

The Dualist

Stanford's Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Spring 2014

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Stanford's Undergraduate Journal of Philosophy

Volume XIX

Spring 2014

Cause and Explanation:
Explanatory Pluralism in Davidson's
Anomalous Monism

Sean Fujimori

The Demands of Disagreement:
A Case for Conciliationism

Jonathan Kim

This issue is dedicated to

Our Graduate Advisors

Meica Magnani & Shane Steinert-Threlkeld

THE DUALIST

Volume XIX ■ Spring 2014

Department of Philosophy

Stanford University

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The Dualist
Volume XIX
Spring 2014

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Cause and Explanation: Explanatory Pluralism in Davidson's Anomalous Monism

Sean Fujimori
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Introduction

What causes me to type these words? I am inclined to say that it is my intention to write a philosophical essay that causes my actions. Assuming physicalism, my intention is a phenomenon ultimately describable by physical laws, so perhaps I should say that a particular configuration of physical or neural processes causes my actions. However, there are convincing arguments that psychology is not reducible to neurophysiology, much less physics—that the configuration of brain process in an individual cannot adequately explain intentional action.¹ Donald Davidson articulates the tension between physicalism and mental causation in his observation that,

¹ See Tyler Burge, "Individualism and Psychology," *The Philosophical Review* 95.1 (1986): 3-45. Burge argues against the view that psychology ought to be reduced down to the neurophysiology of an individual. Also see Daniel Dennett "Three Kinds of Intentional Psychology," *Reduction, Time, and Reality*. Ed. R. Healy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981. 37-61. Dennett similarly argues that psychology cannot be reduced to physiology because intentionality and rationality are constitutive and irreducible elements of a proper understanding of the mental.

"On the one hand, human acts are clearly part of the order of nature, causing and being caused by events outside ourselves. On the other hand, there are good arguments against the view that thought, desire and voluntary action can be brought under deterministic laws, as physical phenomena can."²

The first sentence expresses a commitment to physicalism, and the second points out that the problem of accounting for mental causation introduces an apparent discontinuity into the presumed causal homogeneity of a purely physical universe. At least three resolutions to this dilemma are possible. Actions might be explained by non-physical causes, in which case the first hand should be overturned, or by strict deterministic laws, in which case the second hand should be overturned, or it might be demonstrated that the two views are actually compatible if properly construed. Descartes notoriously went the first route in attributing mental causation to non-corporeal souls acting through pineal glands. Hobbes went the second route in arguing that the mind is fully explicable in material terms. Davidson cleaves to the third possibility, claiming, "An adequate theory of behavior must do justice to both these insights and show how, contrary to appearance, they can be reconciled."³

With his seminal essay "Mental Events", Davidson aimed to reconcile both insights by distinguishing between epistemological and ontological aspects of the mind-body problem, i.e. between causal explanation and causation in itself. Ontologically speaking, he argued, there is no substantial dichotomy in nature between the mental and the physical. Epistemologically speaking, different sorts of events are, and ought to be, described using unique forms of causal explanation. To reconcile these views Davidson developed a framework that incorporates the prevailing principles of physicalism while denying that mentality can be properly understood in terms of strict laws. The former constraint precludes dualist ontologies wherein the mental is substantively distinct from the physical, while the latter constraint precludes eliminativist or reductionist ontologies wherein mental events are dismissed as either nonexistent or explanatorily superfluous.

Responding to this dilemma, Davidson formulated a metaphysical position, anomalous monism, which is supposed to reconcile physicalism with the denial of psychophysical reductionism. Critics of anomalous monism have argued that it leaves no causal role for the mental. If mental events cannot enter into causal relations then they are merely epiphenomenal, which contradicts

² Donald Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy," in *Essays on Actions and Events*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 191.

³ *Ibid.*, 191.

Davidson's commitment to mental events as causally efficacious. Kim, for example, argues that given the constraints set by Davidson, anomalous monism entails either dualism or epiphenomenalism.⁴

With this essay I aim to defend Davidson's conception of anomalous monism against the charge of epiphenomenalism. I will argue that anomalous monism avoids entailing epiphenomenalism by collapsing a problematic dualism of mental and physical properties into a more coherent monism of causal events.

The first section of this essay will provide an explanation of anomalous monism. The second section is devoted to illuminating connections between anomalous monism and Baruch Spinoza's metaphysics. In the third section I will explicate Kim's argument that anomalous monism entails either dualism or epiphenomenalism. Finally, I will investigate two different conceptions of the relation between events and explanations of those events. My goal is to demonstrate that Kim's argument strikes only against an ontological dichotomy between mental and physical properties—a distinction that Davidson is careful to reject.

Anomalous Monism

Davidson develops an account of the relation between mental and physical events by reconciling three premises that seem plainly contradictory. The first premise, 'the Principle of Causal Interaction', states that mental events and physical events can causally affect one another. *Pace* Spinoza, Davidson maintains that mental and physical events can causally interact. The second premise, 'the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causality', states that causal explanations necessarily entail the applicability of strict laws of cause and effect to the explanandum. These first two premises are not obviously contradictory, but form a *prima facie* contradiction in conjunction with the third premise. The problematic third premise, 'the Anomalism of the Mental', is the claim that strict laws cannot be applied to mental events. The contradiction is apparent—if causality entails the possibility of description by strict explanatory laws and causality obtains between mental events and physical events, then the causal relations between these events must be at least in principle describable by strict psychophysical laws. So how does Davidson approach the daunting task of reconciling these three premises?

To begin, he defines events as 'unrepeatable, dated individuals', and sets out the criterion for the attribution of the predicates 'mental' and 'physical' to a particular event.

⁴ Jaegwon Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63.3 (Nov., 1989): 31-47.

"Now we may say an event is mental if and only if it has a mental description, or if there is a mental open sentence true of that event alone. Physical events are those picked out by descriptions or open sentences that contain only the physical vocabulary essentially."⁵

All events are physically describable, but events that can also be described in mental terms are considered mental events. It is important to note from the outset that events are classified as mental or physical based on linguistic practice, not on an attribution of metaphysical status. I will return to Davidson's event-ontology in more detail in the 'Events and Explanations' section below.

Davidson's conception of 'mental' and 'physical' as linguistic predicates rather than metaphysical properties of events underpins his version of token-identity. It is not that a mental event is identical with some physical event per se, but rather that any event individuated by a mental description is also describable by a physical description. Davidson rejects the assumption that strict psychophysical laws are necessary components of mind-body identity theories because on his view law-like relations need not hold between individuations of events by mental description and the relevant physical descriptions. In denying this assumption Davidson raises the distinction between particular events and kinds or types of events. Psychophysical laws must be invoked if identity is supposed to apply to kinds of mental and physical events (type-identity), but are not necessary if identity holds only between particular mental and physical events (token-identity). Type-identity entails psychophysical laws because, *ex hypothesi*, all mental events of a given type are individuated based on a one-to-one correspondence with a given type of physical configuration. Token-identity requires that each mental event be physically instantiated, but not necessarily by a given type of physical configuration. Type-identity must assume an individuation of mental events that corresponds to typical physical configurations, while token-identity allows for mental events to be instantiated by various different physical events. This difference is precisely why multiple-realizability problematizes type-identity but not token-identity.

