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## **A Linguistic Reading of Anomalous Monism**

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## Introduction

In 1970 Donald Davidson published “Mental Events”, an article that would prove very influential in the debate on the mind-body problem. In the article Davidson gives a non-reductionist version of the identity theory of mind which he calls *anomalous monism*. Over the years, “Mental Events” has evoked a large number of responses, some critical. In this thesis I will defend anomalous monism against two main criticisms, which are held by a number of philosophers. The most prominent amongst the critics is Jaegwon Kim, who has written extensively on this subject. The first criticism is the charge that anomalous monism leads to epiphenomenalism. The second criticism is that, according to anomalous monism, the mental has no place in causal explanation. The underlying claim in both problems is that when one accepts anomalous monism, the mental becomes a causal idler. There are also many critics of the premises of anomalous monism, especially of the anomalousness of the mental, but my project is not to defend the premises themselves.

In this thesis I propose a different interpretation of anomalous monism, to which the two criticisms do not apply. I argue that there is a way to formulate anomalous monism without the vulnerability to accusations of mental causal idleness. I advocate a reading of Davidson as a philosopher of language making claims about statements rather than giving an ontological account of mental causation. That is to say: I see anomalous monism as a theory primarily rooted in the philosophy of language, rather than as an ontology of mind and body. This requires the formulation of a truth-value notion of ‘supervenience’ to replace an ontological view of supervenience. With a new concept of supervenience, and a re-evaluation of the subject matter of anomalous monism, anomalous monism becomes a more robust theory. It should be noted that in this thesis I do not claim to show that

anomalous monism is the end-all theory of the mind. However, I will show the consistency of anomalous monism.

This thesis consists of three main parts. Part 1 contains an exposition of anomalous monism. Part 2 treats the criticisms anomalous monism faces with mental causation. Part 3 contains the linguistic view of anomalous monism I developed, and how this view deals with the problems presented part 2.<sup>1</sup> I conclude the thesis with some explorations into reasons for rejecting my interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> The idea for this interpretation came from my thesis supervisor Dr. Menno Lievers.

## Part 1: Anomalous Monism

### 1.1 The basic structure of anomalous monism

Anomalous monism is a version of the identity theory of the mind. The identity theory holds that physical states are identical to mental states. Distinction must be made between type-identity and token-identity. Identity theorists such as J.J. Smart and U.T. Place have argued for type-identity, where a type of mental events, such as pain, is identical with a type of physical events, such as the firing of C-fibers in the brain.<sup>2</sup> Donald Davidson holds a version of identity theory that only acknowledges token-identity.<sup>3</sup> One specific token mental state is identical to one specific token physical state, but type-identities do not hold.

Davidson's position consists of holding the following:

1. Mental events are causally related to physical events
2. Singular causal relations are backed by strict laws
3. There are no strict laws connecting mental and physical events

and deriving from these three premises the thesis 'AM', which is the conjunction of:

The monism thesis: Mental entities are physical entities

The irreducibility thesis: Mental concepts are not reducible (by definition or natural law) to physical concepts.<sup>4</sup>

This is made possible by:

S.: Mental concepts supervene on physical concepts.

Davidson holds that AM is true and can be derived from P1, P2, P3, and that S is true.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Smart (1959) and Place (1956)

<sup>3</sup> Davidson [1970](1980), p212. There are more instances of token-identity theory than just anomalous monism, for example psycho-physical functionalism.

<sup>4</sup> 'AM' stands for anomalous monism. Davidson calls the conjunction of the monism thesis and the irreducibility thesis 'anomalous monism'. In the secondary literature, 'anomalous monism' is used to refer to the complete theory of P1+P2+P3 and monism and irreducibility and supervenience. To avoid confusion, I use 'anomalous monism' in this way, and 'AM' for the conjunction mentioned above.

<sup>5</sup> Comprehensive account taken from Davidson (1993) p3-5.

## 1.2 The premise of mental causation

P1 is an expression of the intuition that mental events can cause physical events, and physical events can cause mental events.<sup>6</sup> The first can be illustrated by the example of action based on desires. If one takes a bite from an apple because of the desire to taste its sweetness, this is a case of mental-to-physical causation, as the desire is a mental event, and the biting is a physical event. Perception is the typical example for physical-to-mental causation: a red traffic light causes the belief that stopping the car is a good idea. The red light is a physical event, the belief is a mental event. Mental to mental causation is what happens when one thought follows from another. Physical to physical is not part of the problem of mental causation.<sup>7</sup> That mental to physical and physical to mental causation are both possible is a given fact in the mind-body debate, because it is assumed that the possibility of mental-to-physical causation is presupposed by the possibility of human agency.<sup>8</sup> The possibility of physical-to-mental causation is presupposed by the possibility of perception. Since no-one seriously doubts the ability to act or perceive, any theory of mind that makes it impossible to account for those phenomena, is deficient.

## 1.3 The premise of the nomological character of causality

P2, the statement that singular causal relations are backed by strict laws, is somewhat less self-explanatory than P1. In “Mental Events” Davidson calls P2 “the Principle of the

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of mental causation naturally presupposes a view of causation in general. Davidson’s account is based on that of Ducasse (1926). Causation in general is still a subject of debate. If causation in general turns out to be problematic, mental causation will certainly be problematic. Still, to claim that problems of causation in general make comprehensible discussion about mental causation impossible would be to violate what Rey (1997) calls the “Fairness Maxim for Philosophy of Mind”, stating that the philosophy of mind should not be burdened with problems that are not specific to philosophy of mind. These more general problems should be approached in a more general matter. See Rey (1997), p27.

<sup>7</sup> Which is not to say it is without problems. See the footnote above.

<sup>8</sup> This is pointedly formulated by Kim (1996), p128. Of course there is no consensus on the nature of agency. I here take it in the widest sense, including also compatibilistic views. Otherwise the claim that no-one seriously doubts the ability to act would be unwarranted.

Nomological Character of Causality". The principle is that all events related as cause and effect are thus related under strict deterministic laws, or in other words, that if two events are related as cause and effect, they must be covered by a law.<sup>9</sup> Davidson warns that the principle of the nomological character of causality "must be read carefully".<sup>10</sup>

The proper reading of the principle states: "When events are related as cause and effect, they have descriptions that instantiate a law."<sup>11</sup> Davidson alerts us of the fact that "It does not say that every true singular statement of causality instantiates a law."<sup>12</sup> In much of the secondary literature, this warning does not seem to have been heeded.<sup>13</sup> This might be explained by the way Davidson introduces the premise in "Mental Events": "The second principle is that where there is causality, there must be a law".

The idea that a law must cover cases of causality raises the question what it is for a law to cover a case. A law is formulated in (a) language. A 'case' of causation consists of an assertoric sentence that states that the event we call the cause happened, and a sentence that states the effect. A law covers the case if, when conjoined with the cause-statement, it entails the effect. In the example of a ball rolling against another ball, the cause-statement may be something like 'ball A rolls against ball B at a speed x', and the effect-statement may be 'ball B starts rolling at a speed q'. The law covering the case may be something like 'whenever an object with the shape and mass of ball A rolls into an ob-

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<sup>9</sup> In the case of physical to physical causation this is easily understood. For example, one ball rolling into another and causing it to roll coheres with the laws of classical mechanics. If the same situation were to arise again, the event would be exactly the same: the laws of classical mechanics are strict. Whenever a ball rolling into another causes the second ball to move, the laws of mechanics cover the case.

<sup>10</sup> Davidson [1970](1980), p215.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. These quotes also provide a ground for the interpretation espoused in chapter 3

<sup>13</sup> One example of this is footnote 9 of Herman Philipse's inaugural lecture (2004), in which he recounts Davidson's position as claiming that wherever there is causation, a causal law must exist. Philipse calls this a 'false premise' and chides Davidson for committing a "*fallacy of ambiguity*" by shifting the meaning of 'law' between premise 2 and 3. Philipse's criticism has the character of a *strawman fallacy* because he adopts an incorrect and uncharitable interpretation of Davidson's "Mental Events".

ject with the shape and mass of ball B at speed  $x$ , the second object will start rolling at speed  $q$ '. It is clear that this is not a watertight example: there may be an object blocking the path of ball  $b$ , or the surface on which ball B is may have too much friction for B to move at  $q$ , etc. Yet the example shows how a law is the connection between the cause-statement and the effect-statement, and that 'law' and 'covers' are not mysterious concepts. That the example isn't 'watertight' gives us a hint at the difficulty of actually formulating a strict law. Davidson claims that strict laws with no *caveats* or *ceteris paribus* clauses can only be formulated for a closed comprehensive theory.<sup>14</sup>

Davidson calls this premise "true though contested"<sup>15</sup> while Kim states of it: "this is in essence the widely accepted nomological model of causation".<sup>16</sup> Whatever the status of the premise may be, it seems that this premise is not the cause of the problem of mental causation.

