

The Argument for Anomalous Monism, Again

Deren Olgun

1. Introduction

The main focus of the contemporary debate on mental causation has centred on whether mental events can cause other events in virtue of their mental properties, or only in virtue of their physical ones. Whilst reductive physicalists maintain that the only properties that exist are physical properties, and that any mental or other “higher-level” properties are only properties in virtue of their being identical with some physical property, non-reductive physicalists maintain that mental or other “higher-level” properties are irreducible to physical ones. A common charge that has been levelled against non-reductive physicalists is that if mental properties are irreducible then they must be causally inert or “epiphenomenal” since it cannot be the case that both mental and physical properties are simultaneously causal, a position which the literature has come to call *property epiphenomenalism*. This paper argues that the charge of property epiphenomenalism is misplaced when it is applied to Donald Davidson’s anomalous monism. Davidson cannot be accused of property epiphenomenalism because properties do not feature in his ontology and, therefore, play no role in his account of causal relations between events. Davidson’s work and name have become embroiled in the debate about property epiphenomenalism because he is mistakenly thought to be working in an old tradition that accepts properties as an ontological category and that maintains that it is only in virtue of their properties that events have the effects that they do. Whilst the conceptual irreducibility of mental types to physical types (predicate dualism), which is the hallmark of non-reductive physicalism, is, for non-reductive physicalists, a consequence of an ontological non-reductivism (property dualism), for Davidson the start and end point is the denial of conceptual reduction (i.e. the acceptance of

predicate dualism only). Thus Davidson is neither a non-reductive physicalist, nor can he be accused of property epiphenomenalism – properties simply do not enter into his philosophical scheme.

This paper is divided into eight sections. The first section introduces the mental causation debate by giving a brief outline of its history up to the contemporary debate about property epiphenomenalism. The second section outlines the argument for anomalous monism. The third section outlines one of the earliest arguments that asserted that anomalous monism implies property epiphenomenalism. The fourth section outlines various non-reductive physicalist responses that attempt to defend non-reductivism. The fifth section outlines Kim’s influential “overdetermination” argument – the claim that non-reductive physicalists must accept either property epiphenomenalism or overdetermination. The sixth section makes the case that anomalous monism cannot imply property epiphenomenalism. The seventh section deals with Sophie Gibb’s (2006) criticisms of Davidson’s underlying approach to ontology, as instances of more appropriate criticisms. The final section concludes.

2. The Mental Causation Debate

Cartesian dualism is the classic form of *substance dualism*. Descartes maintained that there are two kinds of substance, material and mental, and that man is a union of a spatially extended, material substance (the body), which is incapable of thought or feeling, and a spatially un-extended, mental substance (the mind or *soul*), which thinks and feels.

Now, pre-theoretic conceptions of agency hold that the mind and the

body causally interact. When, for example, Alfred summons the waiter (by raising his hand, say), we say that his wanting to order caused him to do so, just as we say that my intention to read Emile Zola's *Germinal* causes my buying of the text. And, in agreement with these common sense intuitions, Descartes also maintained that the mind and the body causally interact. However, one of the main problems for Cartesian dualism is how to marry the possibility of mental-physical causal interaction with the total independence of mental and material substances – it is very difficult to see how an un-extended, immaterial substance with no presence in physical space could causally influence material bodies that are subject to the laws of physics. And indeed, as Kim notes, the 'inability to explain the possibility of "mental causation", how mentality can make a causal difference to the world, doomed Cartesian dualism' (Kim, 1996: 4).

The majority position (see Kim, 1996; Crane 2003) in contemporary philosophy of mind rejects Cartesian dualism in favour of a kind of *monism*, which argues that there is only one kind of substance. More specifically, it is a physicalist or "materialist" monism that has come to dominate the debate, a position that is generally known as *physicalism*. Kim defines *ontological physicalism* as the position that 'there are no concrete existents, or substances, in the spacetime world other than material particles and their aggregates' (Kim, 1996: 211) and observes that 'in most contemporary debates, ontological physicalism forms the starting point of discussion rather than a conclusion that needs to be established.' (*Ibid.*: 211)

However, embracing physicalism does not resolve the problem of mental causation that dogged substance dualism: it still remains unclear as to how mental events or objects (whatever their apparent relation to the physical substance that constitutes them) can causally interact with physical events or objects. The debate has simply shifted its focus from substances to properties, as Kim notes 'the most intensely debated issue – in fact, the only substantive remaining issue – concerning the mind-body relation has centred on *properties* – that is, the question *how mental and physical properties are related to each other*' (*Ibid.*: 211-212 – emphasis in original). To make sense of the debate to which Kim refers it will be helpful to draw on the distinction between *token identity* and *type identity*.

