

PHIL 255
Week 7: Mental Causation
 Paul Thagard

Please turn off and
 put away all
 electronics.

Please avoid the last
 2 rows.

Mental causation

Eliminativism



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Mental Causation



Event = something that happens

Nonmental events cause mental events:

E.g. puck makes hockey player duck

Mental events cause nonmental events:

E.g. person wants cake so cake gone

Mental events cause mental events:

E. g. thinking of snow makes you
 sad

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What is Causation? Alternatives

1. Causation is constant conjunction (Hume).
2. Causation is an illusion.
3. Causation is correlation:
 $\text{Probability}(\text{effect}/\text{cause}) > \text{Probability}(\text{effect})$.
4. Causation is a special power.
5. Causation is the result of a mechanism.

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Mechanistic Explanation

How does a bicycle move?

Parts: frame, wheels, gears, chain, pedals, etc.

Structure: e.g. pedal connected to gear.

Interactions: e.g. pedal moves chain.

Changes: e.g. wheels turn.



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What is a Mechanism?

1. A mechanism is a system of parts whose interactions produce regular changes.
2. Biological examples: digestive system, evolution by natural selection
3. Social example: families, organizations.
4. Physical examples: solar systems, earthquakes.

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Views of Mental Causation

1. **Neural mechanisms:** mental causation results from brain processes. (Identity theory)
E.g. William Bechtel



Objections: multiple realizability, anti-materialist arguments, e. g. zombie

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Views of Mental Causation

2. **Dualism:** Mind and body interact.
Objection: how does interaction work? Replies:
Causality is constant conjunction.
Parallelism: God coordinates mental & physical.
3. **Epiphenomenalism:** Physical events cause mental events but not vice versa. Objection: thoughts cause actions.

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Exam 1

If you lost marks on the second half of questions from part B because you interpreted "response" to mean "answer", then please hand in your exam for remarking.

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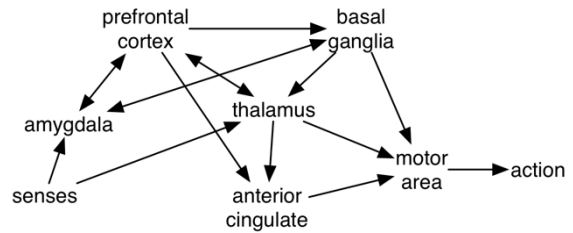
Discussion Question

How do you think mental events cause physical events?

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Brain Mechanism

Expanded from Schröder, Stewart, and Thagard, "Intention, Emotion, and Action", *Cognitive Science*.



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Eliminative Materialism

Mental events do not need to be identified with physical events, because they do not exist.

Analogies: caloric, vital force, phlogiston, ether: concepts abandoned as science develops.

Similarly, concepts like consciousness, qualia, and free will will be eliminated as science develops.

Paul & Patricia Churchland



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Folk Psychology

Folk psychology is the everyday view of mental causation held by ordinary people.

E.g. If you want something, and you believe an action will accomplish it, then you will do the action.

Criticisms: folk psychology is as obsolete as folk physics and folk biology.

Reply: Folk psychology is at least approximately true.

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Propositional Attitudes

Examples: beliefs, desires, fears, doubts, etc. E.g. I believe (doubt, desire, fear ...) that spring will be late this year.

Claim: mental states are attitudes toward propositions (the meanings of sentences)

Criticisms: supports dualism, by making mental states an abstract relation between an abstract self and abstract entities (meaning). Neural mechanisms don't need propositions.

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Discussion Question

Do you think that scientific developments will lead to the elimination of folk psychology?

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