#### 1.4 The anomalism of the mental

P3, The doctrine of the anomalousness of the mental, states that there can be no strict laws in which the mental features. This implies that laws of the form  $P_1 \rightarrow M_1$  do not hold.<sup>17</sup> Neither do laws of the form  $(M_1 \wedge M_2) \rightarrow P_1$ . The laws P3 is most explicitly aimed at are strict psycho-physical laws of the form  $M_1 \leftrightarrow P_1$ . The consequence of this position is that no mental event can be explained by appealing to strict laws.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Since special sciences are in general not closed comprehensive theories, strict laws are not the usual mode of explanation of the sciences, let alone everyday life. See Davidson (1993), p9f.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p3.

<sup>16</sup> Kim (1996), p137.

<sup>17</sup> A capital P represents a physical event, and a capital M a mental event.

<sup>18</sup> A concise account of the anomalism of the mental is given by Kim (2003) p117-121.



The anomalism of the mental can be argued for along various lines. The argument that seems to carry most weight and is at the same time the most controversial, is referred to as *the rationality argument*. The rationality argument claims that in evaluating or interpreting mental statements, the concept of rationality plays a constitutive explanatory role, while in physical statements it does not. The idea is that the physical and mental domains have different sources of evidence for evaluating the truth of statements.<sup>19</sup> Discussing the different arguments and their merits goes beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore I will work with the *assumption* of the anomalousness of the mental, treating it as a premise without arguing for it. The goal of this thesis is not to claim unconditionally the truth of anomalous monism. Even if the anomalousness is an assumption, that does not stand in the way of proving that it is compatible with the other premises. If it is proved that the premises are compatible, anomalous monism is a viable theory.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.5 The monism thesis

The claim in 1.1 was that AM, which consists of the conjunction of the monism thesis and the irreducibility thesis, can be derived from the three premises. The premises may at first seem contradictory.<sup>21</sup> It seems natural to think that if physical and mental events are causally interactive, and if causal relations require laws, that there must be laws connecting the physical and the mental. The goal of anomalous monism is to reconcile the three premises. This reconciliation leads to the two theses conjuncted in AM. For if it is assumed that mental events and physical events interact (P1), and that there are strict laws covering

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<sup>19</sup> The rationality argument as developed by Davidson can be found in Davidson (1974).

<sup>20</sup> Since the premises of anomalous monism are controversial, and P2 is especially so, one might ask what the appeal of the theory is. One possible answer is that anomalous monism shows that the identity-theory of the mind can be correct even if empirical research does not find type-identity to hold. Furthermore, anomalous monism shows that one may intelligibly hold both monism and anomalism of the mental.

<sup>21</sup> Although not formally without additional premises.

every causal interaction (P2), then it must be assumed either that there are strict laws connecting the mental and the physical, or that every mental event is a physical event. The first of these options would contradict P3, so the second seems most suitable in the effort to reconcile the three premises. This leads to saying that every mental event is a physical event, which is the monism thesis.

### 1.6 The irreducibility thesis

If we assume that mental events *are* physical events (monism), and we can form a law of the form  $P_1 \rightarrow P_2$  where  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  are physical events, it may transpire that  $P_1$  is one of those physical events of which it can be said that  $M_1 = P_1$ , in which  $M_1$  is a mental event. If that is the case, then we may substitute, by the law of identity,  $M_1$  for  $P_1$ . If we do that in the law  $P_1 \rightarrow P_2$ , then we get  $M_1 \rightarrow P_2$ . But that is a psycho-physical law, and therefore contradicts P3. Since it is not a possibility to drop P3 without failing at our effort to reconcile the three premises, and since reconciling the three premises is the goal of this thesis, we must look at other possibilities. We could try dropping the monism thesis, but that again would lead to contradiction between the premises, as we have seen. The solution lies in claiming irreducibility. If we do not accept the identity statement  $M_1 = P_1$  above, we cannot substitute  $M_1$  for  $P_1$  in the above law. If we cannot substitute, then we can hold on to all our premises. So we come to the irreducibility thesis: mental events cannot be reduced to physical events. Essentially, what anomalous monism objects to is reduction of mental states to physical states. An aversion against reduction can be found even as early as Plato. In the following passage Socrates is discussing Anaxagoras, who is a reductionist.

I might compare him [i.e. Anaxagoras, AvW.] to a person who began by maintaining generally that mind is the cause of the actions of Socrates, but who, when he endeavoured to explain the causes of my [i.e. Socrates, AvW.] several actions in detail,

went on to show that I sit here because my body is made up of bones and muscles;

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In short: the idea that reduction of the mental to the physical is not to be accepted, has been around for a long time. The reason against reductionism given here is that reductionist explanation of action is not satisfactory. Davidson also rejects reduction, but on different grounds.

### 1.7 Supervenience

Our acceptance of the irreducibility thesis leaves us with a problem. In our argumentation for the monism thesis, we concluded that mental events must be physical events, since otherwise we would have to drop either the possibility of mental causation (not an option), or the idea that there are no strict laws connecting mental and physical events (also not an option). Yet in our argumentation for the irreducibility thesis we concluded that if we allow substitution between mental and physical events, we end up with psychophysical laws (again, not an option). That leaves us to state that there must be some relation between physical events and mental events that forms a sufficient basis for causal reasoning, yet does not allow reduction. This theoretically posited relation is what is called supervenience. When an event  $p$  bears it to an event  $q$ , we say that  $p$  supervenes on  $q$ .

Davidson, in “Mental Events” gives his definition of supervenience:

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. Dependence or supervenience of this kind does not entail reducibility through law or definition.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Plato, phaedo 98c. Transl. B. Jowett (1953)

<sup>23</sup> Davidson [1970] (1980) p214.

It is part of what 'supervenience' means that it does not entail reducibility. In most discussions, it is even taken as entailing non-reducibility, and I follow that line of thought.

Davidson himself states there are at least two ways to define supervenience. The one account is that if one event is supervenient on the other, and they are alike in all physical respects, they must also be alike in all mental respects. The other account is that when one event is supervenient on the other, the events cannot be altered in some physical respect without altering them in some mental respect.

The quoted account of supervenience leaves open which of the two meanings is the one to use, if there is a difference. Davidson, in this passage, does not elaborate on either, or whether there may be more ways to define supervenience. In part 3 I will offer my view on the matter.

## Part 2: The Problems with Anomalous Monism

### 2.1 Mental causation in general

Any theory of mind should be able to give an account of mental causation, as I claimed in 1.2. Descartes, as a dualist, held that the physical and the mental were distinct substances, one material and extended, the other immaterial and without extension. This gave rise to the question how any substance without extension or matter could stand in a causal relation to substances that did have extension and matter; a problem pointedly put by Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia:

It would be easier for me to attribute matter and extension to the soul, than to attribute to an immaterial thing the capacity to move and be moved by a body <sup>24</sup>

In this passage we find a simple form of the problem of mental causation. On the Cartesian account, the question is how a non-physical substance can effect a physical one. For Cartesian dualism, it is clear that mental causation poses a problem. the problem, however is not unique to this theory.

Davidson categorises theories of mind in four classes: nomological dualism, anomalous dualism, nomological monism, and anomalous monism.<sup>25</sup> In the figure below, I have listed examples of theories fitting these classes.

	Nomological	Anomalous
Dualism	Parallelism, interactionism.	Cartesian Dualism
Monism	Materialism	Davidson's position

On the nomological dualist account, there are various ways of answering how mental causation is possible. For one, it may not be actual causation, but apparent causation because of a pre-established harmony between the mental and the physical, as Leibniz

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth of Bohemia in a letter to Descartes (AT III 685). Transl.: J. Cottingham (1991).