Token identity states that any mental event or object is identical with some physical event or object – accepting token identity implies a rejection of substance dualism. Type identity, in contrast, holds that mental event types are identical with/reducible to physical event types – "types" here are generally taken to mean properties, although, as we will later observe, it can also mean predicates.

Accepting both token identity and type identity is a *reductive physicalist* position. Reductive physicalists deny mental causation because, as they maintain, a mental event only has the causal power it does in virtue of its being identical with some physical event; that it is only because the event is of a certain physical type that it is the cause it is, and its being of a certain mental type is just a consequence of its being that physical type.

In contrast to the reductive physicalist position, Donald Davidson's *anomalous monism* (1970, 1993) seeks to defend the possibility of mental causation. The idea that reasons are causes of actions is a central part of Davidson's philosophy (see Davidson, 1963) and anomalous monism represents a stance in the philosophy of mind that combines his position on mental causation with other elements of his philosophy, including his views on events (see Davidson, 1969), causation (see Davidson, 1967b) and semantics (see Davidson, 1967a, 1974a, 1977). Whilst anomalous monism accepts token identity, it denies type identity (where by "types" Davidson would have in mind predicates rather than properties), holding that mental types are irreducible to physical ones.

In response, many critics (e.g., Honderich, 1982; McLaughlin, 1993; Kim 1993a) have argued that anomalous monism is inherently contradictory and that the only reasonable way to resolve the contradiction is to accept that mental events are epiphenomenal, or rather that *mental properties* are epiphenomenal – the general argument taking the form that it is only in virtue of an event's being a certain physical type that it has the effect that it does, and not in virtue of its being a certain mental type, that mental events do not cause anything *qua* mental; a position which we shall call *property epiphenomenalism*. In response to these criticisms, arguments in defence of anomalous monism (e.g., LePore & Loewer (1987), Macdonald & Macdonald (1991), Macdonald (2007)), which are usually dubbed *non-reductive physicalism*, have been proposed. These arguments,

in general, contort the positions developed by Davidson's critics in such a way as to (attempt to) restore causal efficacy and relevance to the mental properties of events.

In so far as the debate is one between reductive and non-reductive physicalists, or one between non-reductive physicalists of different stripes, asking whether or not their positions imply property epiphenomenalism is a reasonable line of inquiry. Where it ceases to become reasonable is when Davidson's anomalous monism is made the object of this line of attack either explicitly or because it has been classed, as it frequently is (e.g. Jacob, 2002), as a form of non-reductive physicalism. As Davidson (1967b, 1980, 1993) maintains, and as is reiterated by Tim Crane (1995) and Sophie Gibb (2006), causal relations are extensional relations between events; they are independent of the manner of their description. To ask, within the framework of anomalous monism, whether a mental event causes a physical event *in virtue* of its mental properties or only *in virtue* of its physical properties is to misinterpret a fundamental tenet of the theory of anomalous monism. Properties do not feature in the ontological system on which anomalous monism is based, owing to Davidson's holistic, truth-conditional approach to semantics and metaphysics, and, as such, it simply cannot be criticised for rendering properties epiphenomenal. Properties are simply irrelevant to anomalous monism. The following sections make that case.

3. Anomalous Monism

Davidson (1970) originally presented anomalous monism as a solution to an apparent paradox between three principles which he was inclined to accept:

1. The Principle of Causal Interaction (CI): 'That at least some mental events interact causally with physical events' (Davidson, 1980: 208)
2. The Nomological Character of Causality (NCC): All causal relations instantiate a strict law
3. The Anomalism of the Mental (AOM): There are no strict psychophysical laws

In terms of the discussion of previous section, CI is just the acceptance of the possibility of what we have been calling mental causation. NCC is, by Davidson's own acknowledgment (Davidson, 1970: 209), unsupported. AOM is defended by appealing to Quine's argument of the indeterminacy of translation: it is not possible to formulate strict laws that relate the two, distinct, conceptual realms, because mental concepts are not explicable in physical vocabulary, nor physical concepts in mental vocabulary. As Davidson notes:

'There are no strict psychophysical laws because of the disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes' (Davidson, 1970: 222).

It is from this principle that Davidson's denial of *type identity* arises; because there is no systematic correlation between mental and physical types there is no basis for reduction from the mental to the physical.

So, in anomalous monism (1) the mental interacts causally with the physical, (2) any given causal interaction is describable by a strict law, and (3) there are no psychophysical strict laws. Since Davidson holds that the physical is *causally closed*¹, i.e., that "any physical effect must have a sufficient physical cause" (Crane, 1995: 7), he maintains that the strict law instantiated by any causal relation is always a strict physical law. Therefore, any causal relation between two events is describable by a strict physical law, including the interaction between a mental event and a physical event. Davidson solves the apparent paradox by concluding that mental events *just are* physical events; he endorses *token identity*. However, an event is mental only insofar as it is given a mental description, and is physical only insofar as it is given a physical description – the two are both descriptions of the same event in different vocabularies. Hence, unlike physicalists, Davidson gives no ontological primacy to physical descriptions but, to put it loosely, regards them only as a kind of description that – in virtue of the formation of our physical concepts – *happens* to allow for the statement of strict laws. As a result, Davidson's position constitutes a kind of neutral monism, not, strictly speaking, a kind of physicalism.

