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ANOMALOUS MONISM: OSCILLATING BETWEEN DOGMAS

ABSTRACT. Davidson's anomalous monism, his argument for the identity between mental and physical event tokens, has been frequently attacked, usually demanding a higher degree of physicalist commitment. My objection runs in the opposite direction: the identities inferred by Davidson from mental causation, the nomological character of causality and the anomaly of the mental are philosophically problematic and, more dramatically, incompatible with his famous argument against the third dogma of empiricism, the separation of content from conceptual scheme. Given the anomaly of the mental and the absence of psychophysical laws, there are no conceptual resources to relate mental and physical predicates. We fall in the third dogma if we claim that the very same token event is mental and physical. One of the premises must be rejected: I will claim that we do not need a law to subsume cause and effect to be entitled to speak of causation. Davidson has never offered an argument to back this premise. Against such a dogma I will sketch some ideas pointing towards a different conception of causality, singularist and undetachable from explanatory practices.

1.

The aim of this paper is to expose an inconsistency within Davidson's philosophy and to argue that his commitment to the nomological character of causality is dogmatic. Davidson famously argues for an identity between tokens of mental events and tokens of physical events. This identity allows him to hold that mental events can have causal powers despite there not being psychological laws nor psychophysical laws and causality being nomological. The absence of psychophysical laws, consequence of the different principles that constitute the physical and psychological schemes, makes it impossible to resort to identities between mental and physical types. The absence of psychological laws implies that behind explanatory links between mental events there must, in principle, be descriptions of *those very events* amenable for subsumption under physical laws. This argument has not ceased to attract critical attention. However, the criticisms almost unanimously centre on the insufficient degree of monism granted by the argument, and demand a deeper commitment to physicalism (an excellent recent example can be found in Michael Antony's 'Davidson's Argument for Monism' (2003). My objection comes from

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the opposite flank. I will claim that within a Davidsonian conception we lack the conceptual resources to establish the token-identities that do the trick. Davidson's influential argument against any separation of conceptual schemes from pre-conceptualised contents (empirical or otherwise) makes it inconsistent to expect that events individuated physically and events individuated psychologically may happen to be the same. Someone unconvinced by Davidson's rejection of what he calls the third dogma of empiricism may ignore this charge.[1] To the question "if different descriptions of the same event can be given, which is the event that can be so described?" she may answer, with Elisabeth Anscombe, "pick up the description that you like the best!" This option is not open *to Davidson*: not only there is no guarantee that we *do* pick up the *same* event with different descriptions; if the descriptions are conceptually unrelated, the event must be noumenal[2] (on pain of reintroducing the scheme/content dualism). Not all is lost, though. Mental causation, the anomalousness of the mental and its irreducibility to the physical may be preserved by rejecting the idea that causality must be nomological. An alternative to this Humean prejudice will be sketched at the end of this essay.

2.

The problem of mental causation is central for modern philosophy. It is the point of encounter between the alleged inevitability and closure of the causal and the phenomenologically felt freedom of action. Donald Davidson's philosophy is perhaps the most brilliant and explicit contemporary example of this tension. Two of his theories stand out from his work and highlight the tension: radical interpretation and anomalous monism. The first establishes that something meaningful cannot be understood in isolation from other meaningful things, but rather globally: when we make sense of someone's speech or rationalize her behaviour we need to assume a shared world which is inconceivable independently of a shared intentional net. Davidson dedicates to this idea one of his most subtle arguments: his rejection of the third dogma of empiricism, the separation of conceptual scheme and empirical content. But, on the other hand, the thesis of anomalous monism claims that every mental event is identical to one physical event even though the former are characterized anomically and holistically while the latter can, in principle, be individuated atomistically and are subject to laws. So, Davidson's way to reconcile both poles of the tension is to concede them both. Nevertheless, I will argue, there is an internal inconsistency between both arguments and, hence, we need to look somewhere else to ease the tension.

A mental event can be the cause of another mental events, or of a physical event, or can be caused by a physical event, inasmuch as it is *also* a physical event, i.e., in virtue of being potentially describable in physical terms.[3] For Davidson, event monism (i.e., the identity of mental and physical events) is the way to make three principles compatible (see Davidson 1970):

(1) Mental events cause physical events (Principle of Psychophysical Interaction);
(2) When there is causation there is a strict law which relates cause and effect (Nomological Character of Causality); and
(3) There are neither psychological nor psychophysical strict laws[4] (Anomalism of the Mental).

This is the strategy that I will follow through the rest of this paper: first I will motivate a general problem for identity theories by means of an example; then I will summarize a diagnosis of the source of this problem due by Jennifer Hornsby. After doing this I will look in some detail at the specific difficulty that Davidson's proposal has, and I will finish with a first approximation to a conception of causality that does not define it in terms of laws.

