Anomalous Monism

An Attempted Reconciliation
An Apparent Contradiction

- The Principle of Causal Interaction
- The Nomological Character of Causality
- The Anomalism of the Mental
At least some mental events causally interact with physical events:

- **Mental to physical**: As an act of revenge, Ramona punctured the tires of Paul’s British racing green Jaguar XJ with an ice pick.
- So with: decisions, plottings, intentions, beliefs, hopes, desires. . .
- **Physical to mental**: after puncturing the last tire, she inadvertently pricked the palm of her hand with the ice pick.
- When her skin was punctured, she felt pain.
The Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality

- Events related as cause and effect fall under strict deterministic laws.
- That the laws be *deterministic* is ‘stronger than required by the reasoning.’ (‘Mental Events,’ 125, n. 4)
- This principle may be ‘treated as an assumption.’ (‘Mental Events,’ 116)
The Anomalism of the Mental

- There are no strict deterministic laws on the basis of which mental events can be explained and predicted.
- It helps in understanding this principle to focus on the exigencies of explanation.
- The thought is that mental events are permanently, ineliminably, amorphous because *normative*. 
More on Anomalism

- The mental and the physical have disparate commitments.
- The domain of the mental is inherently *normative*, whereas the physical is exhaustively *descriptive*.
- With regard to the domain of the mental, we must ever stand prepared to adjust our explanations from the standpoint of overall cogency: this is the constitutive ideal of rationality.
The Apparent Contradiction

- If the mental and physical causally interact, and causal interaction requires strict deterministic laws, then such laws must govern their interaction.
  - Yet the Principle of the Anomalism of the Mental states that no such laws are applicable in the domain of the mental.
- Looked at the other way, given that causal laws must be strict and the domain of the mental does not admit of such laws, then there is no mental-physical causal interaction.
  - Yet the principle of causal interaction states just such interaction.
Davidson’s Gambit

- The normal (and perhaps eventual) course of action:
  - Deny some one of our principles.
  - Which?

- Davidson’s gambit:
  - All three are true.
  - It may be taken as a kind of confirming explanatory fecundity that anomalous monism renders this seemingly inconsistent triad consistent.
The Mental

• Mental events: ‘event $x$ is $M$’ iff the expression that replaces ‘$M$’ contains at least one mental verb essentially:
  • A mental verb is an intentional verb: desiring, knowing, believing, intending, remembering. . .
  • These are verbs in which the ‘usual rules of substitution appear to break down.’ (117)
  • We do not attempt to type-identify or otherwise reduce the mental to the physical.
Four Possibilities Regarding Mental-Physical Relations

- Nomological Monism: materialism as it is usually construed
- Nomological Dualism: parallelism, occasionalism, epiphenomenalism
- Anomalous Dualism: Cartesianism (?)
- Anomalous Monism: Davidson
The Reconciliation

- Causal relations are extensional: events related as cause and effect are so related no matter how described.
- Laws, by contrast, are ‘linguistic’.
- It is true that events related as cause and effect instantiate a law.
- It is not true that causes and effects instantiate laws no matter how described.
The Reconciliation, Made Overt

❖ The Principle of Causal Interaction
❖ True: mental and physical events stand in causal relations to one another.

❖ The Nomological Character of Causality
❖ True: all these instances of causation fall under strict, deterministic laws.

❖ The Anomalism of the Mental
❖ True: these laws never employ mental predicates.
A Tidy Argument

1. Suppose $m$, a mental event, causes $p$, a physical event.

2. If so, $m$ and $p$, under some description, fall under a strict causal law.

3. This law cannot be psychophysical.

4. So, the law must be mental or physical.

5. The law cannot be mental.

6. Hence, the law must be physical.

7. Physical laws relate physical events.

8. Hence, $m$ must be token-identical with some physical event.
Three Worries

❖ The argument against psychophysical laws is obscure.
❖ Is this really a matter of *explanation* rather than causation?
❖ Perhaps the premises are actually inconsistent.
❖ In any event, supervenience does not sit well with Davidson’s commitment to anomalism.
❖ AM renders the mental causally irrelevant.
❖ Does AM eviscerate the Principle of Causal Interaction?
❖ "What role does mentality play on Davidson's anomalous monism? None whatever." —Jaegwon Kim
Consider the semantic value of the phrase ‘ertrinken, versinken, - unbewusst, -höchste Lust!’ from the end of Tristan und Isolde.

Suppose, when singing these words, Lotte Lehmann shatters a wine glass.

It is true that her voice shattered the glass.

It is also true that the final words mean ‘utmost rapture’.

But this semantic fact is utterly causally irrelevant to the shattering of the glass.

Similarly, then, for mental predicates...
1. If AM, then there are no strict laws governing psychophysical relations.

2. In the absence of such laws, mental events cause physical events only insofar as they are themselves physical events.

3. Hence, mental events cause physical events only insofar as they are themselves physical events.

4. If mental events cause physical events only insofar they are themselves physical events, then their mental properties are irrelevant to their causal efficacy.

5. Hence, an event’s being a mental event is irrelevant to its being a cause.