

Minds and Machines

spring 2003

Anomalous monism, contd.

“Mental events”

- a defense of “anomalous monism”
- like Dennett, Davidson is a materialist (hence, “monism”, as opposed to “dualism”)
- like Dennett, Davidson gives a nonreductive account of the mental (hence, “anomalous monism”)

Donald Davidson

three principles

- **causal interaction**
“every mental event is the cause or effect of some physical event”
- **the nomological character of causality**
if c causes e, then there is a (strict) law of the form “A-type events are followed by B-type events”, where c is of type-A, and e is of type-B
- **the anomalism of the mental**
there are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained

anomalous monism

- **the token identity theory**
“Every mental event...is a physical event”

(see the “demonstration of identity” on p. 124)

and:

- **the anomalism of the mental**
there are no strict laws on the basis of which
mental events can be predicted and explained

lawlike statements

- **lawlike statements**

“general statements that support counterfactual and subjunctive claims, and [that] are supported by their instances”

e.g., ‘all swans are white’; evidence for this is also evidence for the “counterfactual conditional” ‘if this had been a swan, it would have been white’ (cf. ‘if this dime had been in my pocket, it would have been a quarter’)

- ***ceteris paribus* lawlike statements**

lawlike statements “qualified by generous escape clauses”—‘in normal conditions’, ‘other things being equal’, etc. (note: *c.p.* lawlike statements are a subclass of lawlike statements)

laws

- **laws**
true lawlike statements
- ***ceteris paribus* laws**
true *ceteris paribus* lawlike statements
(e.g., ‘normally, if demand increases faster than supply, prices rise’; ‘typically, people tend to avoid extreme pain’)
- **strict laws**
laws that aren’t *ceteris paribus*—exceptionless true lawlike statements
e.g., ‘nothing can be accelerated beyond c ’

using laws to predict and explain

- all samples of copper expand when heated
- this bar is a sample of copper

so:

- this bar will expand when heated



the anomalism of the mental

“There are no strict psychophysical laws because of the disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes. It is a feature of physical reality that physical change can be explained by laws that connect it with other changes and conditions physically described. It is a feature of the mental that the attribution of mental phenomena must be responsible to the background of reasons, beliefs, and intentions of the individual. There cannot be tight connections between the realms if each is to retain allegiance to its proper source of evidence.”
(p. 123)

the anomalism of the mental

here is how the argument might go:

- 1) suppose that there are strict psychophysical laws
- 2) in particular, suppose that there are laws of the form: anything in brain state B_a believes that p ; anything in brain state B_b desires that q ; etc.
- 3) then we could choose some combination of the B_i 's so that a system with the corresponding combination of mental states would violate the “constitutive ideal of rationality” in the attribution of beliefs, desires, etc. (cf. Dennett, pp. 559-60)
- 4) hence, there are no strict psychophysical laws (premise 3 seems questionable)

are the three principles consistent?

- **causal interaction**

“every mental event is the cause or effect of some physical event”

- in particular, suppose e_p causes e_m

- **the nomological character of causality**

if c causes e , then there is a (strict) law of the form “A-type events are followed by B-type events”, where c is of type-A, and e is of type-B