<sup>25</sup> Davidson [1970] (1980), p213.

claimed.<sup>26</sup> Or it may simply be said that the mental can interact with the physical in a lawlike way, even though they are distinct substances. This, however, leads to problems of overdeterminedness and contradicts the causal closure of the physical.<sup>27</sup>

Nomological monism does not really face problems with mental causation. Since the mental is simply the physical, there is only physical causation. For nomological monism, the status of mental causes such as *reasons for action* remains problematic.

Anomalous Dualism does have a problem with mental causation, as seen above. It remains a problem for Cartesian dualists how a physical substance can be affected by a mental substance which has a very different metaphysical character. Descartes' attempted pineal-gland solution leans towards interactionism, but does not seem probable from the perspective of modern-day philosophy and neuroscience.

On an anomalous monist account, where the impossibility of strict laws is assumed, and the picture of causality as instantiating laws is accepted, the solution to the problems lies in reconciling these theses. The possibility of mental causation is a problem because of the supposed incompatibility of P2 and P3 with P1. As we have seen in part 1, this can be solved through claiming supervenience between the mental and the physical. This solution, however, is not convincing in the light of some readings of anomalous monism. In the remainder of part 2 we will see objections to the solution. In part 3 a reading of anomalous monism is given that greatly contributes to the credibility of the solution to the problem of mental causation.

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<sup>26</sup> Leibniz (1961), *Essais de Théodicée*, VI620-21. Originally published in 1710.

<sup>27</sup> Mills (1996), p112. These two issues are closely related.

## 2.2 The problems with the premises

There are various ways to formulate the disbelieve that anomalous monism has solved the problem of mental causation. Yet essentially, all those views can be summarised in the statement that the premises of anomalous monism are inconsistent.<sup>28</sup> I will focus on two main versions of the argument; the charge of epiphenomenalism, and the argument from causal explanation. Both arguments claim that it follows from the premises of anomalous monism that the mental is a causal idler.

One way of formulating the problem is to say anomalous monism leads to epiphenomenalism. According to Brian McLaughlin there are two kinds of epiphenomenalism: type epiphenomenalism and token epiphenomenalism.<sup>29</sup> Type epiphenomenalism is the position that “events can be causes in virtue of falling under physical types, but events cannot be causes in virtue of falling under mental types.”<sup>30</sup> Token epiphenomenalism is the position that “Physical events can cause mental events, but mental events cannot cause anything.”<sup>31</sup> An argument against anomalous monism can be made by showing that anomalous monism implies type epiphenomenalism. If it does, the claim is, then it violates P1. The claim that anomalous monism leads to epiphenomenalism is the claim that it implies type epiphenomenalism, and that this is incompatible with P1.

A second way of formulating the problem is the criticism that on anomalous monism, since the strict laws that cover causation can only be strict laws about physical events, the mental does not have a place in the nomological net of causality. The point here is that, by P2 and P3, all causal laws are physical laws, and that implies that the mental has no place

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<sup>28</sup> Some critics claim the two theses of anomalous monism are inconsistent, but since the theses are weaker than the premises, as Davidson (1993, p4) points out, these critics would also view the premises as inconsistent.

<sup>29</sup> McLaughlin [1989] (2008), p459. McLaughlin’s two kinds of epiphenomenalism are inspired by C.D. Broad.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Enumeration marks excluded for clarity.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Enumeration marks excluded for clarity.

in causality. The mental is a causal idler, it does not appear in chains of cause and effect. This violates P1. So again, the criticism is that the premises are inconsistent. This argument I call ‘the argument from causal explanation’. Another way to formulate the causal explanation argument, is to say that effects, in an anomalous monist account, are overdetermined. The physical is enough to account for all effects, the mental is not needed as a cause. This violates P1.<sup>32</sup>

So it seems that the two arguments that are pitted against anomalous monism on the basis of the problem of mental causation come down to the thesis that P2 and P3 jointly imply the negation of P1, but achieve the contradiction in different ways.<sup>33</sup>

### 2.3 The charge of epiphenomenalism

Central to the charge of epiphenomenalism is the notion of causation *in virtue of*.<sup>34</sup> The definition of type epiphenomenalism I have given above uses the idea of events being causes in virtue of falling under certain types (hence the name). Other formulations include events being causes in virtue of having certain properties, or in virtue of their descriptions. It is interesting to see that these formulations are more or less considered equivalent, although some authors seem to prefer the ‘properties’ variety. Kim has a handy way of bundling the various formulations, by saying that the charge of epiphenomenalism is the criticism that mental events cannot be causes *qua* mental.

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<sup>32</sup> This does not violate P1 if one excepts causal overdetermination. Acceptance of causal overdetermination, however, comes with its own problems. Anomalous monism does not rest on the acceptance of causal overdetermination.

<sup>33</sup> The difference between the charge of epiphenomenalism and the argument from causal explanation will be elaborated on in 2.3 and 2.4.

<sup>34</sup> Consider Honderich (1982) and Stoutland (1985) as examples of the charge of epiphenomenalism. Both speak of causation in virtue of properties. Also: Kim (1993a), Sosa (1993) and McLaughlin (1993 and [1989] 2008).



The charge of epiphenomenalism is that the doctrines of anomalous monism conjointly imply Type-E.<sup>35</sup> The argument for this is constructed as follows:

1. P2 implies that only nomic properties are causal properties<sup>36</sup>
2. P3 implies that no mental properties are nomic
3. From 1&2: No mental properties are causal properties<sup>37</sup>
4. From 3 & P1: Contradiction.

It is important for the rebuttal of this argument (which will be presented in part 3) that the following assumption is made explicit:

Assumption: Events have causal roles *in virtue of their properties*.

It must be noted that not everyone seems to distinguish the argument from explanation from the charge of epiphenomenalism. Kim says about anomalous monism that:

“It is interesting to note that some versions of the currently popular “token identity” thesis are also strikingly similar to Broad’s epiphenomenalism. Consider, for example, the influential “anomalous monism” of Donald Davidson.”<sup>38</sup>

So it seems that Kim sees his own criticism as the charge of epiphenomenalism. Brian McLaughlin treats Kim’s accordingly.<sup>39</sup> However, I think there is more to Kim’s criticism than just the charge of epiphenomenalism. In the argument from explanation, the idea of causation *in virtue of* is not central like it is in the charge of epiphenomenalism. The charge of epiphenomenalism can be countered by arguing against the notion of causation *in virtue of*. Of the argument from explanation, there is a version possible which is not dependent on this notion. Kim’s criticism of anomalous monism consists of both arguments: the charge of epiphenomenalism and the argument from explanation. Kim does not explicitly

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<sup>35</sup> McLaughlin [1989] (2008), p462-3.

<sup>36</sup> Nomic properties are properties that function in laws.

<sup>37</sup> This is equal to saying that mental properties are epiphenomena.

<sup>38</sup> Kim (1993b), p105.

<sup>39</sup> McLaughlin [1989] (2008), p464.

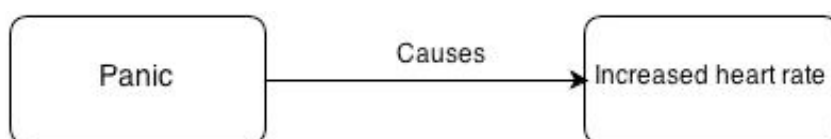
distinguish these, but it strengthens his argument to do so, since it takes more arguments to rebuke both criticisms, as we will see in part 3.

## 2.4 The argument from explanation

The other version of the causal idler argument, that is not the same as the charge of epiphenomenalism, is the idea that, on anomalous monism, the physical is enough explanation for any causation, and that the mental is therefore a causal idler. If the mental is causally irrelevant, that contradicts P1. Let's take a closer look.