3.

Consider the following scenario: I have a conversation with someone who just saw *The Big Sleep*. He is impressed with the film, and especially with Bogart's character, Marlowe. I tell him that the novel on which the film is based is also very good, that Raymond Chandler wrote it and that he wrote six more novels, all with the same main character. My interlocutor acquires a new belief: "Raymond Chandler wrote seven novels". This acquisition is a typical Davidsonian token-event (let us call it *m1*).[5] So, according to Davidson's argument for token-identity, there must be a token physical event with which this acquisition is identical (say, *p1*). However, here is where the intuitive problem starts. Our new Marlowe fan has acquired, together with the belief above mentioned, an indefinite set of standing beliefs, amongst which we can list "Chandler wrote more than one novel", or "Sam Spade is not the main character of any of Chandler's novels". Let us call these acquisitions *m2* and *m3*. These beliefs are clearly not identical with the one explicitly acquired, but their acquisition, *m2* and *m3*, must be identical with some physical event. One likely candidate is *p1*, the event with which we have identified *m1*. If *m1*, *m2* and *m3* were identical to *p1*, then they would be identical themselves. So far, this is not a problem. The

same token can instantiate several types simultaneously. In the situation at hand *p1* is a physical event token identical to a mental event token that we have called *m1*, and *m2*, and *m3*, given that the mental token instantiates an indefinite number of types including the three explicitly mentioned. Nevertheless, how could *p1*'s causal powers account for the explanatory force of the mental type *m1*, but not necessarily of *m2* or *m3*, now considered as mental types which *p1* also instantiates?

Imagine now that my friend decides tomorrow: "I am going to buy all the novels written by Chandler". The tokening of this decision is also the tokening of "I am going to buy seven novels", and of "I am going to buy more than one novel", etc. As I said, a counterintuitive, but not contradictory, consequence of this is that, even though the types are different, the tokens are identical, given that they are identical with the same physical event. But a bitterer pill has to be swallowed. Imagine now that my friend makes the mistake of thinking that novelists only write novels, and not short stories or cinema scripts. His decision, tomorrow, would also be, for him, a tokening of "I am going to buy everything written by Chandler". And if that token is identical with the same physical event with which the token "I am going to buy all the novels written by Chandler" is identical, and hence identical with this last token, how is it that one decision will be satisfied with seven novels and the other with seven novels, lots of short stories, some scripts and poems, and a big surprise? Our rationalization of his behaviour will have to choose amongst a variety of co-instantiated mental events (types), but this choice cannot be made in terms of the physical description of the token that instantiates them. Physical descriptions of causal relations bear no relevance to the mental connections, but it seems that they should, as mental predicates cannot appear, according to Davidson, in laws. Given that the same mental/physical token instantiates an indefinite number of types of belief-acquisitions, how could the physical description of the token discriminate the fact that one of those acquisitions is explicit while the others are implicit?

Davidson's answer is that it cannot and it does not need to. His claim is that the identity conditions for events in general are sameness of causes and effects, regardless of the radically different vocabularies that may be used to pick up such events. A complete physical description of the universe would not suffice to predict a mental event, so described (it would, of course, predict that very event under a physical description, but we may well be forever incapable of knowing that both descriptions are descriptions of the same event; see Davidson 1970, pp. 204–205). Hence, the commitment to the existence of a potential physical description of any mental event cannot play the role demanded by the concluding ques-

tion of the previous paragraph: those descriptions will not help us, say, to choose amongst competing rationalizations of an action. Then, what role do the token-identities play? For Davidson, token-identities without corresponding type-identities allow for a principled separation between causal relations and causal explanations. Davidson needs to accept that the identity conditions for all events, mental or physical, are the same to make his event monism possible. And, he needs to claim that these identity conditions are independent of the preferred vocabulary to describe the events and to account for their causal connections. Davidson understands causal relations extensionally, as relations between events and not between descriptions of events, while the opposite is true of causal explanations (and of laws and nomological explanations). This allows him to claim that there can be statements that truly capture a causal relation even if such statements are not the upshot of a strict law: it is sufficient for such statements to capture the right events, even if they do not do so under a description suitable for nomological explanation. One of the most important insights behind this distinction is that giving an incomplete description of an event-cause is not the same as giving a description of an incomplete cause.