However, it is possible to define an ontology of events such that the necessity of correlating laws for identical events are embedded in the definition of identity. Davidson gives the example of Kim's suggestion, "...that Fa and Gb 'describe or refer to the same event' if and only if $a = b$ and the property of being F = the property of being G. The identity of the properties in turn entails that

⁵ Donald Davidson, "Mental Events," in *Essays on Actions and Events*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 174.

$(x)(Fx \leftrightarrow Gx)$."⁶ This definition of what constitutes event identity entails a strict correlating law for any two properties describing or referring to the same event. Davidson does not subscribe to such an event-ontology. This crucial disagreement indicates the crux of the accusation of epiphenomenalism against anomalous monism, which will be discussed in detail in the 'Anomalous Monism and Epiphenomenalism' section below.

To clarify his position, Davidson distinguishes the question of mind-body identity from the question of psychophysical laws. The former question asks whether the mind and the body are ontologically distinct. The latter question asks whether strict psychophysical laws hold between mental and physical events. From affirmative or negative answers to these two questions arise four ways of characterizing the mind-body relation, namely *nomological monism*, *nomological dualism*, *anomalous dualism*, and *anomalous monism*. Nomological monism is mind-body identity theory in conjunction with an affirmation of psychophysical laws, e.g. reductive physicalism. Nomological dualism is the claim that mental and physical events are distinct, but that correlative laws can obtain between them, e.g. parallelism, interactionism, or epiphenomenalism. Anomalous dualism is the claim that mental and physical events are distinct and that correlative laws do not obtain between them, e.g. Cartesianism. Anomalous monism is the mind-body identity theory in conjunction with the claim that mental phenomena cannot be reduced to physical terms by psychophysical laws. Anomalous monism is the only position consistent with the principles Davidson set out to reconcile. Nomological positions contradict the principle of the anomalism of the mental, and dualist positions are incompatible with physicalism.

It is worthwhile to examine in detail the passage in which Davidson explicates his reconciliation of the three initial premises.

"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. The principle of causal interaction deals with events in extension and is therefore blind to the mental-physical dichotomy. The principle of the anomalism of the mental concerns events described as mental, *for events are mental only as described*. The principle of the nomological character of causality must be read carefully: it says that when events are related as cause and effect, they have descriptions that instantiate a law. It does not say that

⁶ Jaegwon Kim, "On the Psycho-Physical Identity Theory," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 3.3 (1966): 231.

every true singular statement of causality instantiates a law."⁷ [Italics added for emphasis are my own]

The principle of causal interaction is sustained because 'mental' and 'physical' are predicates but not metaphysical constituents of events, so causal interaction occurs between events in a way that is untouched by description as either mental or physical. Causal interactions appear to cross boundaries only if mentality and physicality are taken to be metaphysically constitutive of events. The difference between the explanatory schemes of physics and rationality vindicate the anomalism of the mental. Events describable in mental terms obviously do not forfeit their causality in light of our linguistic practices, but the mental descriptions of those events are not subject to strict causal laws. The principle of the nomological character of causality can stand with the other two principles because Davidson's system distinguishes the ontology of causation from causal description. Events described in mental terms can also be described in physical terms, and thereby instantiate laws of physics.

The conjunction of these three principles as Davidson understands them entails that causal events can be conceptualized under different descriptions without a commitment to reducibility or translation between those modes of explanation. This result follows from a distinction between the ontology of causation and causal explanation. Unique causal explanations can be given under different descriptions referring to the same ontological event. Mental phenomena are *nomologically* irreducible to physical phenomena because the ways in which we individuate mental terms are different from the ways in which we individuate events in physical terms. This is certainly not a claim that the explanandum of mental and physical descriptions are two different substances. The principle of causal interaction is sustained by the supervenience of mental events on physical events, i.e. the *ontological* identity of any given event described in mental terms with the event described in physical terms.⁸ The principle of the nomological character of causality applies to events, which are describable in unique yet non-competing vocabularies. The thrust of Davidson's argument is that, contra eliminativism and reductionism, there is no reason to

⁷ Davidson, "Mental Events," 177.

⁸ This point is the subject of much debate that I will not cover in detail in this paper. Kim and others have argued that no forms of supervenience are sufficient to Davidson's purposes. In response, Neil Campbell has argued that Kim uses 'supervenience' to denote a strongly metaphysical relation, while Davidson uses the term to denote a 'logical or linguistic' relation. For a detailed discussion see Neil Campbell, *Mental Causation: a Nonreductive Approach* (New York: P. Lang, 2008).

suppose that mental descriptions of events can or should be eliminated or reduced to physical descriptions.

Davidson as a Spinozist, or Spinoza as an Anomalous Monist

"Aristotle insisted that mental states are embodied, and he claimed that the mental and the physical are just two ways of describing the same phenomena. Spinoza elaborated this idea, and was perhaps more explicit in his insistence both that there is only one substance and that the mental and the physical are irreducibly different modes of apprehending, describing, and explaining what happens in nature. I applaud Aristotle and Spinoza; I think their ontological monism accompanied by an uneliminable dualism of conceptual apparatus is exactly right."⁹

Davidson candidly refers to anomalous monism as, 'my version of Spinoza,' and it is instructive to consider what he means by that statement. Broadly, Davidson follows Spinoza by attempting to reconcile a thoroughly naturalist view of human beings as a part of nature with the sense in which intentional action is not explicable in strictly physical terms. In other words, both sought to naturalize our feeling that our capacity for action "disturbs rather than follows Nature's order," as Spinoza puts it.¹⁰ Contra Descartes, both thinkers sought to reconceptualize thought as thoroughly of the natural world.¹¹

In a gesture deeply radical in its historical context, Spinoza defined God as all of nature. Famously: *Deus, sive Natura*; God, or Nature. On his view there can be only one substance, so that whatever exists does so as an inseparable part or 'modification' of the one substance, i.e. nature. "There can be, or be conceived, no other substance but God."¹² There is nothing outside of nature, because nature is defined openly as all of existence. There is much to be said about Spinoza's metaphysics, but for present purposes I am interested in the parallel between the structure of his dual-aspect monism and the structure of anomalous monism. Spinoza's strict monism in conjunction with his theory of attributes as different conceptual systems through which we comprehend the one

⁹ Donald Davidson, "Aristotle's Action," in *Truth, Language, and History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 290.

¹⁰ Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2006), Part III Preface.