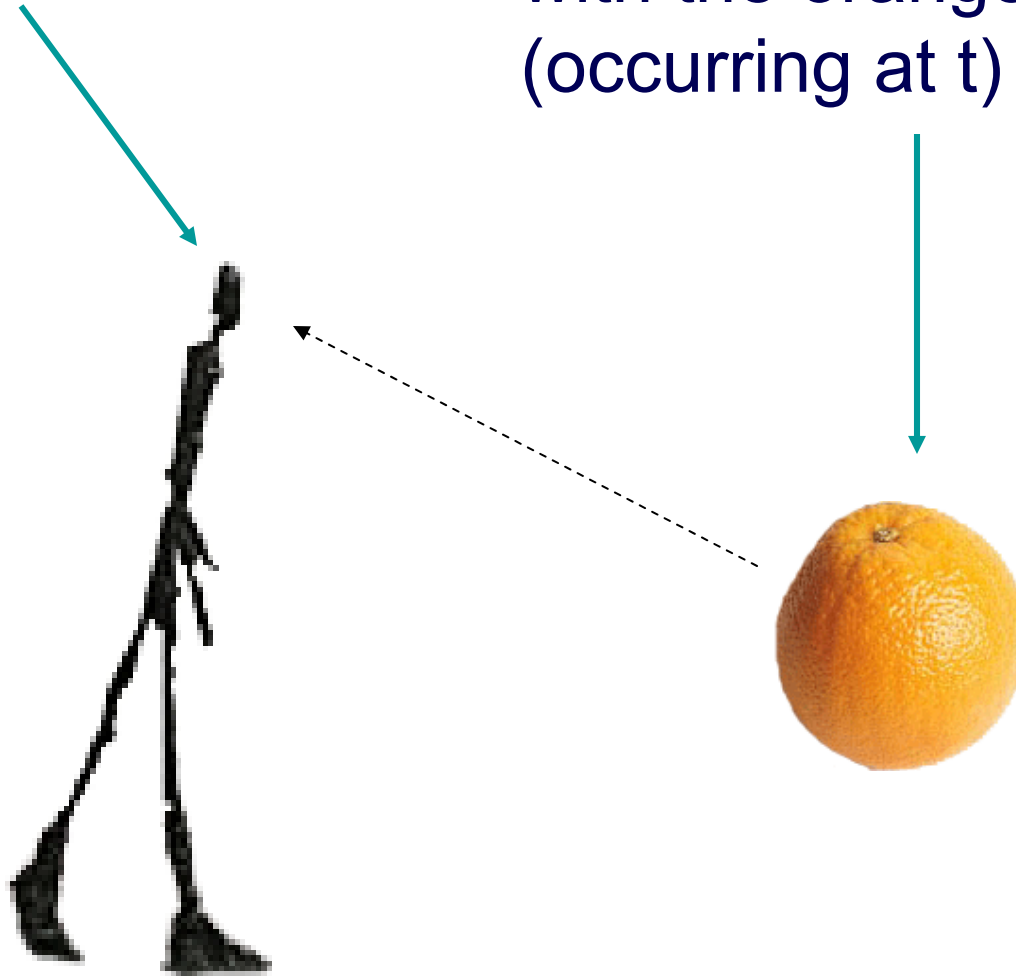
- so, there is a (strict) law of the form “A-type events are followed by B-type events”, where e_p is of type-A, and e_m is of type-B
- but then presumably this law can be used to predict and explain e_m

are the three principles consistent?

- in which case
- □ **the anomalism of the mental**
 - there are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events can be predicted and explained
 - is false
- according to Davidson, this reasoning fails at the last step because “the principle of the anomalism of the mental concerns events described as mental” (p. 119)

e_m = the experience
(occurring at $t+$)

e_p = interaction of light
with the orange
(occurring at t)