All instances of events caused by mental events are overdetermined, because a mental event M1, which is on its own a sufficient cause for M2, supervenes on N1. Then you could say N1 is itself a sufficient cause for M2, making M2 overdetermined. That is to say: even if one of the causes (M1 or N1) was not present, M2 would have happened. Therefore, in our explanation of what caused M2, it is not needed to incorporate both M1 and N1. This leads to explanatory exclusion of a cause: M1 has become obsolete in a causal explanation for M2. Therefore it must be excluded. In other words: N1 is a complete explanation for M2. According to the argument from explanation, this reasoning goes for every mental cause, since they are all supervenient on physical causes, and the physical causes are sufficient for the effects. That is to say: the realm of the physical is enough to explain all causation. The mental does not have a place in causal explanation.

We can illustrate this with an example: let's take the mental state 'panic' as a cause for an increased heart rate. This is a case of mental-to-physical causation.<sup>40</sup>



*Fig. 1: Mental causation; the mental state is (sufficient) cause for the physical state.*

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<sup>40</sup> Fig.1 and Fig.2 are based on the diagrams in Kim (1996), p149.

Anomalous monism supposes that the mental is supervenient on the physical. This physical state would also be a sufficient cause for the effect.

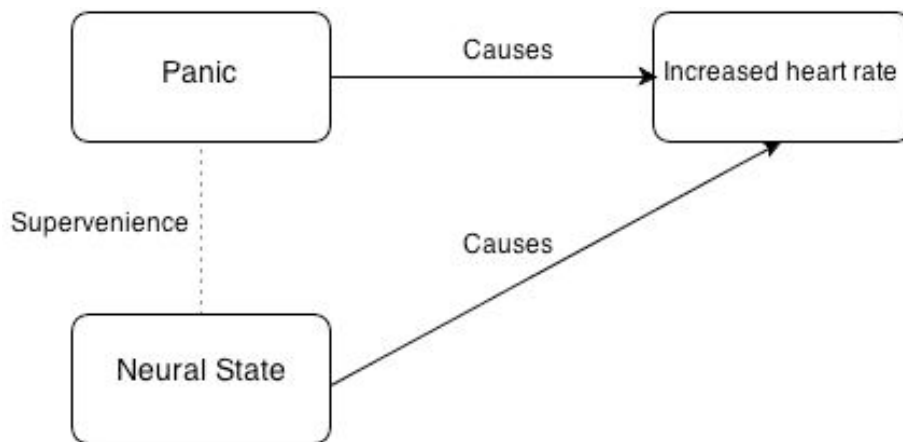


Fig.2: Mental Causation and Supervenience; both causes are sufficient.

The argument from causal explanation is that both panic and the neural state are sufficient causes for the increased heart rate. No effect can have more than one sufficient cause unless there is a case of causal overdetermination. This leads to the conclusion that either one of the causes is not really a cause, or that the effect is causally overdetermined. Most philosophers are reluctant, to say the least, to accept the second conclusion, leaving critics of anomalous monism to say that the mental cannot be a cause of something physical if it supervenes on something physical. I will argue against this view in 3.6.

The argument from explanation can be extended to physical-to-mental causation. With physical-to-mental causation, the mental is an effect of the physical. If the impossibility of mental-to-physical and mental-to-mental causation is accepted, it must be concluded that the mental in physical-to-mental causation is *an effect only*, and not the cause of anything. It can be doubted whether anything can be known that is effect only, since for observing it, it must be some kind of cause. If we allow the end of a causal chain to be something that is in principle unknowable, how can we claim that it is mental? If we do accept these arguments, then we must conclude that the mental has no place at all in a causal chain. Ac-

According to Kim, if one denies all kinds of mental causation, one could as well abolish the notion of the mental altogether.<sup>41</sup> In this way, the argument from explanation can be used to argue for eliminative materialism. This extreme conclusion is unacceptable to the anomalous monist, who takes the possibility of all three kinds of mental causation as a premise. Yet even if we do not extend the causal idler argument to physical-to-mental causation and mental-to-mental causation, the alleged impossibility of mental-to-physical causation is problematic to the anomalous monist.

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<sup>41</sup> Kim (1996), p129. Kim's point here is based on earlier remarks by Samuel Alexander.

## **Part 3: A Different Interpretation**

### **3.1 To a different interpretation**

With the two problems advanced in part 2 in mind, three options remain. First, we may conclude that anomalous monism is wrong. Secondly we may try to counter the problems by showing some inconsistency or incorrect assumption in the argumentation. The third option is to adapt the theory of anomalous monism to such an extent that it is no longer subject to the problems. The solution I propose is a combination of the second and last options. By giving a different interpretation of anomalous monism, it becomes clear that for the charge of epiphenomenalism a certain assumption about Davidson's theory is unjustified, and for the causal idler argument, the theory, when reinterpreted, is no longer subject to the problem.<sup>42</sup>

The interpretation I propose is inspired by the view that Davidson is primarily a philosopher of language. The identifying aspect of Davidson's view when compared to his contemporaries and predecessors, is not his monism, but his thesis of the anomalism of the mental. This thesis is argued for primarily by the rationality argument, which is essentially an argument about the interpretation of statements.<sup>43</sup> This suggests that Davidson's anomalous monism is a product of his philosophy of language. The interpretation of anomalous monism I propose is more linguistic in a way, since it tries to separate clearly which parts of the theory are about the ontology of mental causation, and which parts are about the ways in which we speak about causation.

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<sup>42</sup> Whether it is really just an interpretation, or whether the theory is actually altered is a subject discussed in the final remarks of this thesis.

<sup>43</sup> See 1.4.

### 3.2 The subject-matter of anomalous monism

It is of fundamental importance to note what entities the debate really is about. In the time of Descartes the problem of mental causation was about substances. In the philosophy of the 20th century, the debate has moved away from substances because of the widespread idea of materialism excluding non-material substances. Nowadays the debate on mental causation moves towards notions such as ‘events’, ‘properties’ and ‘descriptions’. It seems to be assumed by many critics of Davidson, that it is not necessary to give a detailed account of the subject matter of anomalous monism. However, I believe that being transparent about the subject matter of the various parts of anomalous monism lies at the beginning of a solution to the problems of the theory. This idea is inspired by a passage from Michael Dummett’s article “Realism”

A third ground for rejecting reductionism while accepting a reductive thesis is very seldom appealed to: it is that, while for any statement *A* of the given class there must be a statement *B* of the reductive class in the truth of which the truth of *A* consists, we have no effective means of identifying, for each statement *A*, the corresponding statement *B*. This appears to be Donald Davidson’s reason for denying the possibility of translating psychological into neurophysiological statements: I know of no other actual example of an appeal to such a ground for denying a reductionist thesis.<sup>44</sup>

The interesting thing about this passage is that Dummett portrays Davidson’s view of supervenience not as a view of relations between events, but as a view of relations between statements. According to Davidson the subject matter of anomalous monism is *events*. This leaves us the question what these are, and what prompted Dummett to use the terminology he did.

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<sup>44</sup> Dummett (1982), p73-4. How the phrase “we have no effective means of identifying” must be interpreted here is unclear. Should it be taken to mean ‘is in principle impossible’ or as ‘we have no empirical means yet’. It is clear that Davidson would endorse the first, not the last. Even if taken to mean the first, it is not clear what principled impossibility of verification is, as P.F. Strawson convincingly argues (1976/77).

According to Davidson events are dated particulars, individuals.<sup>45</sup> They must be seen as separate from their descriptions; it is precisely because of their independent existence that there can be multiple descriptions of the same event. For example: one might name my drinking coffee this morning by the description 'his morning ritual' or by the description 'his first dose of caffeine of the day'. It is evident that these two descriptions are not logically connected in such a way that they must refer to the same thing. Their referring to the same thing is dependent on there being an event that exists independently of these descriptions. In order to make sense of the way we normally talk about events, it is natural to assume that there *are* such things as events. The idea is, that to be able to talk about subjects such as the relation between the mental and the physical, causality or explanation, the assumption that events exist is necessary.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.3 Events and descriptions

There are three key elements to my interpretation of anomalous monism, that are different from the critics' interpretation.

1. Differentiating between the level of events and the level of descriptions
2. Anomalism as a doctrine about description
3. Supervenience as a relation between descriptions

These three points are interconnected. If we differentiate between the level of events, and the level of descriptions, the question rises which parts of anomalous monism are about events, and which are about descriptions. The second and third points are the claims that

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<sup>45</sup> Davidson [1969] (1980), p163-166.