¹¹ Spinoza developed dual-aspect monism as a radical divergence from both Cartesian dualism and Hobbesian materialism, while Davidson introduced anomalous monism in reaction to anti-causalism and reductive materialism. See Giuseppina D'Oro, "Reasons and Causes: The Philosophical Battle and the Meta-philosophical War", *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 90.1 (2011): 207-221. for a thorough discussion of Davidson vis-à-vis anti-causalism. The relevant point of similarity for this discussion is Davidson's and Spinoza's shared ontological monism with multiple ways of perceiving one substance.

¹² Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I Proposition 14.

substance provides an illuminating conceptual predecessor to anomalous monism.

The mental and the physical in Davidson's theory are like Spinoza's attributes of thought and extension insofar as they are ontologically identical yet nomologically and epistemologically irreducible. Spinoza expresses the ontological identity of attributes in his definition of attributes as, "that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence,"¹³ and nomological irreducibility of the attributes in his proposition that, "Each attribute of the one substance must be conceived through itself."¹⁴ Similarly, on Davidson's view the mental and the physical can only be properly understood through their respective conceptual systems.

Michael Della Rocca points out that for both Spinoza and Davidson the mental must be conceived of holistically. The holism of the mental suggests the anomalism of the mental because it implies the impossibility of formulating strict laws between a type of mental state and a typical physical configuration. If mental states are inseparable from a continually fluctuating web of beliefs and desires, then it is deeply implausible that a given physical state could be strictly correlated with a given mental state. On the other hand, if mental states could be conceived of individualistically, then the 'piecemeal attributions of mental states' characteristic of strict psychophysical laws would be perfectly comprehensible. That is, if a mental state could be encapsulated from a web of beliefs and desires, then it is plausible that it could be strictly correlated with a certain physical state.

While both Davidson and Spinoza understand the mental as holistic, a revealing difference arises over the possibility of causal interaction between the mental and the physical. Spinoza denies that thought can explain extension or vice versa, while anomalous monism seems to require such mixed explanation. Davidson draws from Stuart Hampshire's insight that, "To Spinoza...to 'explain' means to show that one true proposition is the logically necessary consequence of some other; explanation essentially involves exhibiting necessary connections..."¹⁵ to suggest that this difference is merely apparent. Since knowledge of a cause involves fully explaining its effect in the strong sense of demonstrating a logically necessary connection, Spinoza's insistence that, "the body cannot determine the mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion,"¹⁶ can be understood as the denial of the possibility of *demonstrating a logically necessary connection* between physical and mental

¹³ Ibid., Part I Definition 4.

¹⁴ Ibid., Part I Proposition 10.

¹⁵ Stuart Hampshire, *Spinoza*, (London: Penguin, 1951), 35.

¹⁶ Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part 3 Proposition 2.

events, but not necessarily the denial of a *causal connection* between physical and mental events. Indeed, Spinoza's proposition that, "Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be or be conceived without God,"¹⁷ seems to entail that there must be a causal connection between modifications of substance regardless of which attribute they are comprehended under. That is to say, modifications of *Natura* have a similar role in Spinoza's metaphysics that events have for Davidson—both are the causal mediums grounding the identity of thought and extension, or the mental and the physical.¹⁸

Davidson's conception of events as the ground of causation is not nearly as metaphysically thick as Spinoza's conception of nature, or substance. More precisely, Davidson is not committed to the same metaphysical structure of the causal web of events that Spinoza posits in his theory of substance and its attributes. Davidson's position is that mental and physical explanations are distinct and irreducible conceptual frameworks, but it is not clear that Spinoza would be comfortable foregoing the metaphysical structure of the attributes.¹⁹ This divergence is clearly understandable given the evolution of thought during the intervening three hundred years, and the linguistic turn contemporary to Davidson. Regardless, both Davidson's events and Spinoza's modifications of substance are the sole realm of causation. Both views stand in stark contrast to the view of thought and extension as two separate causal realms.

Davidson and Spinoza can be understood as attempting to make sense of mentality and rationality in a world that can be fully described using purely physical language. Both must contend with Kim's principle of explanatory exclusion, which precludes the possibility of more than one "*complete* and *independent* explanation of any one event."²⁰ Davidson offers a response to Kim's principle for both himself and Spinoza.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Part I Proposition 15.

¹⁸ Michael Della Rocca agrees with Davidson that Spinoza's metaphysics is closely related to anomalous monism, but notes that Davidson's acceptance of even non-strict psychophysical laws may have been untenable for Spinoza. See Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza*, 154.

¹⁹ Though Spinoza's definition of attributes as "that which the intellect perceives of substance as constituting its essence" suggests that he may be amenable to Davidson's view. If the intellect's perception is tied to conceptual schemes, a *prima facie* plausible connection, then Spinoza's metaphysics converges with anomalous monism— "ontological monism and a multiplicity of conceptual schemes."

²⁰ Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Physicalism," 233. Contra Kim, Campbell claims that *explanatory pluralism*, the view that events are describable in multiple non-competing ways, is more plausible than explanatory exclusion. Campbell, *Mental Events*, 73-106.

"The ideal of a comprehensive vocabulary in which complete explanations could in theory be given of any event does not rule out the possibility of another, irreducibly different, vocabulary in which alternative explanations of the very same events could be produced. There might be many such possible systems. So nothing precludes as unintelligible the idea that the vocabularies of the mental and the physical belong to two different, but equally complete, systems of explanation for the same world."²¹

These claims contrast sharply with the inclination, evident in Kim, to consider the mental and the physical as in some sort of competition for explanatory ground. Both reductionism and eliminativism seek to oust the mental from our explanatory repertoire in favor of a pure physicalism, at least in theory. There is a sense that mental states cannot possibly be a part of the ultimate causal explanation of the world unless they can, in principle, be subsumed under the strict laws of the physical world. Spinoza's metaphysics and Davidson's anomalous monism suggest that this assumption is misguided. Their related theories demonstrate the plausibility of epistemic pluralism grounded in ontological monism. In the following section I will lay out a view that purports to show, contra Davidson and Spinoza, that the mental cannot be involved in causal explanation.

Anomalous Monism and Epiphenomenalism

Epiphenomenalism is the claim that mental events are merely the effect of physical processes, and can cause neither physical events nor other mental events. A major critique of anomalous monism is that it entails epiphenomenalism, and thus contradicts the principle of causal interaction. There are many arguments to this conclusion, but in this essay I will directly address only one—the argument from explanatory exclusion.²²

In his attempt to show that anomalous monism entails epiphenomenalism, Ted Honderich introduces 'the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causally-Relevant Properties,' which is the claim that events are causally connected only in virtue of having causally relevant properties.²³ Thus Honderich holds that a causal description of an event is a description of the

²¹ Donald Davidson, "Spinoza's Causal Theory of the Affects," in *Truth, Language, and History*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 304.

²² "Numerous authors have argued that Donald Davidson's anomalous monism reduces mental properties to the status of causally inert epiphenomena. In fact, so common is this objection that it has taken on the air of orthodoxy." Campbell, *Mental Causation*, 99.

