

Handout #8: Davidson's Anomalous Monism

**1. An Inconsistent Triad?**

1. **The Denial of Epiphenomenalism:** Mental events are causally efficacious.  
(For example: Feeling hungry can cause someone to search for food.)

2. **The Nomological View of Causation:** If one event *c* causes another *e*, there must be a *universal law* (or strict generalization) of which this particular causal process is an instance. It must be that *c* is an event of type *F* and *e* is an event of type *G* such that necessarily: if there is an *F* event, then there is a *G* event.

3. **The Anomalism of the Mental:** There are no universal laws holding between mental properties or mental kinds or types. There are no strict psychological laws and no strict psychophysical laws. If *F* is a psychological type or category then (whether *X* is a physical or psychological property or kind) it is not the case that necessarily: if there is an *F* event, then there is a *X* event (nor is it the case that necessarily: if there is an *X* event then there is an *F* event).

Davidson does not really argue for these theses (though he does spend a lot of time trying to motivate (3)). Instead, he wants to argue that they're consistent and he wants to explain (and endorse) the view of the mind/brain relation that results when one adopts all three.

**2. Token-Event Identity:** Denying Kim's View. Kim's extensional (semantic) definition: 'Fa' and 'Gb' pick out the same event iff 'a' and 'b' denote the same object and 'F' and 'G' express the same property.

On Davidson's account this isn't right: even if 'F' and 'G' express different properties, descriptions involving the two predicates can pick out the same event.

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

The assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand = the event that started WWI.

The eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79 = the cause of the destruction of Pompeii.

Being Scott ≠ being the author of Waverly; being an assassination of AF ≠ being the start of WWI; being an eruption ≠ being destroyed.

(Note that *being Scott* is or was a haccetic property of Scott but *being the author of Waverly* is or was not. Having fun with metaphysics!)

**3. Davidson's Reconciliation of (1)-(3)**

(a) **True:** My thinking of a plate of spaghetti on February 15, 2021 at 10:00PM = neurons in my brain firing in pattern P on February 15, 2021 at 10:00PM.

(b) **False:** Thinking of a plate of spaghetti = having a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P.

(c) **False:** Necessarily, for all *x*: If *x* is thinking of a plate of spaghetti, then *x* has a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P.

However, suppose my thinking of a plate of spaghetti *causes me* to intentionally leave bed to make myself one. Then according to the Nomological View of Causality there must be some strict law of which this is an instance. Now my bodily behavior of getting out of bed would be described by a physicist as an event involving various objects moving along trajectories with velocities, etc. So Davidson would say:

(d) **True:** AZ's getting out of bed on February 15, 2021 at 10:01PM=body b moving with velocity v along trajectory t (etc.) on February 15, 2021 at 10:01PM. Thus, it must also be:

(e) **True:** Necessarily and for all x if x has a brain with neuron's firing in pattern P, then x moves with velocity v along trajectory t (etc.).

#### 4. Supervenience & Causation

**Question 1:** Davidson embraces a mental/physical event-identity thesis. But does Davidson's view amount to property dualism? He says "no."

**Argument:** The account embraces the **supervenience** of the mental on the physical:

**Weak Supervenience 1:** Properties P1-Pn supervene on properties G1-Gn if there can be no change in which things have the Ps unless there is a change in which things have the Gs.

**Weak Supervenience 2:** Properties P1-Pn supervene on properties G1-Gn if there can't be two objects entirely alike in terms of Gs but differing in terms of Ps.

**The Key Issue:** Is the supervenience of the mental on the neurological (or microphysical) sufficient for physicalism? Does it rule out property dualism?

**Question 2:** Does the denial of psychophysical laws and the acceptance of a nomological view of causation lead to epiphenomenalism? Davidson says "no."

**Argument:** Causation is a relation in extension between events. "Laws are linguistic; and so events can instantiate laws, and hence be explained or predicted in light of laws, only as those events are described in one or another way. The principle of causal interaction deals with events in extension and is therefore blind to the mental-physical dichotomy."