The central argument of this paper implies that Davidson is not entitled to such a severe separation between explanation and causation, on pains of allowing causal relations to be free-floating, independent of our conceptual resources and, ultimately, noumenal. The seed of this difficulty can already be found in the very paper in which Davidson argues both for the distinction of explanation and causation and for the need for an ontology of events: he finishes his paper by claiming that events are needed to make sense of our common talk and that our common talk is the only way we have to show what there is (Davidson 1967, p. 162). This is a quick way to state the impossibility of a scheme/content dualism, and it leaves one wondering what resources our common talk (or, for that matter, our scientific talk) has to allow us such a brusque separation between our explanatory practices and the existence of extensional (causal) relations. It may well be that causal explanations are opaque and causal relations transparent, but the transparency of the latter cannot be used as a blank cheque because, according to the criticism of the third dogma (that will be explored in Section 5), which entities get related to which other entities cannot be postulated independently of the conceptual framework needed to make sense of such relations. But, famously, that framework excludes laws connecting mental and physical predicates. With respect to sameness of causes and effects as an identity condition for events, my objection holds in the same way that it does for the radical separation of causal relations

and causal explanations mentioned above. If Davidson is right in his rejection of the dualism, we would need ways to link intentional predicates and physical ones, otherwise our belief that an event intentionally described and an event physically described may share causes and effects must be held on faith. If nothing that we could know would be sufficient to say that two descriptions, one physical, one mental, are of the same event (as Davidson admits at the end of 'Mental Events'), then we could never justifiably claim that the two descriptions did in fact refer to the same event. The only alternative would be to maintain that the connection between the two events was something "given" from outside the conceptual realm.

But, if I am right in claiming that Davidson's token-identities lie outside our conceptual resources and, hence, no atomistic identity conditions can be given for the mental (given Davidson's thesis of the holism of the mental) then the only way to identify mental events would be to do so in terms of the intentional vocabulary that defines talk of propositional attitudes, beliefs, desires, intentions and other mental states. Given that the existence of an intentional description of an event is the criterion to consider it mental, mental events, and actions in particular, are placed in the same holistic and normative net occupied by mental states. Davidson's attempt at rescuing mental events from the holism of the propositional attitudes demands that sense can be made of their identity in causal, and ultimately nomological, terms. But, I will argue, the possibility of such an identity violates the rejection of the third dogma.

4.

In a series of influential papers, Jennifer Hornsby has criticized the contention of weak physicalism (i.e., of token-identity theories such as Davidson's or Fodor's) that we can have identities between events described in an action or perception vocabulary and events described in physical vocabulary. Some actions,[6] such as someone's moving an arm, seem describable in crudely physiological terms, such as someone's contracting her muscles. That is, as we can refer to someone's kicking a ball as someone's scoring a goal, we can also say that an action is both the event of someone's contracting certain muscles and the event of her moving her arm. If an action is an event that causes, amongst other things, muscle contractions, the physicalist should, in principle, be able to identify it with neurophysiological events.

But the crucial question is at what stage in the neural chain do we find a person's action? Where is the action itself, as distinct from its effects, as distinct from the events the agent brought about? To think that an answer

can be given is to assume that a sharp distinction between the events that compose an action and those which result from it can be established. "If scientists of the brain develop their classification of events independently of our interests in recounting people's actions, then why should we presume that what they single out is the same as what we single out when we speak of actions?" (Hornsby 1980/81, p. 78). The contention here is not just, as Hornsby says (ibid., n. 5, p. 91), that there is no reason to think that what is captured by an action predicate can also be captured by a neurophysiological (or, in general, physical) one. This is understating the criticism. The idea is that what a token of an action predicate captures is very unlikely to be univocally identified with one particular (token) description in physical terms. Hornsby, in a recent paper, uses a distinction between the personal and the impersonal point of view (which she correctly refuses to equate with the subjective and the objective respectively) to make the same point. From the first point of view, an action is a person's doing a certain thing for a reason, while from the impersonal, it would be a link in a causal chain which is independent of reference to persons or reasons. An action cannot be captured from the impersonal point of view, because we "lack any argument for subsuming actions in the impersonal world of causes" (Hornsby 1995, p. 174). The character of action explanation appeals to a different standard of intelligibility than that of the impersonal view, a standard that understands a person's doing something "by seeing her as (at least approximately) rational – as conforming (more or less) to norms of consistency and coherence in her thought and practice" (ibid., p. 172). This is, in fact, what Davidson has taught us.

Even if the reductionist (or the non-reductionist identity theorist) is confident about finding a particular neurophysiological event that starts the chain of causation, which starts the action, such confidence is difficult to maintain in reference to the separation between the action and its effects. She may say that the action started here (pointing at a certain physical event), but she may not say where the action finishes. This is not an empirical question, but one about how our common sense and our language work, i.e., a philosophical question. And, if we agree that our common sense and our language function on the presumption of normativity, then nomological accounts will not deal with actions. Our conception of the world independent of us, our impersonal view, is not a conception of the world including us.