4. Causation, *In Virtue Of*

Ted Honderich (1982) was one of the first to critique anomalous monism for rendering mental properties epiphenomenal. Honderich argues that only those properties of an event that can enter into lawlike connections could be causally relevant and since, in anomalous monism, the mental properties of an event cannot enter into lawlike connections, he argues that it renders mental properties epiphenomenal; that anomalous monism entails *property epiphenomenalism*, or, as it is otherwise called (e.g. McLaughlin, 1993), *type epiphenomenalism*.

Honderich's argument begins by noting Davidson's ontological conception of an event as an "irreducible entity" and adds to this position the claim that 'an event has an indefinite number of properties, features or aspects' (Honderich, 1982: 60). To illustrate this point, consider a brick: it could be said to have, amongst others, the properties of "hardness", "redness", "coarseness" and "being cuboid". Given that events have properties in this same way, Honderich argues that 'it is in virtue of certain of its properties rather than others that an event is the cause it is' (*Ibid.*: 61). So, in the event of the brick breaking a window, it is the brick's property of hardness coupled with the window's property of fragility and a small set of other properties (e.g. the brick's velocity) that break the window. The two properties are thus relevant to the cause and effect relation, whilst properties such as the "redness" or "coarseness" of the brick are irrelevant to it. So, Honderich concludes:

'If the ground for saying that two events are in lawlike connection is that they are cause and effect,^[2] and it is the case that all of their properties save some residue are irrelevant to their being cause and effect, then they are in the given lawlike connection solely in virtue of that residue of properties' (*Ibid.*: 62).

Honderich thus claims that causal relations exist only between certain properties of events, and that a lawlike connection exists in virtue of these properties. He calls this claim the "Principle of the Nomological Character of Causally Relevant Properties".

Now, since AOM implies that mental properties cannot enter into strict lawlike connections with physical properties, Honderich contends that they are not captured by this Principle, i.e., mental properties are not causally relevant. Therefore, either we must reject AOM or reject the claim that mental events interact with physical events (CI). Honderich suggests that we should reject the strong form of CI, and argues, instead, that it is mental events *as* physical events that cause physical events. So, whilst mental events do interact with physical events, it is only in virtue of their being identical with physical events. Therefore, since the mental properties of mental events are epiphenomenal in the causal relation, Davidson must be a property epiphenomenalist.

This accusation of property epiphenomenalism is common amongst most of Davidson's critics. Indeed, Kim observes that it has been voiced with "an impressive if unsurprising unanimity" (Kim, 1993a: 20). Moreover, property epiphenomenalism proves to be one of the dividing issues between reductive physicalists, who accept it, and non-reductive physicalists, who generally seek to reject it. The non-reductive physicalist attempts to reject type-epiphenomenalism, and the arguments against them, are the focus of the next two sections.

5. The Non-Reductive Physicalist Defence

The general form of the non-reductive physicalist responses to the charge of type epiphenomenalism (e.g., Macdonald & Macdonald, 1991) is to maintain that we should be careful to distinguish between universals (which they call properties) and particulars (which they call property-instances). A property, e.g. "hardness", is distinct from any given property-instance that instantiates it, e.g. this brick's "being hard", and it is the latter, and not the former, that *are* causally efficacious (it is the brick's "being hard" that breaks the window, not "hardness" in general).

So, whilst mental properties are irreducible to physical ones, particular mental property-instances (that is, mental events which instantiate certain mental properties) may be either realised by (e.g., LePore & Loewer, 1987), or identical³ to (e.g., Macdonald & Macdonald, 1991), a physical property-instance (that is, the physical event which instantiates certain

universal physical properties).⁴ Therefore, whilst mental properties are not causally efficacious, instantiated mental properties are causally efficacious because they are identical to, or realized by, the physical event (which instantiates “its” physical properties).

‘To say that a mental property of a physical event is causally relevant (that is, that a mental event is causally efficacious *qua* mental) is to say at least that an exemplification of that property, that is, that event, is causally efficacious in bringing about an effect of that event. This will require that (mental) instance to be a physical instance, that is, will require one and the same event to be an instance of both a mental and a physical property’ (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1991: 562).