²³ Ted Honderich, "The Argument for Anomalous Monism," *Analysis* 42 (1982): 59–64.

properties that are causally relevant to that event. Given this principle, Honderich concludes that anomalous monism entails either psychophysical laws or epiphenomenalism—both of which contradict principles of the theory. This unhappy conclusion is reached because by Honderich's hypothesis a mental event must be causal in virtue of either mental properties or physical properties.

Consider a chess game in which the player of the white pieces desires to begin the game, and therefore picks up the e-pawn and moves it to the e4 square. The decision to begin the game is clearly describable as a mental event, but it is not clear whether the decision is causally related to the moving of the pawn *as mental* or *as physical*. If the event is causal in virtue of its mental properties then by the Principle of the Nomological Character of Causally-Relevant Properties there must be a lawlike connection between the mental event and its physical effects. In this case anomalous monism entails psychophysical laws. If the event is causal *as physical* then the mental properties of the decision are not genuinely causal and epiphenomenalism follows. Kim follows the pattern of Honderich's argument, and extends it by appealing to the principle of explanatory exclusion.

Kim claims that, "on anomalous monism, events are causes or effects only as they instantiate physical laws, and this means that an event's mental properties make no causal difference."²⁴ There is no room for mental properties to cause anything because the laws of physics explain all possible causal events, and by explanatory exclusion there can be only one "*complete and independent* explanation of any one event."²⁵ The key disagreement is that for Kim, events are causal only *in virtue of physical properties*, i.e. properties that instantiate the laws of physics. As noted in the previous section, on Davidson's view it is meaningless to attribute causal power to a property of an event because properties are descriptions of events—indications that a certain epistemic approach has been taken. To say that an event is causal because it is a physical event is a reversal of the order of explanation. On Davidson's view, we call an event physical if its causal explanation is given in only physical terms. The point of contention is therefore whether any property at all should be considered causally efficacious, as opposed to the event referenced under a particular sort of description.

Kim clearly believes that properties are causally efficacious. Neil Campbell helpfully suggests that, "Kim's emphasis on explanatory realism has blinded him to the fact that, understood as an epistemological enterprise,

²⁴ Kim, "The Myth of Nonreductive Materialism," 35.

²⁵ Jaegwon Kim, "Mechanism, Purpose, and Explanatory Exclusion," *Philosophical Perspectives* 3. Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory (1989): 79.

explaining is always explaining under a description."²⁶ Campbell argues that explanatory pluralism better captures the goal of causal explanation as an epistemological enterprise.

It should be clear that for Davidson, properties are best understood as predicates or descriptions—linguistic rather than ontological aspects of events. On this understanding there is "no literal sense...to speak of an event causing something as mental, or by virtue of its mental properties, or as described in one way or another."²⁷ Thus Davidson explicitly rejects the claim that properties can be causally efficacious.

The argument against anomalous monism from explanatory exclusion to epiphenomenalism rests on a tacit assumption of properties as ontologically inherent—the view that mental properties and physical properties inhere in events. Davidson does not share the view that properties are ontological components of events. Without this assumption there is no sense in which the mental and the physical must compete for explanatory primacy. The causes and effects of events are comprehensible under different descriptions, and explanations of events approach complete adequacy by taking into account all relevant descriptions, not by excluding them. In the next section I will further explicate the contrast between the view of properties as ontological constituents of events and Davidson's event-ontology.

Events and Explanations

I have argued that Davidson's view mentality and physicality are not *ontological components* of events, but rather *explanatory predicates* of events. Identifying an event as either mental or physical is a way of describing how we ought to understand it, and not a way of differentiating events based on ontological status. As Davidson asserts, "It is *events* that have the power to change things, not our various ways of describing them."²⁸ Different descriptions of an event cannot change its causal relations, but different constitutive components plausibly could. The former is an epistemological difference, while the latter is an ontological difference. Two radically divergent views of causation and causal explanation emerge from this distinction.

If properties are taken to be ontologically inherent components of events, then it makes perfect sense to talk about causal relations between events in virtue of one or another property. On this view the causal relations of an event depend on which properties are involved. Causal explanations of events rest on

²⁶ Campbell, *Mental Causation*, 89

²⁷ Donald Davidson, "Thinking Causes," *Mental Causation* Ed. J. Heil and A. Mele. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

²⁸ Davidson, "Thinking Causes," 12.

knowledge about how different properties cause the events being described. For example, the path of a golf ball is affected by a golf club in virtue of the physical properties at play in the club hitting the ball, and a proper explanation of that event consists in stating the physical properties that fully explain the flight of the ball. But in virtue of what property did the golfer decide to swing the club? Myriad questions about mental causation arise as soon as we try to make sense of a mental property, e.g. the intention to hit a golf ball, affecting physical properties such as the motion of the golfer's body, the club, and the ball.

On the other hand, if properties are understood as predicates assigned to events based on how they are described, then it makes no sense whatsoever to talk about causal relations of events in virtue of one or another property. Recall Davidson's criterion for mental and physical events:

"Now we may say an event is mental if and only if it has a mental description, or if there is a mental open sentence true of that event alone. Physical events are those picked out by descriptions or open sentences that contain only the physical vocabulary essentially."²⁹

On this view the causal relations of an event are completely independent of whether they are mental events or physical events. Causal explanations of the event need not rest on knowledge about how particular properties of that event give rise to its causal effects, because properties depend on epistemic categorization, not on the ontological status of the event. The flight of the golf ball can and should be described by reference to the laws of physics because those laws are usefully applicable to that event, but not because the physical properties of that event are ontologically primary. Explaining the golfer's initiation of the swing can be adequately explained by a primary reason, namely that the golfer wanted the ball to travel toward the hole and believed that hitting it with the club was the appropriate action to that end.³⁰ The problem of determining in virtue of what property the golfer decided to swing simply dissolves because events are not causal in virtue of the way they are described.

Such an explanation of the golfer's intentional action exemplifies Davidson's three principles. The golfer's mentally described intention causally interacts with the resulting physically described swing and flight of the ball. The nomological character of causation is upheld because the golfer's mental state supervenes on an instance of neural, chemical, and thus physical interaction that

²⁹ Davidson, "Mental Events," 174.