A different answer would hold that there are no actions (or perceivings, or feelings of pain). The problem is that this answer seems not to be motivated by anything but the disappointment at not finding identities (neither type nor token-identities) between them and physical events. This

eliminativist answer is the last resort of a physicalism that can be neither strong nor weak. Then it becomes absolute. But, unless we give pride of place to the physical individuation of events, there seems to be little reason to assert that mental and physical events are the same, i.e., to expect that intentional descriptions of events and neurophysiological descriptions of events could in principle meet (or that reference to mental events should be eliminated, in the case of absolute physicalism). This picture, which sees the neurophysiologist and the "everyday psychologist" as starting from two radically different grounds, while at the same time hoping to be working on the same material, reminds one of the joke about the two Welsh miners who went to talk to the Prime Minister about their project for the Channel Tunnel. They explained: "I will start digging in Dover and my brother will start in Calais. We will meet half-way and that will be it". The Prime Minister asked: "What happens if you miss each other?" "Then, you'll have two tunnels for the price of one". Having two tunnels sounds like a good thing, but having two explanations that never meet is a different matter. And we have no justification to expect them to meet, unless there is a common plan. "Dig away and time will tell" is wishful thinking. Separating science from our commonsensical world-view leads to two tunnels that are not just unlikely to meet, but are also unlikely to reach the shore. After all, almost as dangerous as thinking of reality as made up of two different, incommunicated or mysteriously communicated, worlds is to think that for something to be real it must be physical, in the sense of being fully describable in terms of the physical sciences.

5.

So far I have only intended to shed doubts on the feasibility of establishing anything short of a fully holistic identity between the mental and the physical and to sustain those doubts on Hornsby's ideas about action and her opposition to parcelling out identity in terms of events. Now I will give an explicit argument against Davidson's attempt at opening the door for other kinds of identities. Clearly, token-identity is intended as an ontological thesis. So, I will consider now whether Davidson can hold ontological theses which are detached from explanatory practices. But his problem is even tougher, because his rejection of the third dogma of empiricism does not allow him to separate entities from our ways of conceptualising them. How can the causal and the significative features of *the same event* be captured by the nomological net of physics and by the rational net of interpretation? Is the event *given* independently of these nets?

The structure of my argument against *Davidson*'s entitlement to token-identity is:

(a) For Davidson there are not strict psychological laws,
(b) There are not strict psychophysical laws,
(c) From (a) and (b) it follows that a mental type cannot be identified with a physical *type*. However,
(d) No separation is possible between content and scheme, i.e., there are no schemeless events waiting to be captured by one or more descriptive frameworks. Something's being a token of a type is not prior to there being a type that captures it. A token can instantiate more than one type only if the types can, in principle, be connected by a law. But there are no psychophysical laws, given the anomalousness of Davidson's monism (b). Hence,
(e) A mental (or physical) event *token* can only be individuated with respect to the mental (or physical) type that it exemplifies. In order to defend event monism we need a schemeless method to individuate events (given (c)), i.e., a method which allows us to say that the same event is both the one described by the nomological vocabulary of physics and by the normative vocabulary of psychology. But (d) goes against such a possibility.

Davidson holds (a), which amounts to the thesis that the psychological realm is not causally closed, as a consequence of two ideas: (I) ascription of mentality is holistic, given that it involves the principle of charity, i.e., the presumption of rationality, and (II) something's being a mental event constitutively depends on its place within a rational network (individual beliefs, desires and other propositional attitudes are, according to Davidson, dependent on our interpretative practices, not free-standing) and it makes no sense to talk about rational networks independently of interpretation. The mental is holistic and normative: mental events must be individuated by their place in the general economy of propositional attitude attribution, not in terms of atomistic causal links to other events. Of course, this is not Davidson's official story about the individuation of events. As I pointed out in Section 3, Davidson needs to maintain that all events have the same identity conditions to make his anomalous monism conceptually possible. His criterion is that "(. . .) events are identical if and only if they have exactly the same causes and effects" (Davidson 1969, p. 179). However, the rest of this section tries to show that Davidson's rejection of the third dogma of empiricism, together with his insistence on the anomic character of the mental, do not entitle him to such a criterion for event identity. Furthermore, the central characteristic of anything mental, be it a state or an event, is its place within an intentional, holistic, framework: "On

the proposed test of the mental, the distinguishing feature of the mental is (...) that it exhibits what Brentano called intentionality. Thus intentional actions are clearly included in the realm of the mental along with thoughts, hopes and regrets (or the events tied to these)" (Davidson 1970, p. 211). In contrast, physical events or, as Davidson would prefer to express it, physical descriptions of events, are subsumable by laws. There are no strict psychological laws to reduce to physical ones[7] and, given the radically different constitutive principles of the mental and the physical (normative vs. nomological, i.e., prescriptive vs. descriptive), there cannot be bridge laws between both realms: these are the reasons why Davidson holds thesis (b). The conjunction of (a) and (b) is premise (3) of Davidson's argument for anomalous monism. Proposition (c) is a different way of stating (3).