This argument bears an apparent similarity to anomalous monism in so far as it advances a token identity theory. For Davidson, it is not possible to separate mental causation from physical causation precisely because causal relations are between events, and the mental event is identical with the physical event, thus mental causation *just is* physical causation. Similarly, with the property-instance version of non-reductive physicalism, one cannot ask whether a mental event causes a physical event *in virtue of* its instantiating particular mental properties, or *in virtue of* its instantiating particular physical properties, since the mental property-instance is identical with the physical-property instance, thus mental causation *just is* physical causation.

6. Kim’s Overdetermination Critique of Non-Reductive Physicalism

Jaegwon Kim has probably been the most prolific critic of non-reductive physicalism. He charges that non-reductive physicalism, including the property-instance variety outlined above, if it wishes to accept physical causal closure, must either accept type epiphenomenalism or imply causal overdetermination⁵ (Kim 1993b, Kim 2005). His argument is as follows:

Suppose that M, a mental event or property-instance, causes another mental event (property-instance), M*. Now, supervenience variously

(dependent on its interpretation) implies that both M and M* are identical to *or* realised by physical events (property-instances), let us call these, respectively, P and P* and since M causes M*, P must also cause P*. But, if P causes P*, and M and M* are each, respectively, realised by their physical events, then M* would have been realised irrespective of whether or not it was caused by M, since the instantiation of P* would have realised it. So, says Kim, perhaps the causal efficacy of M comes from its having caused P*. However, if M causes P* then P* is overdetermined; having been caused both by M and by P. Therefore, concludes Kim, either we must accept that mental events cause physical events in virtue of their physical properties (property epiphenomenalism) or we must claim that mental causation always involves the overdetermination of its effects.

Kim originally formulated this argument as one against realization theses such as LePore and Loewer (1987), and, as Macdonald (2007) notes, it does not apply with the same force to the property-instance identity theses.⁶ However, where the property-instance identity version fails, Kim would perhaps claim, is in its violation of the explanatory exclusion principle (e.g. Kim, 1989a). The explanatory exclusion principle effectively denies overdetermination in explanation, that is, that there cannot be two independent causal explanations of one event. The property-instance identity thesis fails this criterion because it offers both a mental and physical causal explanation of the same event; thus, Kim might claim, the mental properties cannot be causally relevant (given causal closure of the physical).

Kim summarises the “Mental Causation Problem” for non-reductive physicalists as follows:

‘Causal efficacy of mental properties is inconsistent with the joint acceptance of the following four claims: (i) physical causal closure, (ii) causal exclusion, (iii) mind-body supervenience, and (iv) mental/physical property dualism—the view that mental properties are irreducible to physical properties’ (Kim, 2005: 21-22).

To elaborate briefly on each of these:

- i. *Physical Causal Closure* – Any physical effect must have a sufficient

physical cause.

ii. *Causal Exclusion* – “If an event *e* has a sufficient cause *c* at *t*, no event at *t* distinct from *c* can be a cause of *e* (unless this is a genuine case of causal overdetermination⁷)” (Kim, 2005: 17).⁸

iii. *Mind-Body Supervenience*⁹ – There can be no change in a mental event or property-instance without a change in the corresponding physical event or property-instance.

iv. *Mental/Physical Property Dualism* – Mental properties are irreducible to physical properties (i.e. the distinguishing tenet of non-reductive physicalism).

Kim’s position is to reject (iv), maintaining that mental properties are reducible to physical ones, and that mental properties have causal efficacy only because they are so reducible, i.e., mental events are causally efficacious *in virtue of* their physical properties, hence property epiphenomenalism.

7. Anomalous Monism Cannot Imply Property Epiphenomenalism

In his response to Davidson’s “Thinking Causes,” (in which Davidson defends anomalous monism against its critics), Kim (1993a) argues that simply dispatching with the “inelegant locutions” of “*qua*” and “*in virtue of*”¹⁰ will not get rid of the main issue which, for Kim, ‘*has always been the causal efficacy of properties of events – no matter how they, the events or the properties, are described;*’ (Kim, 1993a: 21 – emphasis in original). This is exactly the same position as is developed by Honderich when he attributes properties to events, and states that the issue of causation is the relation between properties of events. And this is precisely where these critics of anomalous monism, and those who come to its defence with property-based arguments, are wrong. Talk of properties of mental or physical events is just irrelevant to anomalous monism. As Sophie Gibb (2006: 408) so clearly notes, the basic causal relations of Davidson’s ontological system are events; properties simply do not feature in it.

7.1 Anomalous Monism, Properties and Predicates

The key to understanding Davidson’s position is acknowledging that ‘unlike his critics, Davidson does not consider events to have properties, because for him properties are not objective aspects of things in the world’ (Gibb, 2006: 414). Davidson endorses a kind of nominalism and rejects a correspondence theory of truth; for him predicates do not pick out objective features of the world that we might call “properties”, they do not refer to anything: ‘Nothing [...] no *thing*, makes sentences and theories true: not experience, not surface irritations, not the world can make a sentence true’ (Davidson, 1974b: 194). Arguably the most important point in understanding the theory of anomalous monism is this denial of the referential character of predicates. So, for Davidson, the statement “this brick is hard” is not true in any sense that involves correspondence with the world.

