, is the aforementioned contention regarding the anomalousness of the mental, which Davidson, of course, labels the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental. The position of Anomalous Monism is supposed to dissolve this apparent conflict by making, and keeping clear, the distinction between which principles present *ontological theses*, which principles present *theses about descriptions*, and which principles present *theses about explanations*. Making these distinctions, and showing the utility and importance of *keeping* them clear is, I would assert, the *core* point of “Mental Events”.

Davidson thought that by characterizing four possible positions as regards the relation between the mental and the physical, and thus bringing into view Anomalous Monism -- the fourth, and novel, position -- we could lay out a view which accounts for how the three principles can, in fact, be interpreted so as to be consistent with one another. The importance of this view is that it allows us to see mental events as genuinely causal, while allowing a fully naturalistic view of explanation (that is, allowing that all events are maximally explainable under some description), and admitting that mental descriptions are not apt for the formulation of strict laws, or reducible into a descriptive vocabulary which is so apt.

I am going to reiterate, one last time, how the reconciliation of our three principles is supposed to go, with all that implies for the content of the position of Anomalous Monism. In chapter 1 I had the following excerpts from my account of the suggested reconciliation in bold type:

1. ***The Principle of Causal Interaction, and the identity thesis, are read as applying to events in extension.***

2. *The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality, however, is a thesis about explanation.*
3. *The Anomalism of the Mental is a thesis about certain kinds of descriptions, not an ontological thesis at all.*

I have argued that **1.** is the claim that causality operates between events, taken ontologically seriously<sup>119</sup>, and that some events described as mental events *cause* some events described as physical, and some events described as mental are *effects* of some events described as physical, and that events *described as* mental or physical are *one and the same events*. Hence *monism*.

Kim and Davidson are fundamentally at odds. Kim demands an unacceptable correlation, and explanatory relationship, between predicates and properties (where those properties are to be taken ontologically seriously). For Davidson this demand is in error, and results in an infinite explanatory regress instead of in any explanation of predication. Thus, Davidson is ontologically committed only to events, and not to properties of events, taken ontologically seriously.

Davidson is *not a* non-reductive *physicalist*<sup>120</sup>. Nor does Davidson introduce, or rely on, the notion of higher order multiply-realizable properties. While Davidson does not subscribe to, for example, Quine's flat out nominalism, he *is*, I have suggested, best read as a property agnostic. His only *explicit* statements about properties (in the serious metaphysical sense, rather than in what I have previously described, following Heil, as the 'episcopalian' sense) are to be found in the course of his arguing that they *are not* explicative of predication, and that it is an error to take them to be so.

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<sup>119</sup> Davidson's suggestion is that since we are relatively comfortable offering identity conditions for them this ought not be particularly worrying. I would also note that I see very little prospect of giving an account of the semantics of, for example, singular causal claims (or, indeed, of the semantics of adverbial modification) *without* allowing quantification over events.

<sup>120</sup> He admits of neither substance nor property dualism. "Physical" is, for Davidson, a different kind of conceptual category, not an ontological category. He defends monism, not physicalism.

I have argued that **2.** is warranted, for Davidson, by a version of *naturalism*. I take it that Davidson's warrant for the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality is the thesis that all events can be given *complete* explanations, along with the thesis that *complete* explanations are *nomological*.

We arrive at the *strict* law thesis as a consequence of noting that nomological explanation may run out in the face of brute indeterminacy. Yet we retain the notion that, for example, the *comprehensive* nature of the descriptive *vocabulary* of physics --the fact that *all* events may be *described* under this vocabulary *as* physical events-- affords us with descriptions in that vocabulary that are *homonomic*, that is, apt for indefinite further refinement *in that vocabulary*, until laws are arrived at which are *maximally* explanatory and predictive.

Following Davidson, we agree with Anscombe that singular causal claims are extensional not logical. We agree with Anscombe that *identification of the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality with the thesis of determinism* is an error, and further, we agree that the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality is not *warranted by the assumption of determinism*.

The source of *disagreement* between Anscombe and Davidson, is, I have suggested, that Anscombe does not consider naturalism, as a thesis about *explanation*, as a warrant. Davidson's explicit claim, in "Mental Events", as regards the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality, is that we resolve its apparent contribution to our problem by properly identifying it as a thesis about *explanation*.

I have argued that **3.** is, for Davidson, a thesis about mental *descriptions*. This is as distinct from a thesis about mental states or properties. The thesis of the Anomalism of the Mental is the thesis that mental *descriptions* are not themselves apt for the formulation of strict laws because they are essentially *heteronomic*, nor are they apt for reduction into a vocabulary that *is so apt* because the norms of

application of these *descriptions* require the *ascription of our own norms* to the *subjects* of these descriptions. The vocabulary of physics does not require its subjects to be reasonable.

Contrary to McIntyre's contentions this is, firstly, not the thesis that social science is not science. Nor is it the thesis that nomological investigation is *a priori* ruled out in the social sciences. Secondly, Davidson admits of the possibility of psychological laws (which are not 'mental' in the sense in which he is interested in 'the mental' in "Mental Events") and even of psychophysical laws (which are not 'mental' in the sense in which he is interested in 'the mental' in "Mental Events"), he thus does not seem to committing the conceptual error McIntyre names 'descriptivism' in his actual contentions.

As regards the broader elements of McIntyre's arguments that Davidson does indeed commit this conceptual error, my contention has been that these broader arguments only apply if McIntyre is *misinterpreting* Davidson as Kim does, though in McIntyre's case I have noted that he seems to misinterpret Davidson's position as entailing a commitment to "natural kinds" or "states" (if these are distinct from properties).

While we *can* see Davidson's argument as entailing that not all sciences, considered as descriptive frameworks, are apt for the formulation of strict laws (although many may reduce to descriptive frameworks which are), if I am correct in my interpretation, we *ought not* see the argument for Anomalous Monism as having the conclusion that there can be no nomological investigation in social science. This contention follows only on the claim that any *scientific* system of description is either apt for the formulation of strict laws, or reducible to a system of description which is. This, however, seems to *me*, frankly, to be merely stipulative as a definition of science, and Davidson decries this definition as uninteresting.

Fundamentally, then, my contention is that the upshot of “Mental Events” is *supposed* to be that we need not worry that mental *descriptions*, although such descriptions are not apt for the formulations of strict laws, *violate* naturalism. That these descriptions are not so apt is a function of the norms of application of these descriptions *not a function of their subject matter*. We can see Davidson as inveighing against reductivism. This does not entail that we accuse him of physicalism. Physicalism is the assumption (underlying reductivism) that one system of description describes actual features of reality, while the other does not. Anomalous Monism is the thesis that these different systems of description describe one and the same elements of our ontology. Hence monism.

While I do not concede that the arguments of “Mental Events” are confused, I must concede, in the face of decades of secondary literature, that they are confusing. I hope to have allayed some of that confusion. I hope that by suggesting, and attempting to demonstrate, that Anscombe, Kim, and McIntyre, are best seen as misunderstanding Davidson, I have then used their misunderstanding to help the reader better understand. I hope that the reader, at the least, feels that my interpretation of “Mental Events” makes more sense of that paper than the secondary literature that I have canvassed.

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