I recognize that my phrasing of (d) as a consequence of Davidson's rejection of the dualism of scheme and content is controversial. I am going to justify it. Davidson puts forward his argument against what he calls the third dogma of empiricism as a radicalisation of Quine's rejection of the first two dogmas, the analytic/synthetic distinction, and the possibility of reducing all meaningful statements to experiential statements. Davidson follows Quine in refusing to accept a distinction between statements that are true in virtue of their meaning and statements, which are true in virtue of the world, and goes one step further when he argues that we cannot make such a distinction for our world-view as a whole. We cannot parcel out the world's contribution and our own contribution to the meaning of beliefs and statements. The three dogmas are semantic theses, and so are their rejections.

But, as Davidson's work on radical interpretation makes it clear, semantics and epistemology are not independent enterprises: meaning and belief go hand in hand; it is a precondition to have thought to be a linguistic creature whose speech is interpretable. Ultimately, this interdependence of belief and meaning arises from the interdependence of two aspects of interpretation, the attribution of beliefs and the interpretation of sentences (see Davidson 1974, p. 195). His argument against the third dogma is thus an epistemological argument: there is nothing *given* in experience which can serve as a ground for knowledge.[8] However, it is not just against the experiential given or content that Davidson's criticism is directed. The dualism under criticism is the dualism "of organizing system and something waiting to be organized (...)" (ibid., p. 189). The supposedly given entities waiting to be organized do not need to be experiences: "As for the entities that get organized, or which the scheme must fit (...) we may detect two main ideas: either it is reality (the universe, the world, nature), or it is experience (the passing show, surface irritations, sensory

promptings, sense-data, the given)" (ibid., pp. 191–192). The rejection of the third dogma is the rejection of a separation between concepts and empirical contents, and a rejection of the separation of reality from concepts. Semantics leads to epistemology and epistemology leads to metaphysics. The opening paragraph of 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics' (1977) makes the connection between the three explicit:

> In sharing a language, in whatever sense this is required for communication, we share a picture of the world that must, in its large features, be true. If follows that in making manifest the large features of our language, we make manifest the large features of reality. One way of pursuing metaphysics is therefore to study the general structure of our language. (Davidson 1977, p. 199)

If we can communicate, we must share knowledge. That is, a true picture of reality. That is, a world. From where does Davidson get his token-identities then? What area of our picture of reality can simultaneously capture nomological and anomalous characteristics of the same event? Davidson cannot take an asymmetric stance with respect to "interpretative" and "scientific" objects. But, it can be argued, Davidson retains an aspect of Quine's scientism to which he is not entitled after his rejection of the scheme-content dualism. Once he admits that ontological matters cannot be established independently of knowledge, it seems unjustified to claim that only the objects and events picked up by the rational vocabulary are subject to the model that connects them. Mental events are holistic, but this alone does not make them more dependent on the framework where they belong than physical events and objects are with respect to the model that relates them. Davidson is not entitled to a stronger form of realism towards the physical than he is towards the mental. And, finally, the identities that he infers from principles (1)–(3) do not fit any of our conceptual devices. Davidson is defenceless against the accusation that such identities are noumenal. That there cannot be noumenal objects, or events, or characteristics, or whatever, is the point (d) makes. What are the options left?

The prospect of defending 1, 2 and 3 simultaneously is bleak. If causation is nomological and there are not psychophysical laws, then (1) is false. But, even worse, Davidson also argues for an alternative construction of (1), which could be called Principle of Causal Efficacy of the Mental: (1b) Reasons are causes, at least of actions. But, there not being psychological laws either, without token-identities, and given (2) and (3), (1b) would also be false. I will argue that the only option left in order to save mental causation and mental/physical interaction is to reject (2), the nomological character of causality. Davidson does not offer any argument for this premise, but rather works as a dogma for him: the fourth and

final dogma of empiricism, as it has been suggested.[9] The consequences of rejecting it will be explored in Section 6 of this paper.

Let's briefly consider the alternatives to rejecting (2). One option would be to reject (3). This could be done either by accepting that there are psychological laws or by also accepting that there are psychophysical laws (to recognize psychophysical laws without psychological ones would be prone to the accusation of mixing up realms differently constituted). There would be nothing recognizably Davidsonian in such options, and it is precisely against them that his work is directed (the most valuable part of his work, it could be argued). If we only accept psychological laws, then mental events would have causal powers, but only within the realm of the mental. That is, even if one denies the existence of bridge-laws between the physical discourse and the mental one, as Davidson does, it is open to claim that there are psychological laws and hence that reasons can be causes (of actions but not of physical processes such as, for instance, the water spilled by my hand wetting the carpet) because there are laws which connect mental events as cause and effect. There are difficulties with this account. Why do we need to separate two untranslatable discourses if we do not so obtain a certain relaxation in one of them that gives room for freedom, for a genuine notion of action rather than a surrogate? On the other hand, this dualism, like all kinds of dualism, needs to explain whether both discourses are about the same world, and if so, how? There is a problem I find more serious, a problem shared both by the proponent of psychological laws and by the proponent of psychological and psychophysical laws, and that is dealing with the difficulty of accounting for the normativity of mental discourse. If we think of rationalization as a science in the business of looking for laws, it is unclear how we could still do justice to the idea that mentality is normative rather than descriptive unless we can show how to derive norms from scientific laws.