Indeed, this seems to clearly follow from his argument in support of the Anomalism of the Mental. As noted above, Davidson refers to the ‘disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes’ which preclude the possibility of strict psychophysical laws. Now, it is only possible to maintain that both mental and physical descriptions of events can be “true” descriptions of events (as Davidson does) if the criteria of verification, or the *truth-conditions* for the applications of particular mental or physical descriptions, are not inherent in the event itself. For Davidson, properties of events are things we ascribe to them from the perspective of a given theoretical backdrop and vocabulary, ‘talk about properties is simply talk about the predicates that can be ascribed to an event when the event is variously described’ (Gibb, 2006: 414). We say that the brick *is* hard in relation to its breaking the window only because our physical theory and vocabulary relate those terms in such and such a way, not because, in some objective reality, the brick is hard, or because it instantiates the property of “hardness”. Thus, for Davidson, an event could not cause an effect *in virtue of* its having certain properties, since an event need not have (ontologically) *any* properties.

As such, Davidson’s denial of type identity is a position of *predicate dualism* – Davidson denies the possibility of conceptual reduction of mental descriptions to physical ones. Ontologically, however, Davidson is an out-and-out monist: there are only events. In contrast, the non-reductive

physicalist maintains, according to Kim (see section 5), a sort of *property dualism*: for non-reductive physicalists mental properties are not *ontologically* reducible to physical ones (although they are somehow dependent on, or realised by, them). Non-reductive physicalists will thus probably be predicate dualists as well, since they take predicates to refer to these properties, but the non-reductivism arises at the ontological, rather than the conceptual level, whilst Davidson argues precisely the opposite; his is a purely conceptual non-reductivism.

7.2 Davidsonian Causal Relations

Davidson's theory of causation maintains that 'causes are individual events, and causal relations hold between events' (Davidson, 1967b: 161). He accepts what he calls the 'principle of extensional substitution' (*Ibid.*: 153) which states simply that causal relations are extensional so that we cannot change the truth-value of a sentence by substituting co-referring terms. In the expression "Alfred's wanting to order caused him to raise his arm", Alfred's wanting to order is a (mental) description of the event that caused the event of Alfred's arm's rising, but another description might be "Alfred's brain state caused him to raise his arm". The latter substitutes a physical description of the first event for a mental one, but, according to Davidson's principle of extensional substitution, since the referent of both expressions is the same event, the truth of the sentence remains unchanged. And this is really the point of Davidson's system: causal relations are between events, *independent* of their description. Since there is nothing in Davidson's ontology for predicates to correspond to, the causal relation cannot be said to be *in virtue of* the event being describable in one way rather than another. As Davidson notes:

'Given [my] extensionalist view of causal relations it makes no literal sense [...] to speak of an event causing something as mental, or by virtue of its mental properties' (Davidson, 1993: 13).

7.3 Anomalous Monism Cannot Imply Property Epiphenomenalism

To re-cap, Davidson's ontology does not include properties; his non-reductivism is conceptual rather than ontological. Causal relations are between events and are independent of the manner in which the causal relation is described (or, in strictly non-Davidsonian phraseology, of the properties that the event has). As such Davidson necessarily denies a premise that has been implicit in most of the discussions considered in this paper – that causes have their effects *in virtue of* their properties. For this reason it is not possible to accuse Davidson of rendering mental properties epiphenomenal; properties do no causal work in anomalous monism so it cannot, therefore, be accused of property epiphenomenalism.

Jaegwon Kim, Ted Honderich and the like are well entitled to an ontological system, or "theory of events" (Gibb, 2006: 415) that entails properties, and, indeed, they have advanced such systems themselves (e.g. Kim, 2005). They assume that statements, in some sense, correspond with the world and that physics is the set of truthful statements about reality – in which case mental statements will be truthful only insofar as they are reducible to physical ones. It is fine for them to hold that position, and, indeed, as the argument goes property epiphenomenalism may well be a problem for property dualists of the non-reductive physicalist kind, but Davidson is not a property dualist. It is not fine, however, to criticise anomalous monism because, when placed in this ontological system, it results in property epiphenomenalism, since this is not what Davidson argues – he clearly states his own ontological system that is distinct from the former and from which anomalous monism emerges. As Gibb observes, property epiphenomenalism would be a plausible criticism of 'anomalous monism if embedded within a Kimean theory of events, but to criticise Davidson's theory under a scheme of events that is not his own would be question-begging' (Gibb, 2006: 414-415). As such Davidson and anomalous monism have been erroneously accused of property epiphenomenalism.