<sup>46</sup> Another consideration for the existence of events is that the logical form of common sentences cannot be analysed properly without the assumption that events exist. Davidson's argument for this is long and complicated, and falls outside the scope of this thesis. For the present exercise, it is enough to assume events exist. See Davidson [1969] (1980), p167. For the actual analysis see Davidson [1967] (1980).

the anomalism of the mental and the concept of supervenience both apply to the level of descriptions.

As said above, events are dated particular individuals that exist independently of their descriptions.<sup>47</sup> If events figure in causal relations, then they do so independently of their descriptions. Events simply are what they are and do what they do.<sup>48</sup> Events can be described in various ways. When doing so, one must be careful to distinguish between saying thing about the events themselves, or saying things about the descriptions of the events. This is what I mean by the *level of events* and the *level of descriptions*. If we say of an event  $e_1$  that it has property P, and that  $d_1$  is a description of that event, that does not imply that  $d_1$  has P. It does imply that the referent of  $d_1$  has property P, assuming that  $d_1$  is an uniquely identifying description.  $d_1$  Having a property P does not imply anything about  $e_1$ , except that  $e_1$  can be described by a description having property P. The separation of the levels of events and of descriptions is nothing new; it is at heart the old use/mention or *suppositio materialis/suppositio formalis* distinction, with the difference that the *mention* side of things is not proper names but descriptions.

The solution to the problems of epiphenomenalism and causal idleness is to recognise that monism is a claim about events, causation is a relation between events, and that the rest of the doctrines of anomalous monism does not concern events, but descriptions of events.

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<sup>47</sup> This idea can be found throughout Davidson's work. It is argued for in Davidson [1969] (1980).

<sup>48</sup> As Gluër puts it: "The particular entities, however, are simply there – they exist in complete independence of how they are described." and "Ontology is independent of description, but classification is not." (2011) Notice that throughout this thesis I have assumed that if events exist, they can have the power to cause something. This assumption is not altogether uncontroversial, but it seems to be shared by Davidson and his critics. Whether events have powers is a debate I will not get into presently.



### 3.4 The linguistic interpretation

The business of interpreting anomalous monism that now remains is that of judging which parts of the theory are on the level of events, and which on the level of descriptions. In this process the main guiding principle is a principle of charity: the distribution of the levels through the theory that is most effective at countering the criticisms, while remaining consistent, is the preferable one.<sup>49</sup>

Recall the first premise of anomalous monism:

P1. Mental events are causally related to physical events

The interpretation starts in full swing here, because we see the two levels in a single sentence. This sentence claims causation between two groups of events. Causation is a process on the level of events. It is not the description of an event that causes the description of another event. *Events* cause events, not descriptions, and events are caused by *events*, and not by descriptions.<sup>50</sup> Now these events that are involved in causal relations are of two types: mental and physical. These terms are on the level of descriptions, not of events. This follows from monism. Since mental events *are* physical events, whether an event is mental or physical cannot be part of in the ontology of the event (as independent of its de-

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<sup>49</sup> An important question to ask when interpreting is if the interpretation has the same scope as the original theory. A danger of interpretation is to simply narrow the class of cases a theory is applicable to, thereby sacrificing generality of the theory to gain validity. I believe my interpretation has the same scope as the theory set out in "Mental Events" (Davidson [1980], 1970). The interpretation still concerns the entire class of mental events. In 3.5 it will become clear that anomalous monism comes hand in hand with a certain kind of nominalism. This is, however, not an addition of mine to the theory, but something that was already present and has merely come to light by facing anomalous monism with the charge of epiphenomenalism. Therefore I feel it safe to say that what I'm doing is *interpreting* anomalous monism, not *altering* it, in as far as an interpretation is not always an alteration.

<sup>50</sup> This sentiment is expressed in Davidson (1993). Of course, expressions of descriptions may cause other events, but then it is not the description per se that caused it, but the expression of it. For example, a descriptive nickname (a description) may 'catch on', causing other people to use it. When I say that events are caused by events, and not by descriptions, I do not wish to deny this possibility.

scription) unless we were to claim that ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ are not mutually exclusive predicates, as we have (naturally) assumed.<sup>51</sup>

If not the ontology of the event, what makes a mental event mental and what makes a physical event physical? The answer can be found in “Mental Events”:

*[...] an event is mental if and only if it has a mental description [...] Physical events are those picked out by descriptions or open sentences that contain only the physical vocabulary essentially.*<sup>52</sup>

These remarks by Davidson have been almost completely ignored by his critics. Here we find a good clue for the interpretation I am proposing. Mental events are mental in virtue of their description, not of their ontology, and physical events are physical because of the way they are described. If one wanted to make this interpretation more explicit in the premise, one could reformulate it as follows:

P1.: Events that can be described as mental events are causally related to events that can be described as physical

Now, the second premise of anomalous monism:

P2: Singular causal relations are backed by strict laws.

We know already that causal relations are on the event level, but what about laws? Davidson writes:

Causality and identity are relations between individual events no matter how described. But laws are linguistic; and so events can instantiate laws, and hence be explained or predicted in the light of laws, only as those events are described in one or another way.

Laws are not connections between events as such. Laws are *linguistic* connections between event-descriptions. In a law events are not featured independent of their description, but are featured as described. Singular causal relations are relations between events, but

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<sup>51</sup> The ‘cannot’ here is that of metaphysical impossibility, using the assumption that one object cannot have two contradictory (mutually exclusive) properties. Or, put differently, that one cannot rationally hold two contradictory predicates of one subject.

<sup>52</sup> Davidson [1970] (1980), p211.

if we are to formulate a law governing this relation, we can only do so using descriptions of the events.<sup>53</sup> Strict laws are connections between two events as described.<sup>54</sup>

The third premise of anomalous monism:

P3.: There are no strict laws connecting mental and physical events

In this premise, we see the claim that there are no strict laws possible between mental and physical events. If we take into account the conception of laws explained above, and the idea that events are only mental or physical by virtue of their description, it becomes clear that Premise 3 is not a claim about the ontology of causation between mind and matter, but a linguistic thesis. There is a subclass of linguistic phenomena called 'laws'. In this class there is another subclass called 'strict laws'. In this class there exist no (true) laws that feature both mental and physical events.<sup>55</sup> No events described as mental are connected to events described as physical by the linguistic form of a true strict law. The premise can thus be interpreted as a rule of language rather than a statement about reality independent of language. The rule implies that we cannot sensibly formulate strict laws between the mental and the physical.

In part 1 we saw how the conjunction of the three premises led to the monism thesis and the irreducibility thesis. These can also be interpreted along the lines of the event/description distinction.

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<sup>53</sup> Implicitly stated here is that causality itself (not its description) is a feature of the world that exists independent of its description.

<sup>54</sup> Here is claimed that laws are connections between descriptions. Description is an activity of a linguistic being, not something that exists independent of a linguistic being. So laws seem only to exist if a linguistic community formulating them exists. This shows that the conception of laws in anomalous monism is fundamentally different from the conception of laws of nature as eternal things that exist in the world, independently of us. Davidson's conception of laws is reminiscent of linguistic idealism. However, as true realist, Davidson is careful not to extend this idea too far. Laws may not exist independently of language, but other things, such as events, certainly do.

<sup>55</sup> Notice that 'true' has entered our discourse without a proper definition. Davidson regards 'truth' as an intuitively clear concept, using it to define 'meaning'. (Davidson, 1967b) This is essentially a reversal of Tarski's approach to a formal theory of truth, using the concept of meaning as primitive. (Tarski, 1944)

The monism thesis: Mental entities are physical entities

This thesis expresses the close connection between the level of events and the level of descriptions. As stated in 3.2, events exist independently of their description, and can be described in a multitude of ways exactly because of this. Therefore, every event described as mental is an event that exists independently of this description. This event could be described in other ways. The monism thesis claims that every event described as mental is an event that could be described as physical, even if we may never have the means to do so, and *even if our language is not fit to do so*. The ontological basis needed for a physical description (the event itself) is there. That is to say: on the level of events, there is no distinction between mental and physical; there is monism.

The irreducibility thesis: Mental concepts are not reducible (by definition or natural law) to physical concepts.