A second option is to give up both (1) and (1b) and to claim that there is no mental causation (neither mental to mental, nor mental to physical). Rationality is a matter of understanding, not of causally explaining. This option, I suspect, is shared by much continental philosophy, and probably originates in the classic dichotomy between *Erklären* and *Verstehen* that helps to distinguish between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*. I feel some sympathy for this tradition; however, I find it counterintuitive to reject the commonsensical claim that, for instance, the cause of Othello's unhappiness is his belief that Desdemona is not faithful to him, or the cause of Tom's drinking water rather than wine is his desire to finish his thesis.[10]

6.

In what follows I will explore an alternative account of causality that does not make the existence of lawlike connections between events necessary for it. I will propose that the concept of causation can be defined in terms of explanation, and offer a sketch of the kinds of explanations that could count as causal. I will briefly consider some counterexamples. This approach will make it possible to maintain (1b). On the other hand, both (1) and its converse ((1c) physical events cause mental events) could also be retained as long as sense can be made of explanations which relate events described in the vocabulary of the natural sciences and events which involve evaluation.[11] I believe that the existence of an intimate link between our conception of causality and our conception of explanation should be a Davidsonian thought: I have already argued that the rejection of the third dogma invites a much deeper interconnection between causal relations and causal explanations than the one accepted by Davidson.

The idea of causal relations, at least historically, is a latecomer with respect to the ideas of action, responsibility and explanation. I will advocate for a conception of causation that does not necessarily involve invocation of laws and I will do so by taking explanation as a prior notion with respect to causation. I will consider whether loading explanation with such a heavy burden means giving up what seems a *desideratum* for something to be a cause: namely, that it cannot be deduced a priori from its effect. I will suggest that the reasons invoked in making sense of an action are no more conceptually derivable from our description of the action than, say, the fact that the milk-man came this morning is derivable from the milk being at the door. The conceptual connections in both cases depend on empirical assumptions and are ultimately subject to empirical testing.

One of the difficulties of trying to grasp Aristotle's theory of the four causes, is that the metaphysical load of the modern conception of 'cause' precludes it from capturing the richness of the Greek "*aitia*". What the four *aitiai* have in common for Aristotle is something which our notion of cause does not capture easily, because the *aitia* of something is the (sometimes hidden) explanation of that thing, that which is responsible for that thing existing. This technical sense was inherited from the work of Hippocrates (for whom the *aitia* of a disease was what explained its symptoms) and Thucydides (who used the word to refer to the factors or persons responsible for something, e.g., the origin of wars).[12] The modern use of the notion of cause captures one of the kinds of causality contemplated by Aristotle, namely efficient causation. However, even though the teleological and hylomorphic thinking that sustains the other types of caus-

ation may be out of fashion, it is still interesting to highlight the priority of explanation and responsibility with respect to (efficient) cause which follows from the classic understanding of cause.

I am claiming that the notion of causation is only understandable by reference to our explanatory practices. This strategy has to deal with a serious objection: not all explanation is causal explanation. Which kinds of explanation are suitable to serve as a basis for an understanding of causation? It can be argued that any correct explanation of an event in terms of a different and temporarily prior event is a causal explanation. This rules out "definitional" explanations (such as "I wrote my name because I wrote 'M', 'a', 'n', 'u', 'e' and 'l' "), explanations which invoke institutions ("Why did I marry you?", "Because you said 'yes' ") and deductive explanations ("I like 'Moondance' because I like all Van Morrison's songs").[13] Furthermore, there are two types of causal explanations I am interested in: rational and nomological explanations. Both are causal inasmuch as they both relate different events in an explanatory manner. However, rational explanations are not just causal, but also evaluative, while nomological explanations, besides being causal, invoke a covering law.[14]

A more serious problem arises when we want to do justice to the idea that, for instance, certain chemicals, say psycho-active drugs, cause someone to have certain beliefs, such as "I am the king of the world", "Life is meaningless" or "There is a dragon under my bed". However, it is not in contradiction with anything I have said to hold that it makes sense to say that there must be certain physical or neurological enabling conditions to have beliefs. One needs a tongue, and probably a heart, to be able to say "my heart belongs to you"; one needs eyes to see that the Alhambra is beautiful, etc. However, tongues and eyes and brains are not enough to make sense of such sayings and seeings, unless we can integrate them in an account that includes responsiveness to metaphors, to beauty, and to norms of linguistic correctness.