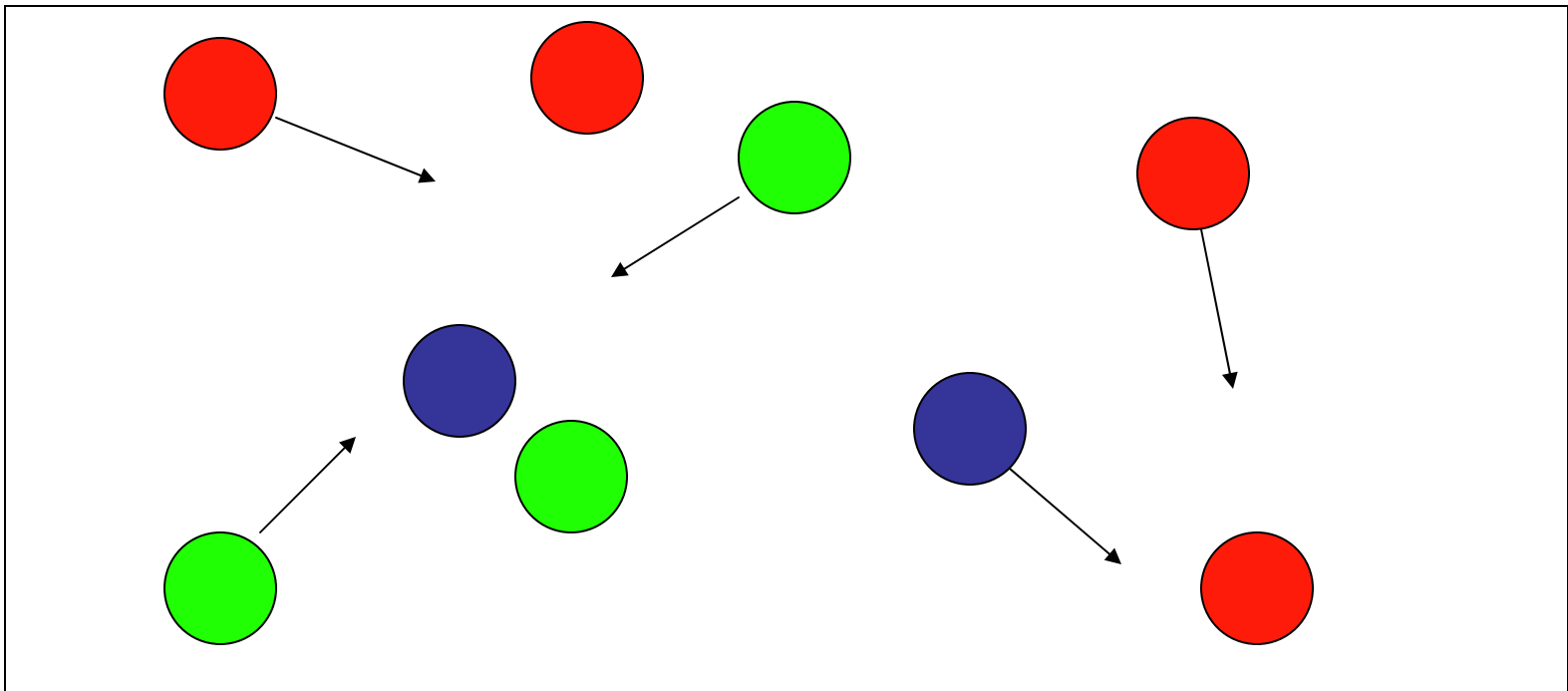


are the three principles consistent?

- the required “strict law” will be couched in purely physical vocabulary
it might look something like this:
if such-and-such electromagnetic events occur [and such-and-such complicated physical system is in the vicinity, in such-and-such physical state] then a few milliseconds later a neural event of type N will occur
- this law cannot be used to predict and explain e_m “as such”, or “under a mental description”, because (according to Davidson) although e_m is a neural event of type N, not every neural event of type N is a visual experience as of an orange (or even a visual experience of any kind)