This thesis is at the heart of anomalous monism. When interpreted along my lines, the thesis states that mental descriptions cannot be translated into physical descriptions. Not on an a priori basis, and not by strict laws. Since events are only mental as described, one should think of 'the mental' not as a category of things, but as a category of expressions. The mental is all that is described as mental. The physical is all that is described as physical. The claim that the mental cannot be reduced to the physical is essentially the claim that perfect translation of the one set of terms into the other is impossible. 'Reduction', in my theory, is redefined as translation. On the level of descriptions, there is no monism, but rather dualism. Anomalous monism incorporates conceptual dualism. The theory is anti-reductionist, because it does not allow translation of mental concepts to physical concepts. Also, in the usual sense of 'reduction' is contained that the reduction leads from a more complex to a more primitive level. On anomalous monism, it makes no sense to call the physical more primitive than the mental, since both are descriptions of the same events, and the two vocabularies cannot be translated into one another.

This leaves us with one of the key concepts of anomalous monism to interpret:

S.: Mental concepts supervene on physical concepts.

Supervenience on anomalous monism is a relation on the level of descriptions, not events.

If mental concepts cannot be reduced to physical concepts, what then is the relation between them? The answer is 'supervenience'.

In part 1.7 two notions of supervenience were mentioned.

Notion 1: If one event is supervenient on the other, and they are alike in all physical respects, they must also be alike in all mental respects.

Notion 2: When one event is supervenient on the other, the events cannot be altered in some physical respect without altering them in some mental respect.

Either two of these formulations will do for our project, since both can be interpreted in a way that is conducive to our goal of reconciling the premises of anomalous monism. The notion of supervenience as a relation between statements can be explicitly formulated as a truth-value theory of supervenience. This means that the two statements in a supervenience relation have connected truth values. Whether truth conditions apply is what makes something true or not, i.e. determines its truth value. The idea of the truth value theory of supervenience is that the truth conditions of mental statements are connected to the truth conditions of physical statements, if the statements are supervenient. If we 'pour' the first notion of supervenience listed above in to this 'mould', we get the following:

If one statement is supervenient on the other, and the truth conditions for the physical statement apply, then the truth conditions for the mental statement apply.

It is essential to recognise here that the truth conditions of the mental are not the truth conditions of the physical. This would contradict the anomalousness of the mental. It must also be noted that there is, according to anomalous monism, no way to reason from the truth conditions of the mental to the truth conditions of the physical, since this would also contradict anomalism. Also, this formulation speaks not of 'truth values', but of 'truth condi-

tions'. 'Truth value' seems to be preferable because it is a more perspicuous notion. So we get the conjunction of the following as the definition of supervenience

1. If one statement is supervenient on the other, whenever one is true, the other is true.<sup>56</sup>
2. There is no deduction without additional premises possible from one statement to the other. Also, there is no deduction possible from one of the statements to the other with the additional premise(s) of one or more true strict laws.

Notion 2 from the last page can be reformulated in a similar way:

If one statement is supervenient of the other, whenever the truth of the mental statement changes, the truth of the physical statement must change and vice versa.

Since anomalous monism is a doctrine about *all* mental states, and it claims that *all* mental statements supervene on physical statements, we can conclude from this notion of supervenience that no mental statement *M* can be true unless some physical statement *P* is true.

So far I have hardly argued for my interpretation: the main argument for my interpretation is that it solves the problems anomalous monism has with mental causation. How it does so is the subject of 3.5 and 3.6.

### 3.5 Against the charge of epiphenomenalism

The charge of epiphenomenalism holds that, if anomalous monism is true, a mental event *m* causes a physical event *p* just because *m* has a certain physical characteristic *Q*, and *p* has a physical characteristic *P*, and there is a strict law connecting *Q* with *P*. That is to say, that for a mental event to cause a physical event, it must do so by having a physical property that is able to cause another physical event.<sup>57</sup> This is an interpretation of Davidson's

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<sup>56</sup> This can be formalised as  $((V_m=1) \leftrightarrow (V_n=1))$

<sup>57</sup> A good example of this view is Horgan (1989) who defines causation not as a two-place relation between events, but rather as a four-place relation in which causally efficacious properties of the events take the two additional places.

position. The argument, then, is that it is irrelevant to the causal relation between  $Q$  and  $P$  that  $m$  is a mental event. As Jaegwon Kim puts it “physical laws must do all the causal work”.<sup>58</sup>

An influential approach to countering the charge of epiphenomenalism is to base the causal efficacy of the mental on counterfactual reasoning.<sup>59</sup> The counterfactual approach says something caused the other if, had the cause not occurred, then the effect would have not occurred. If the event that is the cause is a physical event that is identical to a mental event, then if the mental event had not occurred, the effect would not have occurred, thereby making the mental causally efficacious. This approach, however, assumes that an anomalous monist can help herself to non-strict laws and *ceteris paribus* laws. Davidson seems to think this assumption is correct<sup>60</sup>, but arguments have been put forward against it.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, the counterfactual approach still uses the idea of causation *in virtue of*. With the interpretation of anomalous monism given in 3.4, an argument against the charge of epiphenomenalism can be made which is not dependant on counterfactuals and the possibility of non-strict laws. I will therefore not discuss the other approach in detail, focussing instead on my solution to the charge of epiphenomenalism: the language solution.

In “Mental Events” we can already find some clues for the interpretation I have given above, and also how this solves the charge of epiphenomenalism:

Causality and identity are relations between individual events no matter how described. But laws are linguistic; and so events can instantiate laws, and hence be

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<sup>58</sup> Kim (1996), p138.

<sup>59</sup> LePore and Loewer (1987), Horgan (1989), Block (1990), and a stronger account is found in Fodor (1990)

<sup>60</sup> Davidson (1993). McLaughlin [1989](2008) agrees.

<sup>61</sup> As in: Antony (1991)

explained or predicted in the light of laws, only as those events are described in one or another way. The principle of causal interaction (P1, AvW) deals with events in extension and is therefore blind to the mental-physical dichotomy.<sup>62</sup>

And even before “Mental Events” Davidson held that “we must distinguish firmly between causes and the features we hit on for describing them.”<sup>63</sup> Here we see exactly the point the charge of epiphenomenalism turns on: the interpretation of the premises of anomalous monism. The problem is caused by a certain interpretation of these premises. In 2.3 the structure of the charge of epiphenomenalism was represented as such:

1. P2 implies that only nomic properties<sup>64</sup> are causal properties
2. P3 implies that no mental properties are nomic
3. From 1&2: No mental properties are causal properties<sup>65</sup>
4. From 3 & P1: Contradiction.

Assumption: Events have causal roles *in virtue of their properties*.

If we look at Davidson’s quote above, it becomes clear that the assumption in this argument is unwarranted. Within Davidson’s framework, it makes no sense to speak of causation in virtue of properties, since properties are the features we hit on for describing events, and events cause things independent of their descriptions. Also, having both mental and physical properties feature in a strict causal law would violate the anomalism of the mental.

If the assumption in the above representation of the charge of epiphenomenalism is unwarranted, steps 1 and 2 become unintelligible. Davidson simply rejects causation *qua* something.<sup>66</sup> Or as Robb and Heil summarize Davidson’s view on the matter: “When an event causes something, it does not do so *qua* this or that: it just causes what it does, full

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<sup>62</sup> Davidson [1970](1980), p215.

<sup>63</sup> Davidson (1967a), p155.

<sup>64</sup> Nomic properties are properties that function in laws.

<sup>65</sup> This is equal to saying that mental properties are epiphenomena.

<sup>66</sup> Davidson (1993), p13.



stop.”<sup>67</sup> This position is understandable within the framework of my interpretation given in part 2. Properties on an ontological level are essential to causality in the eyes of Davidson’s opponents. But in Davidson’s framework, properties come into play at the level of descriptions, not at the level of events. It is important here to notice that this doesn’t mean Davidson is any less of a realist about properties. Properties are the actual features of the events that make a certain description of an event a description of that event, but they don’t figure in causal laws. The descriptions figure in causal laws, and a (correct) description is dependent on the properties of the event.