*Response from those who claim that the anomalous component of Davidson's anomalous monism entails the epiphenomenalism of the mental:* John is stronger than Bill. John is stronger than Bill **in virtue of** having certain properties (e.g. muscular properties) that Bill lacks. Event c caused event e. Similarly, when we say that event c caused event e, we can further specify (and will need to further specify) those properties of c in virtue of which it caused e. It is always the case that c caused e in virtue of c's having certain properties and not others. According to his critics, Davidson's account entails that mental events cause physical events in virtue of their physical properties, not their mental properties. So the view implies epiphenomenalism.

#### 5. Motivating the Denial of Psychophysical Laws

##### a. The Holism of the Mental

1. The Indeterminacy of Intentional Attribution
2. Rationality as a "Constitutive" Principle of Intentional Explanation

## b. Grue and Green; Emerires and Emeralds

‘Grue’:  $x$  is grue iff  $x$  is green if observed at some  $t \leq$  January 1, 2022 or blue and observed after  $t$ .

Goodman’s questions: We take the observation of the green color of an emerald to provide support for the hypothesis that all emeralds are green, we do not take it to support the hypothesis that all emeralds are grue. But what justifies this practice? After all, the hypothesis that all emeralds are grue entails and so predicts that all the emeralds we have seen (and will continue to see throughout the year) are green. So why do we think these observations support the hypothesis that all emeralds are green (not grue)?

‘emerire’:  $x$  is an emerire iff  $x$  is an emerald and observed at some  $t \leq$  January 1, 2022 or a sapphire and observed after  $t$ .

Let E1=emerald 1 looks green.

Let E1000=emerald 1000 looks green.

Suppose one learns the truth of E1-E1000 through observation. Intuitively this provides one with good evidence for believing H=All emeralds are green, and it does not provide one with good evidence for believing H1=All emeralds are grue. (Indeed, H is incompatible with H1.) But in observing the truth of E1-E1000 one has made the very observations one would make were these 1000 emeralds grue. So it seems as though E1-E1000 do provide one with good evidence to believe H1. (Suppose one has the concept of something’s being grue. In having observed that emerald 1 looks green has one observed that emerald 1 looks grue?)

**Davidson’s claims**: ‘Grue’ and ‘emerald’ are not *well-suited* to one another, but ‘grue’ and ‘emerires’ are. ‘All emerires are grue’ is well-confirmed by observing E1-E1000. The problem isn’t that “green” is a “projectible” predicate that corresponds to a natural kind whereas “grue” is non-projectible because the so-called property of being grue is unnatural. The problem isn’t that emeralds are a natural class of things so that “emerald” is a projectible kind whereas emerires are an unnatural class and “emerire” a defective term. Instead, according to Davidson, the problem lies in the relationship between terms or concepts within a discourse. If we think of January 1, 2022 as significant in some way, we can use “grue” and “emerire” to confirm hypotheses with observations. We just can’t mix the “grue” discourse (which endows January 1, 2022 with this significance) with the “emerald” discourse (which does not).

**Davidson uses this analysis to diagnose the relationship between psychology (or folk psychology) and neuroscience**: ‘Believes that grass is green’ and ‘exhibits neuronal firing pattern P’ are not well-suited to each other. We might say that according to Davidson, folk psychology and neuroscience carve nature in accordance with incompatible conceptual schemes. (Note though that Davidson is famous for rejecting the very idea of multiple conceptual schemes.)

**Concluding Questions**: Suppose Davidson is wrong in his rejection of psychophysical laws. How can we best integrate the folk psychological understanding of one another that we use to explain ourselves to one another with the understanding of our minds as it is being developed by the community of cognitive neuroscientists? What role, if any, will “laws” play in this integration? Do we need to analyze causation in terms of laws of nature in the way Davidson does? Can our feelings cause our reactions, our preferences cause our choices, etc. even though there are no laws of nature in accordance with which the former determine the latter?