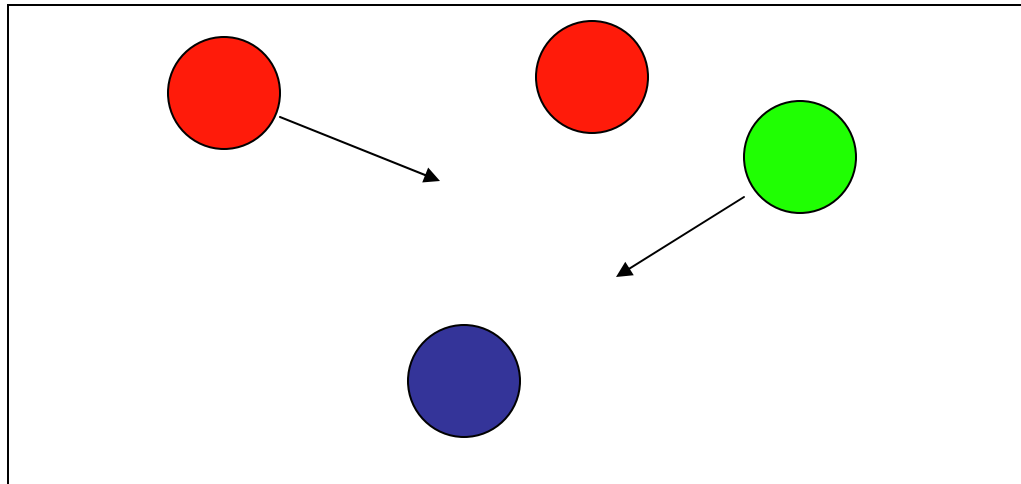
an analogy

- “mental” properties = red, green, blue; physical properties = mass, shape, size, motion
- “mental” events = events picked out by descriptions like ‘the collision at t between a red ball and a green ball’
- “physical” events = events picked out by descriptions like ‘the collision at t between a ball with momentum m_1 and a ball with momentum m_2 ’



an analogy

- every “mental” event is a “physical” event
- mental events cause physical events and vice versa
- if c causes e, this is an instance of a strict law of the form “A-type events are followed by B-type events”
- there are no strict laws on the basis of which mental events (“so described”) can be predicted and explained



the analogy illustrates a problem with anomalous monism

- surely the colors (the “mental” properties) are not “causally efficacious”—the color of a ball doesn’t make any difference to the collisions it causes
- anomalous monism “seems to consign mental properties to the status of epiphenomena” (Kim, p. 172)

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Mental causation



from the philosophical toolkit:

causally efficacious and **causally inefficacious** properties (with respect to some effect)

efficacious (with respect to the destruction of the apple)

- the bullet's velocity, mass,...

inefficacious (with respect to the destruction of the apple)

- the bullet's color, place of manufacture,...

causally efficacious/ inefficacious properties

- the distinction is a bit underexplained, but clear enough for present purposes
- mental properties (believing that it's time for lunch, wanting to burn one's copy of *Elements of Mind*, etc.) are surely causally efficacious with respect to various effects (one's body being at the food trucks, one's copy of *Elements of Mind* being in flames, etc.)
- "...if it isn't literally true that my wanting is causally responsible for my reaching...then practically everything I believe about anything is false and it's the end of the world" (Fodor, quoted in Kim, p. 171)

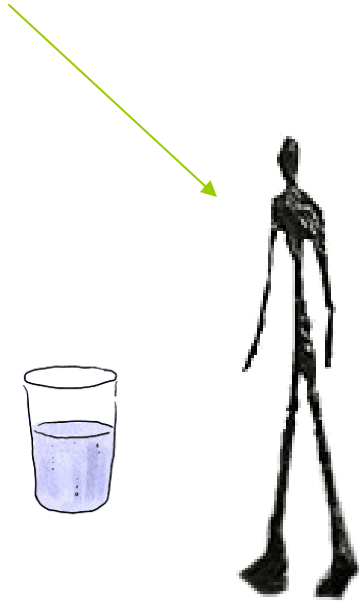
“The many problems of mental causation”

- the problem of anomalous mental properties
- the problem of extrinsic mental properties
- the problem of causal exclusion

the problem of extrinsic mental properties

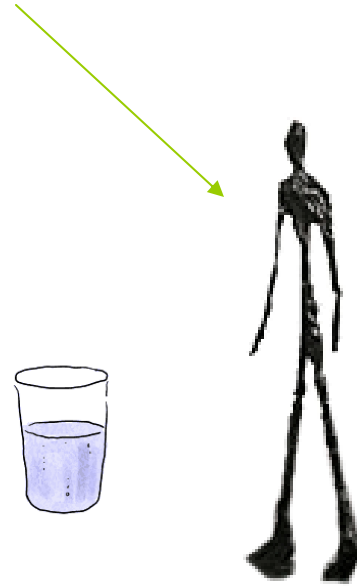
- causally efficacious:
momentum
- causally inefficacious:
made in Ohio
- aren't causally
efficacious properties
intrinsic?

Oscar wants water



Oscar on earth

Twin-Oscar doesn't want water



Twin-Oscar on twin-earth

surely the causal explanation of Oscar's reaching out is the *same* as the causal explanation of Twin-Oscar's reaching out

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- read Peacocke, Horgan and Tienson
- Crane, ch. 3