³⁰ For the seminal discussion of primary reasons see Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," in *Essays on Actions and Events*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 12-25.

is in principle describable by the laws of physics. The mental state is anomalous because that particular instance of neural, chemical, physical interaction is not subsumed under any strict psychophysical law relating the intention to hit a golf ball with that particular instantiation of the laws of physics.³¹

Conclusion

Consider an explanation of the relation between the thoughts of Aristotle, Spinoza, and Davidson. Imagine the vast and convoluted series of events causally linking all of the ways in which Aristotle influenced Spinoza and the two influenced Davidson—the propagation and permutation of thought through distance and time. In principle the three philosophers can be described in purely physical terms as having existed in particular states at particular times such that they inscribed or typed out what were to become canonical philosophical texts. Purely physical descriptions could be used, *arguendo*, to fully describe all the neural and behavioral events that instantiated their reading, discussing, and writing about the relevant concepts. The problem is that we cannot make sense of such a description. Perhaps we could discern that three *Homo sapiens* are involved, due to the highly specific descriptions of brain activity and muscle movements, but how could this lead us to an understanding of how the explanandum hangs together in any comprehensible sense? The language of the mental as explained historically is the appropriate conceptual apparatus for tracing the causal relations in this instance. There is no question of attempting to discern which predictive *physical* laws were instantiated such that Davidson inherited and passed on the philosophical legacies of Aristotle and Spinoza. Nevertheless, we can truly claim that Davidson's thoughts about both thinkers caused him to write *Aristotle's Action* and *Spinoza's Causal Theory of the Affects*. I take this to be Davidson's point when he writes, "Ignorance of competent predictive laws does not inhibit valid causal explanation, or few causal explanations could be made."³² The laws of physics are not proper tools for describing webs of causal influence in normative, intentional, diachronic projects like the development of philosophical systems.

³¹ "The laws whose existence is required if reasons are causes of actions do not, we may be sure, deal in the concepts in which rationalizations must deal. If the causes of a class of events (actions) fall in a certain class (reasons) and there is a law to back each singular causal statement, it does not follow that there is any law connecting events classified as reasons with events classified as actions—the classifications may be neurological, chemical, or physical." Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," 24.

³² Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," 23.

Anomalous monism is important because it makes sense of two central modes of explanation and attribution of causation—the strict laws of physics and the loose but non-arbitrary attribution of reasons, beliefs, and intentions. Both play important roles in our explanatory repertoire, and both help us to understand the causal web of events. It is a mistake to assume either that the denial of psychophysical laws entails dualism or that ontological monism entails reductionism or eliminativism. Anomalous monism reconciles ontological monism and the denial of psychophysical laws by demonstrating that causal explanation is possible and preferable through multiple ways of talking about what is happening.

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The Demands of Disagreement: A Case for Conciliationism

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Abstract: Disagreements abound in virtually every sphere of intellectual inquiry, be it philosophical, religious, or political. Furthermore, many of these disagreements involve persons of comparable intelligence and learning. Thus the question of how to respond to such disagreements is one of significant importance. Accordingly, the philosophical literature on this topic has been growing, offering a variety of views that advise the appropriate way to respond. One of these views is conciliationism, which states that in the face of such disagreements one is rationally required to reduce confidence in one's belief. The success of this view can entail wide skeptical implications, and unsurprisingly it has generated much controversy. This controversy has spawned various challenges to the view, the most worrisome of which I believe is the objection that it is self-defeating. In this paper I advocate a strong version of conciliationism and offer ways in which the conciliationist can respond to the self-defeat objection.

In this paper I will address the topic of disagreement, specifically the question of how to respond regarding some belief when others just as intelligent and well-learned disagree. In doing so I will defend conciliationism, the view that in such cases of disagreement one is rationally required to reduce

confidence in that belief.¹ Furthermore, I will advocate a strong form of conciliationism, which requires not only *some* reduction but enough to give *equal weight* to the other view. This view may be called *equal weight conciliationism*, and henceforth I will refer to my view as such (or simply *EWC*).

For many of us it seems clear that there exist people of comparable intelligence and learning to us, and with whom we have disagreements about various kinds of beliefs—religious, political, philosophical or otherwise. So if EWC is true, many of us would be required to reduce our confidence in those beliefs. In the following I will briefly introduce the conciliationist’s argument from disagreement, which is meant to support the truth of EWC.² Afterwards I will address what I believe to be the most worrisome objection to EWC, the self-defeat objection, which states that EWC ought to be rejected because it is self-defeating. After introducing what I believe to be the strongest formulation of this objection I will offer three responses in defense of EWC.

The Argument from Disagreement:

Conciliationism in its barest form claims the following: if S is in a situation of disagreement with an epistemic peer regarding belief p and S is aware of this, then S has an epistemic obligation to reduce her confidence in p. First, some definitions. I will refer to such cases of disagreement *epistemic peer disagreements* (henceforth *EPD*). People are epistemic peers if and only if they are cognitive peers as well as evidential peers. They are cognitive peers if and only if they are “equally intelligent, equally adept at reasoning, equally good at memory recall, and so forth” (Oppy 187) (i.e., having the same cognitive skills).³ Being evidential peers means to be “equally well-informed” of the

¹ The notion of rational requirement is understood in terms of justified belief, and justified belief is understood in terms of conformity to evidence. This may be distinguished from other forms of justification. Here, rationality is used in a purely epistemic sense, not in any pragmatic or moral sense. Thus it’s compatible with the view to believe that one can be pragmatically or morally justified in *not* reducing confidence in some cases of such disagreement. If one views as pragmatically or morally justified whatever maximizes well-being, and believing the proposition “I will survive this disease” best fulfills maximal well-being, she may be pragmatically or morally justified in *not* reducing confidence in this particular belief apart from epistemic obligations. The discussion of whether rationality ought to be conceived purely epistemically is beyond the scope of this paper.

² Due to space constraints, I will not be able to address every nuance of the argument. Instead, I will only lay out its basic formulation and refer the reader to other texts for further discussion.

³ This is meant to encompass both lower order skills (those regarding belief-formation based on lower order evidence) as well as higher order skills (those regarding assessing how well the lower order evidence supports a belief). An example of the former is using perceptual faculties to arrive at beliefs like “there is a paper in front of me.” The latter refers to evaluating evidence about evidence. An example of this is using logic and induction to form beliefs *about* lower order skills to arrive at beliefs like “my perceptual

evidence and arguments relevant to the question at hand (Oppy 187). And lastly, we must include a consideration of intentions. If you know that an epistemic peer's disagreement isn't aimed at truth, e.g. that she is lying on the basis of some pragmatic interest or simply joking, it's clear that no confidence reduction is required. Thus we're led to supplement the notion of EPD to include an additional condition: what James Kraft calls "sincerity equivalence" (Kraft₁ 66), which obtains if and only if both parties are equally sincere in their aim for the truth.⁴ Henceforth I will assume that sincerity equivalence obtains wherever I assume that an EPD obtains.

The conciliationist's position is that a party of an EPD, being aware of the peerhood, lacks any reason to think herself any more likely to be closer to the truth than her peer.⁵ Thus, to remain firm in her initial belief is to give arbitrary preference to it. This steadfastness is a failure to do what is rationally required, and has been referred to as "epistemic chauvinism" (Kraft₁ 77) and "dogmatism" (Oppy 189). The awareness of EPD over some belief *p* produces skeptical pressure which defeats one's justifications for *p*. Since it works by providing reasons to doubt one's correctness in *p* and thereby weakening the link between *p* and one's evidence for *p*, it is an *undercutting defeater*. Thus the subject is rationally required to reduce her confidence in *p* by giving equal weight to her peer's. This could mean adjusting her belief to meet the other's half way (i.e. splitting the difference) or, in cases of all-or-nothing beliefs, suspending judgment.⁶ Formally stated, the argument is as follows:

- (1) If *S* is in an EPD with *R* regarding some question *q*, then *S* and *R* have the same evidence and cognitive skills relevant to *q*, they are equally sincere, and *S* is aware of this.
- (2) If *S* and *R* have the same evidence and cognitive skills relevant to *q*, and they are equally sincere (and *S* is aware of this), *S* and *R* are equally likely to get at the truth regarding *q*, and *S* is aware of this.

faculties are reliable in the current circumstance." For further explanation, see (Kraft₁ 66).