Something similar can be said with respect to mental to physical causation. I raise my arm because I want to be polite and say goodbye to my neighbour. My raising my arm causes wine to spill. The spilt wine causes certain chemical reactions that stain the carpet. However, if mental events cannot be identified with physical or chemical events, it seems as if my desire to be polite has interfered with the causal closure of the realm of law, given that a mental event, my desire to be polite, has caused a physical event, a certain chemical reaction. But, unless my saying goodbye to a neighbour and a certain bodily movement can be identified, it is hard to see how *I* can have caused a chemical reaction. It is equally difficult to swallow that two causal chains are running in parallel; in one of them I cause the

wine to spoil the carpet, in the other a certain muscular movement causes a liquid with such and such a chemical composition to come in contact with a certain fabric. But, this would be a problem for someone who held that causal chains are independent of the explanatory frameworks where they belong. In the approach that I have recommended this is not the case. A nomological relation between events is a relation that is made sense of within a certain model, one that sees related events as instantiating a law. In order to do this a great deal of simplification is needed. Amongst that which is not taken into account is the significance of the *explanandum*. However, those "disenchanted" events can be related to meaningful intentions and activities.

Even though determinism can make sense within certain restricted areas, universal determinism does not make sense because nomologicality cannot be understood independently of our explanatory interests, which seem to involve freedom. A different way of putting the point is saying that, however important it could be to keep the idea of the causal closure *of* physics (i.e., the idea that events described in the vocabulary of physics cannot be caused from outside the sphere of physically describable events), the causal closure *with respect* to physics (anything which happens, however described, is physically caused) does not follow from it.

I have described how we could get around the almost universally accepted Humean dogma that causality is nomological.[15] However, Hume also introduced another *desideratum* for a conception of causality:

> I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition, which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation [of cause and effect] is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori*; but arises entirely from experience (. . .). Let an object be presented to a man of ever so strong natural reason and abilities; if that object be entirely new to him, he will not be able, by the most accurate examination of its sensible qualities, to discover any of its causes or effects. (. . .) *[C]auses and effects are discoverable, not by reason but by experience*. (Hume 1748, pp. 27–28)

But is the connection between reasons and actions merely conceptual? To put it differently: does our description of someone's bodily movement as an action or a behaviour involve an *a priori* connection with the beliefs and the desires that we use in giving the best explanation of her behaviour?

Think about the following situation: Jerónimo, the milkman of my town, is bald and wears a red wig. This morning, like all mornings, I find two bottles of milk at my door, but this time they are covered with red hairs. This event can be referred to as "milk being at the door" or, in this occasion, as "two bottles of milk having been left at the door by Jerónimo, the milkman", from which we can infer the nature of the cause, "Jerónimo's having been here this morning". However, despite the apparently *a priori* character of this inference, there are empirical constraints

which make the inference possible, such as my knowing about Jerónimo's baldness and wig, knowing that someone delivers the milk every morning, etc. And, in fact, I could be wrong, and the cause of milk and hairs being at the door could be completely unconnected with Jerónimo. My claim is that an accurate and precise description of the effect is dependent on having a true (causal) explanation.

Summarizing: the discussion of the nomological or anomalous character of causality cannot be made independently of an understanding of our explanatory practices. Such an understanding must, necessarily, mention the rational and evaluative character of such practices. Therefore, it is unclear whether sense can be made of the claim that our account of mentality and normativity has to be coherent with laws of nature that are assumed to be given, i.e., prior and independent to our explanations.

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NOTES

[1] Even though Sections 3 and 4 go some way into showing that the idea of such token-identities is unattractive and problematic, and the proposal argued for in Section 6 can be of independent interest.

[2] Or, maybe, transcendental. Alternatively, it could be defended that Davidson's argument leads to a transcendental identity between tokens of mental and physical events, an identity that is condition of possibility for both the free, and hence anomalous, use of thinking and for agency to respect the causal closure of reality. This fits nicely with Davidson's claim that the three premises of his argument are Kantian, as well as with the idea that anomalous monism itself is Kant's position (see Davidson 1970, pp. 207–209). However, Kant, unlike Davidson, could be allowed to defend anomalous monism as part of his separation between phenomena and noumena: the nomological character of causality is a consequence of causality being one the categories of understanding and mental causation is a prerequisite for practical reason (see note 8 below for more on Kant's entitlement to both theses). Davidson, on the other hand, does not have this option because for him there cannot be an appearance-reality distinction as his argument against the scheme/content dualism reveals, as I will argue in this paper.