Defenders of the charge of epiphenomenalism have not accepted the rejection of causation in virtue of as a complete response to the charge of epiphenomenalism. McLaughlin argues that Davidson misunderstood the charge of epiphenomenalism.<sup>68</sup> Davidson views his opponents as claiming that, according to anomalous monism, mental *events* have no causal role. McLaughlin rightly points out that the critics of anomalous monism have claimed no such thing. All critics take the possibility of mental causation for granted: the criticism is that, on anomalous monism, the mental does not cause anything in virtue of its mental properties. Kim makes a similar point, saying Davidson interprets his work as claiming that mental events do no causal work.<sup>69</sup> According to Kim, the charge of epiphenomenalism does not contradict P1, because it is not the charge that mental events are causally idle, but the charge that mental properties are causally idle.<sup>70</sup> In the same volume where McLaughlin and Kim make this point, Ernest Sosa claims something similar.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Robb & Heil (2013)

<sup>68</sup> McLaughlin (1993) p27-28.

<sup>69</sup> Kim (1993a) p19-20.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p20.

<sup>71</sup> Sosa (1993) p48.

What Kim and McLaughlin fail to see, or refuse to acknowledge, is that there is a more fundamental issue at stake: the acceptance of properties as part of causation. Davidson seems committed to not accepting properties as causally relevant, but only as relevant to description.<sup>72</sup> McLaughlin, Sosa and Kim are all thoroughly committed to the idea of things causing things because they have certain properties. Sosa does acknowledge this difference and speculates whether anomalous monism implies, or presumes, property dualism. Davidson is definitely a dualist on the level of description, and might be a property dualist. He mostly avoids the concept 'property' and rather uses concepts such as 'description' or 'predicate' or 'concept', making it hard to ascertain from the literature on anomalous monism whether his is not only a conceptual dualist but also a property dualist. However, in my interpretation it is clear that the mental-physical distinction is one of description, not of ontology. Properties, as understood by McLaughlin, Sosa, and Kim, are part of an event's ontology, not its description. "For Davidson, then, it makes no more sense to ask whether an event had a particular effect in virtue of being mental or in virtue of being physical than it would to ask whether its effect stemmed from its being described in English or in German."<sup>73</sup>

In the Davidsonian framework, rejecting properties as causally relevant things, and interpreting in the manner of chapter 2, anomalous monism does not imply epiphenomenalism. However, if one does not accept Davidson's nominalist tendencies, one can still hold fast to the charge of epiphenomenalism, as Kim, Sosa, and McLaughlin do. It is clear that epiphenomenalism is not a problem inherent to anomalous monism, but rather a result of

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<sup>72</sup> Consider: "it makes no sense to speak of an event being a cause 'as' anything at all" and "there is no room for a concept of 'cause as' which would make causality a relation among three or four entities rather than between two". Davidson (1993) p6.

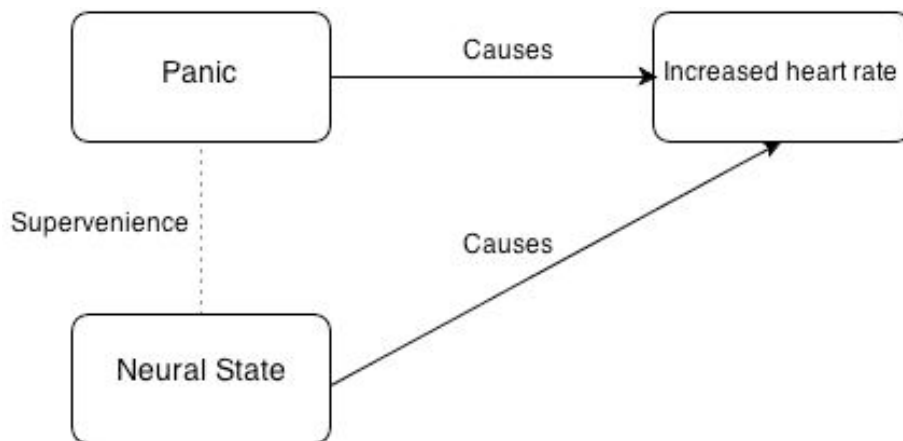
<sup>73</sup> Robb and Heil (2013)

trying to understand anomalous monism from outside the Davidsonian framework.

### 3.6 Against the argument from explanation

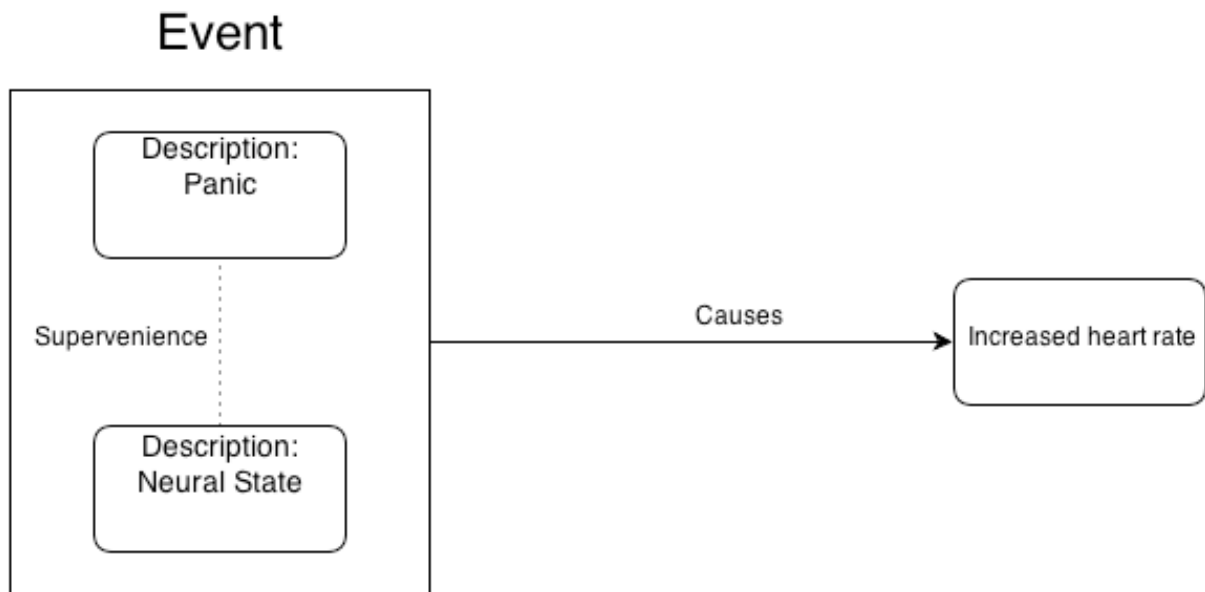
The argument from explanation can be argued against much in the same way in which I have argued against the charge of epiphenomenalism. Again the argument centers on the proper interpretation of anomalous monism, and recognising the level of events is distinct from the level of descriptions.

Recall fig.2 from 2.4:



*Fig.2: Mental Causation and Supervenience*

In this picture a certain misunderstanding of anomalous monism is apparent: the two events that are supervenient (panic and neural state) are viewed as ontologically distinct, and therefore both capable of independently causing something. This disregards the fact that anomalous monism is *monism*, and that panic and the neural state are one and the same event. Once more that, according to anomalous monism, events are only mental or physical as they are described. There is ontological monism and conceptual dualism. If we make a diagram in the style of the above, but using my interpretation of anomalous monism, it looks like this:



*fig. 3: Causation and Anomalous Monism*

In this diagram ‘Panic’ and ‘Neural State’ are labeled descriptions. Enclosing them in a single box labeled ‘Event’ should be taken to imply monism: they are two descriptions of a single event. The event causes the increased heart rate. The increased heart rate, itself an event, could also be described in multiple ways. In that case these descriptions would also be taken to be descriptions of a single event, and be enclosed in a box labeled ‘Event 2’. On the level of events, there is monism. On the level of descriptions, there is dualism. In other words, ‘event’ is an ontological category, while ‘description’ is not.