⁴ Some prefer David Christensen's "independence clause" over Kraft's sincerity equivalence in order to preclude certain counterexamples, taking it to be appropriately broader. The clause requires the subject to not have any reasons independent of the reasons for the target belief to think that the peer in question is wrong on the occasion (e.g. being drunk) (Christensen 2010). However, I believe this is superfluous since the assumption of peerhood is meant to establish that the peer is equally likely to get at the truth regarding the question at hand, thus precluding such reasons to think the peer is less likely or wrong on the occasion for reasons such as being drunk.

⁵ Several helpful scenarios illustrating conciliationist intuitions at play here can be found in Oppy (2010).

⁶ It should be noted that the conciliatory principle of splitting the difference is controversial. Some have argued against it, e.g. Alastair Wilson (2010), but Shawn Graves (2013) has claimed that EWC need not commit to this principle of splitting the difference. Whether Graves is correct, it seems possible that EWC ultimately need not commit to this principle if sufficiently pressed.

- (3) If S and R are equally likely to get at the truth regarding q (and S is aware of this), then S has no reason to think S's belief regarding q is closer to the truth than R's belief regarding q, and S is aware of this.
- (4) If S is aware that she has no reason to think S's belief regarding q is closer to the truth (or is true) than R's belief regarding q, then S has no reasons to give her belief regarding q epistemic privilege, and S is aware of this.
- (5) If S has no reasons to give her belief regarding q epistemic privilege (and S is aware of this), then for S to give her belief regarding q epistemic privilege is arbitrary.
- (6) For S to remain steadfast in her belief regarding q is for S to give it epistemic privilege.
- (7) ∴ If S is in an EPD with R regarding q (and S is aware of this), for S to remain steadfast in her belief regarding q is arbitrary. (From (1) – (6).)
- (8) ∴ In order for S to avoid being arbitrary in an EPD with R regarding q (where S is aware of it), S must not remain steadfast in her belief regarding q (i.e. S must reduce confidence by giving equal weight to her peer). (Contraposition of (7).)

Much of the skeptical force of EWC depends on the prevalence of peerhood (that EPDs obtain to a significant degree in reality). Arguments for such prevalence are beyond the scope of this paper, but if it is correct that EPDs do in fact obtain significantly we may add the following:⁷

- (9) It is the case that for many of us EPD obtains in many areas of belief (e.g. religious, political, philosophical, etc.).

⁷ Some have raised the worry that the kind of peerhood necessary for conciliationist applications is too idealized a concept, suggesting that they obtain very rarely if ever. Among them are Oppy (2010) and Nathan King (2012, forthcoming). However, I believe that the prevalence of such peerhood does obtain. Though I can't treat the issue fully here, I will note that the conciliationist can use a notion of *sufficient similarity* to establish peerhood. This sufficiency is understood in terms of being similar enough to establish equal likelihood to get at the truth. Thus, if two parties are evidential peers their respective evidence renders them equally likely to get at the truth, all other things being equal. They are cognitive peers if they respective cognitive skills render them equally likely to get at the truth, all other things being equal. The same may be said for sincerity equivalence. The use of this notion of sufficiency allows the conciliationist to avoid requiring anything like *identity* of epistemic resources for peerhood to obtain, which is clearly too strong. Indeed, such identity is widely recognized as unnecessary for someone else's belief's having epistemic weight. Furthermore, when the notion of sufficiency puts peerhood in terms of likelihood of getting at the truth, it seems plausible that there is a prevalence of peerhood. This is because in order to deny sufficient similarity one must attribute to all who disagree an epistemic inferiority (the types of which I list below), and I suspect that doing so is implausible to many.

- (10) ∴ In order for many of us to avoid being arbitrary, we must not remain steadfast in those areas of belief and reduce confidence so as to give equal weight to our epistemic peers.

If the argument from disagreement is correct, the upshot is that *rational EPD* (a case of EPD where a party *doesn't* reduce confidence while maintaining rationality) where both parties are aware of the EPD cannot possibly obtain. Any case of EPD requires the involved parties to adjust their beliefs, resolving the disagreement by meeting each other in the middle or meeting each other in suspension. Thus according to EWC the very notion of rational EPD is incoherent. The *disagreement* aspect of any EPD must be appropriately resolved in order for the parties to remain rational. And this is done by confidence reduction, which may result in splitting the difference or suspension. Thus if EWC is correct the only way to avoid this is to deny that the necessary conditions for EPD are met, which leaves the following options: believe that (a) a party has evidential inferiority (thus denying evidential peerhood), (b) a party has cognitive inferiority (thus denying cognitive peerhood), (c) a party lacks intellectual sincerity, or (d) a combination of the three.⁸ Thus for any case of disagreement, one must either resolve it by meeting each other in the middle or in suspension, or ascribe to the peer one of the four kinds of epistemic failures.

The Objection from Self-Defeat

Many have objected to EWC on the basis that it is self-defeating. A principle is taken to be self-defeating if its acceptance somehow leads to its own rejection.⁹ In doing so these objectors advocate for conciliationism's counterpart, the steadfast view (the rejection of conciliationism). These objectors include Plantinga (1995), Timothy O'Connor (2009), Brian Weatherson (2012), among others. David Christensen has described the reasoning behind this objection as the following:

⁸ Note that the option of resorting to the claim that one's peer must have just made a mistake in this case is precluded, as that violates the conditions of epistemic peerhood. One might make a distinction between *performance* and *competence* regarding cognitive skill, and claim that only competence is inherent to cognitive skill. If this is true, then one may object that one can maintain cognitive peerhood while still claiming that the peer has made a mistake. However, this still violates cognitive peerhood since it is understood to be equal likelihood to get at the truth *with regards to the relevant matter of inquiry*. Peerhood is understood to be relative to the matter at hand, since only such a peerhood is epistemically relevant to how we should respond to the matter at hand. And to give reasons for the claim that the peer has made a mistake would be to give reasons to think that the peer is less likely to get at the truth. Appealing to a peer's performance failure amounts to preferring one's own performance reliability, and thus one's own cognitive skill. Thus cognitive peerhood encompasses performance as well as competence. A full treatment of this matter is beyond the scope of this paper, but a more thorough discussion is found in Kraft₂.

⁹ Such principles have also been referred to as those that are "rationally self-undermining" (Graves 2013).