[3] Too literal a reading of the expression "in virtue of" can lead to a frequent confusion in the discussion of Davidson's argument. It is often claimed that Davidson makes the

mindedness of mental events merely epiphenomenal: given that there are no psychological or psychophysical laws, the efficacy of a mental event cannot be ascribed to the mental properties of the event, as these properties cannot feature in laws. This would only follow if Davidson's position were committed to the idea that an event's causal powers are due to its properties. Davidson's nominalism precludes any commitment of the sort from making sense and, hence, the accusation of epiphenomenalism is misplaced.

[4] Davidson denies the existence of psychological and psychophysical laws, but not the existence of true generalizations with the logical form of a law. However, given that the nomological character of causality demands strict laws for causality to occur, not merely true generalization, those generalization are not sufficient to account for causal relations involving mental events.

[5] If events are spatiotemporally located changes, the possession of a belief (explicit or implicit) could not count as an event. However, the acquisition of a belief (again, explicit or standing) would.

[6] An action is, for Hornsby, a person's doing something intentionally. See, for instance, Hornsby 1998, pp. 377–378.

[7] I mentioned in Section 2 that true generalizations with the logical form of a law cannot play the desired role. However, someone may still be tempted to say that mere generalizations linking mental and physical types could grant enough of a conceptual foothold to make sense of Davidson's token-identities. This is not an option open to Davidson: any statement involving intentional predicates has to be understood in conjunction with the rest of the intentional framework, making it impossible to pair physical and mental predicates in an atomistic manner.

[8] An admittedly unusual parallel to this line of argument can be found on Hegel's reaction to Kant's commitment to the possibility of pure thought. We find Kant claiming in the *Critique of Judgement*: "(...) we can conceive of an intuitive intellect (negatively, that is, simply as non-discoursive), that would not go from the general to the particular (...) and for which there would be no contingency of the agreement between nature and our understanding (...) [this agreement] the intuitive intellect does not need [to posit]" (Kant 1790, p. 77). Given that Kant takes the possibility of pure intuition as conceivable, experience could, in principle (i.e., not for us, but for other kinds of knowers) have a role that is isolable from the exercise of conceptual capacities (or, more strongly, a role that makes such capacities completely unnecessary). Hegel, in what I am claiming to be a Davidsonian move, opposes this line of thought: intuitions without concepts are blind, as Kant forcefully showed, but they are not blind just *for us*, but for any thinker deserving the name: "(...) though the categories, such as unity, cause and effect, are strictly the property of thought, it by no means follows that they must be ours merely and not also the characteristics of the objects. Kant however confines them to the subject-mind (...)" (1802, p. 70). I owe this note to uncountable discussions with XXX.

[9] For instance, McDowell (1985, p. 340) gestures towards an alternative, singularist, conception of causality about which I will have a bit more to say (see note 15).

[10] Authors from a different tradition (see, for instance, Anscombe 1957) reject the idea of mental causation on similar grounds. However, such a rejection depends on taking causality to imply laws, and I am trying to show that this is not the only available option (and it seems to me to go against Wittgenstein's thought to state something as philosophically substantive as the idea that any account of causality must appeal to laws). There seems to be no other reason to reject the idea of mental causation besides embracing premise (2) of the Davidsonian argument. Once that the option of accounting for (at least some)

causal connections without needing to invoke laws is recognized, the idea that the mental is causally inert looses its grip on us.

[11] If we consider physical (or chemical or neurophysiological) processes as enabling (but not constitutive) conditions for rational phenomena, and allow for a conception of the world which does not identify it with the physical world, our intuition that there is a connection between the events subject to reasons and events subject to laws can be respected. This will be especially so for someone who believes that it is not possible to isolate the language and method of the sciences from the general framework of human knowledge where they belong. If this is accepted, there is no reason to reject explanations which connect rationally individuated events with events scientifically described, given that such a connection do not need to be grounded on laws, after rejecting (2).

[12] I am indebted to xxx for this philological aside.

[13] David Owens' analysis of causation in *Causes and Coincidences* offers a highly developed articulation of the relation between causation and explanation. Causes are defined, in his account, in terms of coincidences: "A cause ensures that its effects are no coincidence" (Owens 1992, p. 1), while the central feature of a coincidence is its inexplicability.

[14] I am tempted to liken both teleological and historical explanations to rational explanations. Dennett, for instance, has suggested that the idea of evolution by natural selection is an application of the intentional stance. When we say that "The heart pumps blood because it is its function" we are appealing to norms in our explanation. Historical explanations, as economic or sociological ones, are rational because they (partially) depend on psychological ones. But, clearly, all this is very tentative.

[15] However, I will say nothing about the possibility of making compatible a "singularist" or "particularist" conception of causality (which makes it interdependent with explanatory practices) with the idea that causal relations involve necessity (even if not laws). This can be done by showing that necessary connections can be found between particulars. See, for instance, García Encinas, forthcoming.

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