Accepting that anomalous monism works with a different ontology means that criticisms of the argument must either be made from within that ontology, or of that ontology itself. Sophie Gibb sets out to attack Davidson's approach to ontology, arguing, instead, that that is really the

problem with anomalous monism. Her arguments are the focus of the next section.

8. On Davidson's Ontology

Sophie Gibb suggests that we should reject anomalous monism *not* because it implies property epiphenomenalism (which, she acknowledges, it doesn't) but because of 'the implausibility of the ontological system within which it is based' (Gibb, 2006: 408). Against Davidson she levels three critiques: that NCC is unsupported, that his nominalism implies the acceptance of disjunctive regularities as strict law statements, and that Davidson does ontology the "wrong way round". This section deals with each of these claims in turn.

8.1 The Nomological Character of Causality is Unsupported

Gibb argues that Davidson does not support his assumption of the Nomological Character of Causality (NCC), which Davidson himself admits. Now, those who accept some kind of correspondence theory of truth, so that strict law statements could correspond to actually existent laws relating cause and effect, might find an ontological justification for NCC, but such a defence is not open to Davidson; who, as we noted above, rejects such correspondence. Indeed the acceptance of NCC really is difficult to reconcile with Davidson's nominalism, but this is a separate line of argument to the claim that his ontology is implausible. Even if it should prove to be the case that the committed Davidsonian cannot maintain NCC, then, of the many other undesirable consequences that could result from this, I do not think the abandonment of the more general stance of anomalous monism is one of them – indeed, we should probably have to abandon physical causal closure, but we need not abandon the claim that the mental interacts causally with the physical, or that there are no strict psychophysical laws. It may be decided that compromising our belief in physical causal closure is too heavy a price to pay in order to accept anomalous monism, in which case let's out with it, but it still remains to be demonstrated that a Davidsonian position actually cannot maintain NCC. Failing to motivate

the assumption is a criticism, no doubt, but it only spells serious trouble for anomalous monism, I believe, if it proves to be inconsistent with the nominalism that underpins the theory, and this Gibb does not show.

8.2 Accepting Disjunctive Regularities as Strict Law Statements

Gibb's second argument is that a nominalism of the sort that Davidson embraces would lead to the acceptance of the existence of objective disjunctive regularities. Her discussion starts by asking how the Davidsonian is to identify regularities since, 'without properties, there would seem to be nothing that distinguishes those events that are alike from those that are not' (Gibb, 2006: 418). She suggests that a strategy could be to maintain that events can be distinguished, and regularities consequently identified, by determining the predicates that those events satisfy. The problem with such a position, she suggests, is that it entails that we must accept disjunctive regularities as strict law statements. In this case predicates like "grue" could feature in strict law statements, which, she remarks, is problematic since 'the regularities that this predicate yields, or indeed that any such disjunctive predicate yields, are surely not *real* regularities.' (Gibb, 2006: 419, emphasis added) However, I see no reason why the committed Davidsonian could not bite the bullet here and accept disjunctive regularities of this order as strict law statements: the concern for "realness" only comes in if one accepts correspondence. Indeed, Gibb's concern, as she herself admits, only arises if one accepts a "truthmaker principle" (so that law statements are made true by regularities in the world, i.e. there are "real" regularities which law statements can either correspond or fail to correspond to), Davidson's rejection of such a truthmaker principle effectively shields anomalous monism from the real bite of this argument.

8.3 Davidson's Ontology is "Implausible"

Gibb's final claim is against Davidson's approach to ontology, asserting that 'even given doubts about the truthmaker principle, from an ontological point of view, Davidson has arguably got things the wrong way round.' (Gibb, 2006: 420) She maintains that:

‘One’s motivation for accepting or rejecting an ontological category, and hence a theory of the causal relata, should not have semantic considerations at its base, because contrary to Davidson, a theory of meaning cannot be appealed to in order to settle ontological issues’ (*Ibid.*: 420).

Gibb suggests that Davidson ought not to rule out the existence of properties on semantic grounds, and that, instead, metaphysical enquiry should be conducted to establish the nature of causation. This enquiry, she suggests, will find that “properties inevitably play an essential role within one’s ontological system and more specifically within one’s theory of causation,” (*Ibid.*: 420) and, as such, anomalous monism can, and indeed will, be rejected because of the implausibility of its ontological system.

This final argument of Gibb’s is the closest to being an actual refutation of anomalous monism – if she were correct and Davidson’s ontology were, indeed, misguided, then the arguments for anomalous monism would crumble along with its ontological foundations. However, Gibb provides no actual argument as to why Davidson’s ontology is “implausible” or why his approach is the wrong way round, other than repeating the point implicit in the work of reductive and non-reductive physicists alike: that events have their effects in virtue of their properties. Simply saying that ‘a theory of causal relata should not have semantic considerations at its base’ will not convince the committed Davidsonian, who could as easily reply “Yes, it should.”