Anomalous monism is an anti-reductionist theory. It is impossible to reduce the mental to the physical. That is, it is impossible to fully translate one vocabulary into the other. Therefore, we cannot simply substitute one description for the other, since we cannot know which descriptions are fit for substitution. Hence we must accept conceptual dualism, and add supervenience as a relation to connect the vocabularies. If we apply the account of supervenience I have given in part 2, and keep in mind monism, it is not so hard to see that it can at the same time be true that the neural state caused heart acceleration, and that panic caused heart acceleration. In fact, if we assume that the ‘panic’ description is supervenient on the ‘neural state’ description, if panic caused the heart acceleration, it is

true that the neural state caused the heart acceleration, and vice versa. In a way, my solution can be seen as just applying a different notion of supervenience to AM. The notion of supervenience is the turning point of this discourse; in its interpretation as a relation between statements is encompassed most of what is essential to my interpretation of anomalous monism.

Against the argument from explanation we can make a variation on the quote from Robb and Heil I used against the charge of epiphenomenalism: ‘claiming the mental is not part of causal explanation is like saying that a cause described in German is superfluous if the same cause has already been described in French.’<sup>74</sup>

### **3.7 Origins of the ontological interpretation**

In parts 3.5 and 3.6 it has become clear that my interpretation of anomalous monism has great benefits: it deals with the charge of epiphenomenalism and with the argument from explanation. Also, it seems to fit with Davidson’s own work, and I feel it has an intuitive plausibility. This might leave one wondering why anomalous monism was ever understood in the way the critics have understood it. Although Davidson’s work is spread out over a large number of articles written in a rather condensed style, it would be foolish to think philosophers like Kim and Sosa did not see the clues for my interpretation. Therefore, there must be philosophical grounds for rejecting my interpretation in favour of what I call the ontological interpretation.

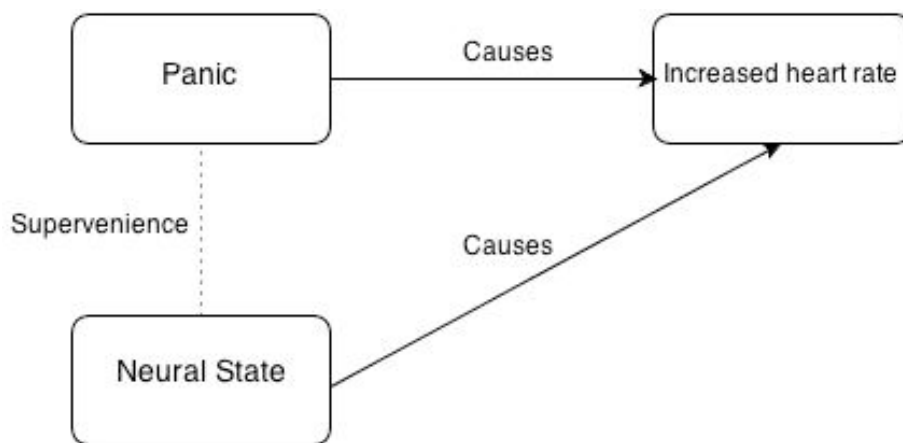
The ontological interpretation as encountered in this thesis consists of two main divergences from my interpretation: the first being that it uses the notion of causation *in virtue of*, the second being the way events figure in explanation. The ontological interpretation

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<sup>74</sup> Variation on Robb and Heil (2013), see part 3.5 of this thesis.

has events in a certain description (mental events, for example) figure in causal explanation.<sup>75</sup>

Underneath these two issues lies a larger disagreement, which has to do with event ontology. The disagreement is best explained as a disagreement on event-identity. If we look at figure 2 again, we see two separate events as causes.



*Fig.2: Mental Causation and Supervenience*

The argument from explanation stems from not seeing these two events as being essentially one event. So it seems that the difference in interpretation is motivated by a different view on the identity of events.<sup>76</sup>

Kim holds that the identity of events depends on their properties. According to Kim, two sentences refer to the same event if they express that the same predicates apply to the same subjects. That is: the sentences co-refer if both sentences assert the same properties of the same substances.<sup>77</sup> The criterium for the identity of properties according

<sup>75</sup> This is the point made in 3.6.

<sup>76</sup> When discussing identity of any kind, it makes sense to turn to the analysis of identity-sentences. Identity of things or events cannot be studied directly, since the answer to the question 'when is one thing identical with another thing' is always 'never', and the answer to the question 'when is a thing identical with itself' is always 'always'. The investigation must therefore turn to the analysis of sentences of the form 'a=b'.

<sup>77</sup> Kim (1966), p232.

to Kim is that they have the same extension. For example: according to Kim the sentence 'I hurt my left index finger this morning' and the sentence 'I injured the finger next to my left thumb this morning' refer to the same event, because the sentences assert of the same substance the same properties, even if they are described differently, and the extension of 'left index finger' is the same as that of 'the finger next to my left thumb'.

Davidson points out a mistake in this approach.<sup>78</sup> He argues that sentences referring to events do not usually refer to a particular event. For example the sentence 'Doris capsized the canoe yesterday' does not refer to a particular event the way 'Doris' capsizing of the canoe occurred yesterday' does. The first states that at least one capsizing of the canoe by Doris occurred yesterday, but does not exclude the possibility of multiple capsizings, and therefore does not refer to a single particular capsizing of the canoe by Doris that occurred yesterday. The first does not refer to a particular in the same way that 'there is a mosquito in here' does not refer to a particular mosquito.<sup>79</sup>

Davidson argues for a different criterion of identity of events.<sup>80</sup> This argumentation is too long and diverges too far from the direct subject matter of this thesis, but it suffices to say that Davidson develops a criterion of identity that accounts for the idea that 'Jones apologised' and 'Jones said "I apologise"' can both be made true by a single event.<sup>81</sup> This means that while these sentences do not refer to a particular event, and are not co-extensive, the event that makes the one true might be identical to the event that makes the other true. Yet Kim must hold that, since 'apologising' and 'saying "I apologise"' do not have the same extension, that 'Jones apologised' refers to a different event than 'Jones said "I

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<sup>78</sup> Davidson [1969] (1980), p167-9

<sup>79</sup> Examples are all from Davidson [1969] (1980).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p171-180.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p170.

apologise”<sup>82</sup>. This means that the uttering of “I apologise” by Jones is not identical to Jones’ apology. When applied to mental and physical concepts, Kim must affirm that if a mental predicate has no co-extensional physical predicate, then an event described with one of these predicates is not identical with an event described with the other, because the criterium of identity of events that Kim employs demands co-extensional predicates for both descriptions.<sup>83</sup> In simpler terms: if mental predicates and physical predicates differ in extension, it becomes hard to say that the events, described differently, are in fact identical. This is likely why Kim understands anomalous monism much like figure 2, and not like figure 3. In figure two the events are separated by their different descriptions, while in figure 3 the descriptions are connected by pertaining to the same event. How interpreting anomalous monism as in fig. 2 leads to the argument from explanation, has been explained in 3.6.

It is also clear how the idea that properties are what individuates events leads to thinking of causation *qua* this or that. Davidson’s mantra that “we must distinguish firmly between causes and the features we hit on for describing them”<sup>84</sup> cannot be heeded if one thinks that the features we hit on for describing them, that is their properties, are exactly what makes an event *that event*. If we accept the criterium of the identity of events that Kim holds, anomalous monism does become much more problematic. If we accept the criterium of the identity of events Davidson holds, my interpretation becomes much more plausible, thereby effectively countering the charge of epiphenomenalism and the argument from explanation.

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<sup>82</sup> Kim (1966), p232.

<sup>83</sup> See Davidson [1969] (2008), p170-1.

<sup>84</sup> Davidson (1967a), p215.



The remark in 3.5, that from within the Davidsonian framework the criticisms do not hold has to be seen in the light of the above. A correct interpretation of anomalous monism does not have the pitfalls of epiphenomenalism, and does not cause problems with causal explanation. It does, however, come as a ‘package deal’; it seems that anomalous monism cannot be coherently held without accepting certain nominalist ideas. The criticisms seem to have sprung forth from trying to understand anomalous monism, without accepting these ideas. Whether or not these nominalist ideas are acceptable is a question worth considering for anyone interested in anomalous monism, and if the answer is negative, it may well be a good reason not to accept anomalous monism.

At the end of this thesis, it should be clear that the charge of epiphenomenalism and the argument from causal explanation are not problems inherent to anomalous monism, but products of a certain interpretation that does not do justice to all elements of Davidson’s remarkable theory. Anomalous monism, all things considered, is a consistent theory.

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