Several people have noted that, at least given the current state of epistemological opinion, there is a sense in which conciliationism is self-undermining. For example, I, as a conciliatonist, know full well that several excellent philosophers oppose my view in fact, it seems to me that opinion on conciliationism is presently divided roughly evenly. By my own lights, then, I should not be highly confident in conciliationism. So in a sense, my conciliationism is self-undermining. (7)

Additionally, Adam Elga (2010) has described it as follows:

A view on disagreement should offer advice on how to respond to disagreement about disagreement. But conciliatory views on disagreement run into trouble in offering such advice. The trouble is this: In many situations involving disagreement about disagreement, conciliatory views call for its own rejection. So conciliatory views on disagreement are incoherent. (178-179)

This apparent self-defeat of EWC is then taken to be grounds for its failure. Indeed, it appears to be the case that disagreement obtains over EWC itself, and I suspect most if not all subscribers to EWC aren't willing to dismiss the likes of Plantinga, O'Connor, and other dissenters as epistemic inferiors. So if this objection is correct, it would prove highly problematic for EWC. There are several ways to interpret just what this objection means, some stronger than others. The different interpretations stem from distinguishing several important concepts: one is Christensen's distinction between *automatically* self-defeating principles (self-defeating under all possible circumstances) and *potentially* self-defeating principles (self-defeating only under certain possible circumstances) (7). Furthermore, one can distinguish between potentially self-defeating principles and *actually* self-defeating principles (self-defeating in reality, i.e. in our present circumstance). The final distinction is between grounds for falsehood (proving the falsehood of the principle) and grounds for rejection (proving that one is unjustified in holding the principle). One can object that EWC is either automatically, potentially, or actually self-defeating, and furthermore that this either gives us grounds for its falsehood or grounds for us to reject it as unjustified. After taking these into consideration, I believe the strongest formulation to be the following:¹⁰

- (1) Actually self-defeating principles give contradicting advice.
- (2) Principles that give contradicting advice are incoherent.
- (3) Principles that are incoherent should be rejected.
- (4) EWC is an actually self-defeating principle.
- (5) ∴ EWC should be rejected. (From (1), (2), (3), and (4).)

¹⁰ Though I cannot treat the matter fully here, I reason I believe this to be the strongest is that the various other formulations of the objection are susceptible to counterexamples. For one example, see Graves (2013), who argues against the objection that a potentially self-defeating principle must be false.

In the following, I will pose several responses to it in defense of EWC.

The First Response to the Self-Defeat Objection

Initially, each of the objection's premises seems plausible. I expect that premises (1), (2), and (3) would be uncontroversial. However, the argument can be shown to be problematic in several areas. First, if the argument is correct, it poses problems not just for EWC but also weaker versions of conciliationism which I suspect are plausible to many. If we accept Christensen's observation that there is a roughly even divide between the conciliationist and steadfast camps, then those who subscribe to weak versions of conciliationism (indeed, *any* version of conciliationism) face a requirement to reduce confidence in their own conciliationist beliefs. To show why this is the case, examine premise (1): that actual self-defeat entails contradictory advice. The premise works by supposing that S assents to some actually self-defeating principle P that applies to matters of inquiry q_1 , q_2 , etc., where P advises S to take some attitude A toward q_1 , some attitude B toward q_2 , and so on. But because P entails the rejection of P, it also entails the rejection of the justification for attitude A toward q_1 . Then, for S, P advises attitude A as well as attitude not-A (entailed by advising some attitude other than A). Thus P gives contradictory advice. A good illustration of this is given by Elga (6). Paraphrased here, it is as follows: Suppose that there is an appliance ratings magazine called *Consumer Reports*, which also rates ratings magazines. For some appliance x, *Consumer Reports* rates that it's very good (perhaps 9/10) while a competing ratings magazine *Smart Shopper* rates it as poor (say 1/10). Then suppose *Consumer Reports*, in its section where it rates ratings magazines, states that *Smart Shopper* is the best and that it should be trusted over all others. Then, in endorsing *Smart Shopper's* ratings, it advises that x is poor (1/10) while simultaneously advising that it's very good (9/10), which is contradictory.

Now, in looking at any form of conciliationism, we see that it has the same result as *Consumer Reports*. Let *Weak Conciliationism* (WC) be the principle which states "in any case of EPD, a party should reduce *some* (but very little) confidence in her view." Then let S be someone who believes in WC, who holds some attitude A toward some matter of inquiry q, and finds that EPD obtains over q. It follows that WC advises S to reduce confidence in A, and assume some different attitude (call it A_{reduced}) toward it. Then S discovers that EPD obtains over WC itself, and thus by WC's own light reduces her confidence in WC. So, for S, WC advises attitude A_{reduced} toward q but simultaneously takes away her basis for A_{reduced} (by undermining WC), thereby advising not- A_{reduced} (and instead something closer to her original attitude, A). Thus WC gives S contradictory advice.

Here one may note that since WC is a very weak version of conciliationism, it doesn't require suspension like EWC but instead only a very modest confidence reduction, and thus doesn't *completely* defeat itself. Then, upon discovering EPD over WC, S must be slightly less confident about WC but not enough to undermine S's basis for A_{reduced} . However, it's clear that one's confidence level in a principle governs one's attitude toward whatever matter of

inquiry to which that principle applies. And this relation appears to be such that a change in the confidence level for any such principle would correspondingly change one's attitude for that matter of inquiry. For example, imagine a machine that randomly picks a marble from a bag, and if the marble is blue it tells you a true statement and if the marble is red it tells you a false one (and you have no way to distinguish them). You place 100 blue marbles in the bag and start the machine. Obviously, your attitude toward the truth or falsehood of the machine's statement is that "it is 100% true" (call this A_{100}). Now you replace one of the blue marbles with a red one and restart the machine. Now your attitude toward the same matter is that "it is 99% true" (call this A_{99}). Here the proportion of blue marbles in the bag represent your confidence in some given principle, and it's clear that even a slight reduction in confidence yields attitudes that are close yet distinct. A_{100} and A_{99} are contradictory; you can't hold them both simultaneously. The upshot is that any principle that even partially defeats itself will give contradictory advice and entail incoherence. Thus, if the self-defeat objection is correct, we must reject not only EWC but all versions of conciliationism, including WC. I suspect many of us with even the slightest conciliationist leanings would deny the consequent of this, which requires rejecting the objection. So all types of conciliationists, without showing that EPDs never obtain with respect to their version, should be motivated to reject the self-defeat objection.

But those in the steadfast camp might remain unfazed. However, they're not completely untouched by the self-defeat objection, either. That's because non-absolute versions of the steadfast view can still be taken as self-defeating, unless shown otherwise. Non-absolute (or *partial*) versions of the steadfast view may claim that there are at least *some* circumstances where EPDs don't require any confidence reduction. But if these circumstances don't include EPDs regarding their own steadfast view, it follows that at least some reduction is required and the view faces self-defeat. But I suspect the necessary qualification would be made easily enough by any proponent of the steadfast view if pressed. Thus, more is needed to defend EWC against the self-defeat objection. In the following I will provide two responses that attempt to meet this requirement. And since it has been shown that the self-defeat objection applies to all forms of conciliationism, I will be responding in defense of conciliationism in general.