The difference emerges in the approach of the two camps to metaphysics. As Davidson observes:

‘When we study terms and sentences directly, not in the light of a comprehensive theory, we must bring metaphysics to language; we assign roles to words and sentences in accord with the categories we independently posit on epistemological or metaphysical grounds. Operating in this way, philosophers ponder such questions as whether there must be entities, perhaps universals, that correspond to predicates, or non-existent entities to correspond to non-denoting names or descriptions’ (Davidson, 1977: 205).

This could be said to summarise the key distinction between the kind of approach Gibb advocates (which this quote discusses), and which is perhaps implicit in the property epiphenomenalism debate, and the approach to metaphysics defended by Davidson.

In contrast to Gibb, Davidson takes a holistic approach to the nature of meaning (e.g. Davidson, 1974a). He argues that because we cannot independently separate an agent’s beliefs (including our own) from the meaning of the propositions to which those beliefs relate, and because the meaning of any given proposition depends on the system of beliefs into which that proposition is situated, we can only assign meaning to individual propositions once we have something like a theory of interpretation for the language as a whole. For this theory of interpretation Davidson adopts a Tarskian truth-conditional semantics, specifying T-sentences that give truth conditions in the theory language for utterances in the language to be interpreted. The idea is that the total set of T-sentences should maximise agreement between the speaker and the interpreter. In specifying these T-sentences, Davidson notes that we can (and must) give T-sentences which also provide truth conditions for all names and predicates in the language, with the result that we can actually eliminate those semantic terms; ‘the call for entities to correspond to predicates disappears when the theory is made to produce T-sentences without excess semantic baggage’ (Davidson, 1977: 206). Conversely, Davidson posits the existence of events and people because he maintains that quantifiers must be understood referentially in order to make sense of expressions ‘for large stretches of language’ (*Ibid.*: 210) (for events, in particular, he argues that this is the only effective way to make sense of adverbial modification (see Davidson, 1967a)). As such Davidson’s ontology admits events and agents but does not include properties. This is not to say that he denies their existence, but that he merely argues that they are superfluous to the understanding of ontology, and therefore must also be superfluous to the understanding of causal relations.

Gibb’s disagreement is presumably with this approach to ontology, and certainly, it may seem intuitively appealing to posit the existence of entities that correspond to properties, and a long tradition of philosophy has done so. However, Davidson’s theory has also been very influential,

and it is insufficient as a criticism of anomalous monism to simply maintain that Davidson's approach to ontology is "the wrong way round", without providing anything in the way of arguments to make that case. A critique of Davidson's semantic approach to metaphysics that proved to be definitive would certainly undermine the cogency of his argument for anomalous monism, but Gibb provides no such critique and, in the end, simply announces her allegiance to the other side.

9. Conclusion

Anomalous monism does not and cannot imply property epiphenomenalism. Physicalists of different stripes are free to battle it out as to whether or not they must accept or reject property epiphenomenalism, but they ought not to involve Davidson in their debates. Anomalous monism is too frequently taken to be a kind of non-reductive physicalism, but in fact the classification runs in the other direction: non-reductive physicalism is a kind of anomalous monism (in so far as there are no psychophysical laws, and it is monistic), but it is a different one to that which Davidson proposes (and, in so far as it accepts property dualism, non-reductive physicalism is arguably a kind of dualism). As Gibb notes, 'it is with good reason that Davidson refers to his position within the philosophy of mind as a monism rather than a physicalism, because for Davidson, events form a neutral class of entities' (Gibb, 2006: 414). Whilst physicalists believe events to be ultimately physical, Davidson makes no such ontological claim; his position is a far more neutral monism than is generally asserted.

There is a lesson to be learned from this debate that Gibb well summarises:

'What the problem of mental causation is actually a problem about, and the possible ways of responding to it, depends upon what causation is a relation between; one's theory of the causal relata provides the very framework for one's theory of mental causation' (Gibb, 2006: 407).

In a sense, then, there must be ontological agreement before there can be disagreement about the character of mental causation. Davidson's ontology differs dramatically from those of the physicalists considered in this

paper; as such anomalous monism cannot answer to the problems that affect those systems. More refined criticisms must face against the ontology directly, or treat anomalous monism on its own terms.

Deren Olgun (1985) completed the EIKE Research Masters in Philosophy and Economics in August 2011. His research interests are in the intersections of the philosophy of social science, philosophy of action, philosophy of mind, metaphysics and the philosophical foundations of decision theory.

'The Argument for Anomalous Monism, Again' was written for the mastercourse 'Experimenting Ethics Away' (of dr. Maureen Sie), taught by dr. Leon de Bruin.

Literature

- Crane, T. (1995) 'The Mental Causation Debate' In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 69: 211–236
- Crane, T. (2003) 'Mental substances'. In A. O'Hear (ed.), *Minds and persons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 229-250
- Davidson, D. (1963/2001) 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes'. In: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Oxford University Press: 3-21.
- Davidson, D. (1967a/2001) 'The Logical Form of Action Sentences'. In: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Oxford University Press: 105-122.
- Davidson, D. (1967b/2001) 'Causal Relations'. In: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Oxford University Press: 149-162.
- Davidson, D. (1969/2001) 'Individuation of Events'. In: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Oxford University Press: 163-180.
- Davidson, D. (1970/2001) 'Mental Events'. In: *Essays on Actions and Events*. New York: Oxford University Press: 207-224.
- Davidson, D. (1974a/2001) 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning'. In: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press: 141-154.
- Davidson, D. (1974b/2001) 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'. In: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press: 183-198.
- Davidson, D. (1977/2001) 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics'. In: *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford University Press: 199-214.
- Davidson, D. (1993). 'Thinking Causes'. In J. Heil, & A. Mele (Eds.), *Mental causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gibb, S. (2006) 'Why Davidson is Not a Property Epiphenomenalist'. In: *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 14(3): 407-422.
- Honderich, T. (1982) 'The Argument for Anomalous Monism'. In: *Analysis*, 42(1): 59.
- Jacob, P. (2002) 'Some Problems for Reductive Physicalism'. In: *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 65: 648–654
- Kim, J. (1989a) 'Mechanism, Purpose, and Explanatory Exclusion'. In: *Philosophical Perspectives*, 3: 77-108.

- Kim, J. (1989b) 'The Myth of Non-reductive Materialism'. In: *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 63(3): 31-47.
- Kim, J. (1993a) 'Can Supervenience and Non-strict Laws Save Anomalous Monism?'. In J. Heil, & A. Mele (Eds.), In: *Mental causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 19-26
- Kim, J. (1993b) 'The Non-reductivists' Troubles with Mental Causation'. In J. Heil, & A. Mele (Eds.), In: *Mental causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 189-210
- Kim, J. (1996) *Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford: Westview Press.
- Kim, J. (2005) *Physicalism, or Something Near Enough*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Le Pore, E., & Loewer, B. (1987) 'Mind Matters'. In: *The Journal of Philosophy*, 84(11): 630-642.
- MacDonald, C., & MacDonald, G. (1986) 'Mental causes and Explanation of Action'. In: *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 36(143): 145-158.
- Macdonald, G. (2007) 'Emergence and Causal Powers'. In: *Erkenntnis*, 67(2): 239-253.
- McLaughlin, B. (1993) 'On Davidson's Response to the Charge of Epiphenomenalism'. In J. Heil, & A. Mele (Eds.), *Mental causation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press: 27-40

Notes

- 1 A position which is implied by NCC in conjunction with AOM.
- 2 As, Honderich suggests, is implied by NCC.
- 3 These notions of realisation and identity are associated with the supervenience thesis, originally entailed in anomalous monism, specifically that the mental supervenes on the physical.
- 4 "Exemplifications of mental properties of mental events are identical with exemplifications of physical properties of physical events" (Macdonald and Macdonald, 1991: 562).
- 5 Overdetermination, simply put, is where a given event is caused by two or more independent causes that would each, by themselves, be sufficient to bring about the event. Consider, for example, a (non-waterproof) watch that is simultaneously immersed in water and crushed in a vice. Both the immersion in water and the crushing of the watch would be sufficient for the watch to cease functioning. The event of the watch ceasing to function is therefore said to be overdetermined. It does seem counter-intuitive to suppose

that overdetermination plays such a continuous role in our experience as to be occurring whenever the mental interacts causally with the physical, and, indeed, Kim calls such a position “absurd” (Kim, 1989b: 44).

6 Because the identity argument maintains that mental causation is physical causation, the two causes are not independent but are the same, therefore there is no overdetermination.

7 Consider the watch example above as a “genuine” case.

8 It may be worth distinguishing here between causal exclusion and explanatory exclusion. Whilst causal exclusion is an ontological thesis, claiming that no one event can have two independent causes, explanatory exclusion is more of an epistemological thesis, saying that no one event can have two independent explanations. In effect the former argues that a mental event and a physical event cannot both cause a single physical event, whilst the latter argues that the same event cannot be given both a mental and physical explanation. To make the case highlighted here Kim only uses causal exclusion.

9 The formulation of supervenience is a particular thorny issue in the context of this debate, but for the purposes of this paper nothing hangs on the nature of supervenience, therefore this definition will suffice.

10 Which is Kim’s understanding of Davidson’s intention in *Thinking Causes*.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License. For more information, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/>