The Second Response to the Self-Defeat Objection

This response denies premise (4) of the self-defeat objection (that conciliationism actually self-defeating) by claiming that conciliationism by its very nature is self-exempting. A principle is self-exempting if and only if it doesn't apply to itself. Elga, who has argued for this response, describes the move as shifting to "*partly* conciliatory views: views that recommend giving ground in the face of disagreement about many matters, but not about disagreement itself" (1). So the new formulation of conciliationism would state everything as before, but with the following clause: "no confidence reduction is required in when an EPD is over conciliationism itself." Though convenient for

the conciliationist, the obvious challenge is to show how it isn't ad hoc and arbitrary. Elga has attempted this by giving the following argument:

For the discussion of *Consumer Reports* and inductive methods shows that it is in the nature of giving consistent advice that one's advice be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. And views on disagreement give advice on how to respond to evidence. So in order to be consistent views on disagreement must be dogmatic with respect to their own correctness. In other words, the real reason for constraining conciliatory views is not specific to disagreement. Rather, the real reason is a completely general constraint that applies to any fundamental policy, rule, or method. In order to be consistent, a fundamental policy, rule, or method must be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness. This general constraint provides independent motivation for a view on disagreement to treat disagreements about disagreement in a special way. So partly conciliatory views need no ad hoc restriction in order to avoid the self-undermining problem. They only need restrictions that are independently motivated. (10)

For Elga, an inductive method is an evaluative principle that provides the subject with recommendations or advice regarding the matters of inquiry being evaluated. His claim is that for any inductive method, to put forward advice at all is to necessarily put them forward as good advice, and this is possible only if the method considers them superior to contrary advice. The idea is that within any given principle, there is an implicit self-assertion that precludes it from entailing any self-denial.¹¹ This is understood to avoid the charge of being ad hoc because it is understood to apply to all inductive methods, regardless of whether they face self-defeat charges or not. If this is correct, since conciliationist views are such inductive methods, it follows that they are by their very nature self-exempting and thus avoid actual self-defeat.¹²

If Elga is correct, conciliationism can overcome the self-defeat objection. However, there are at least two areas where Elga's view can be

¹¹ The conciliationist may note that this need not commit her to think there can't be any methods that give contradictory advice, since contradicting advice can be distinguished from self-defeating advice. It just means that there can't be methods that advise against themselves as methods, since the clause preempts self-denial, but not necessarily self-contradiction. For example, suppose a method that states that on Tuesdays $2 + 2 = 4$, on weekends $2 + 2 = 5$, and on Friday something else (and the method recommends them as necessary truths)—then this isn't necessarily self-defeating but gives contradictory advice.

¹² Elga takes conciliationism to be unable to overcome the self-dejeat objection, and so thinks conciliationists must shift their view to what he calls *partial* (i.e. *self-exempting*) *conciliationism*, which is identical to regular conciliationism but avoids the self-defeat objection. However, I believe this change in terminology is unnecessary. If Elga is right, then conciliationism just would be naturally self-exempting, and there wouldn't be a conciliationist view that *isn't* self-exempting. Thus we seem to have no need to rename it as *partial* or *self-exempting conciliationism*.

challenged. Here I will respond to both in defense of Elga's view. The first charge is that there is a lack of legitimate motivation for the idea that all principles necessarily preclude self-denial. This objection to Elga has been pressed by John Pittard:

The arbitrariness objection [to Elga's self-exemption argument] is not that the conciliationist has absolutely no reason for adding self-exemption to her theory, nor is the objection that the reason for self-exemption is not general enough. For it is obvious that the conciliationist has a reason for adding a self-exemption clause: namely, avoiding epistemic self-defeat and (possibly) incoherence. And avoiding self-defeat and incoherence are essential concerns for any position. (6)

Pittard claims that if there is any motivation for the claim that all principles have an implicit clause that preempts self-denial, it is simply that all principles are desired to be acceptable by those who defend them. Of course the conciliationist is motivated to make her view self-exempting if that means avoiding the self-defeat objection, just as all people are motivated to manipulate their views in order to avoid whatever devastating objection they may face. But this is obviously not a reason to think that self-denial clauses really are necessarily implicit in all inductive methods. The property of being correct is something for which every view is motivated, but it would still be ad hoc for some view to appeal to this general motive as grounds for the claim that *it is* correct. Furthermore, it's clear that many inductive methods don't have any motivations for self-exemption, namely principles that are either not actually self-defeating or not even potentially self-defeating. The proponent of the steadfast view, for example, would be right in resisting such a generalization of self-exemption motives, since she has no reason to think that her inductive method (the steadfast view) requires such a clause. Thus it's false that all inductive methods have motivations for self-exemption. Pittard claims that to really answer the charge of being ad hoc, the proponent of self-exemption must show why the "skeptical pressures" that conciliationism produces on other disagreements don't arise in the disagreement over conciliationism itself (6). But if Elga has merely appealed to a general motive for being ad hoc, which ultimately fails to even be universal in terms of self-exemption, then he clearly hasn't met this challenge.

Elga's view, however, can overcome this charge. Elga doesn't claim that all principles have a motive for self-exemption because their believers desire them. Rather, his claim is that a motive for self-assertion (i.e. non-self-denial) is implicit within the principles themselves, and this is wholly apart from anyone's desire for their views to be correct. The conciliationist need not appeal to the idea that every view is necessarily motivated to be self-exempting, but only that every view, in asserting its implications (i.e. in giving advice), necessarily asserts itself as correct, thus preempting self-denial (which, for conciliationism, amounts to self-exemption). This is what Elga means when he says, "In order to be consistent, a fundamental policy, rule, or method must be dogmatic with respect to its own correctness" (10). And unlike the self-

exemption clause specifically, this self-assertion is something that is necessarily implicit in *any* inductive method, regardless of whether it appears to be potentially self-defeating or not. For example, the steadfast view, when giving advice over cases of disagreement, only makes sense if it advises that *it is correct*—i.e., with respect to itself, dogmatically assert itself. To assume the contrary would be to assume that the view *doesn't* advise the things it does, which is incoherent.¹³ Elga shows that in the same way, *Consumer Reports*, in giving advice on appliances, only makes sense if it presumes that *it is correct*. This is necessarily so if the magazine is to be coherent, and this is why Pittard misses the point when he says, “Surely the fact that [*Consumer Report's* inductive method] ranks another [contradicting] ranking methodology more highly than itself points to a serious problem that cannot be justifiably dismissed by the move from [*Consumer Report's* inductive method] to [a self-exempting version]” (22). It's not that *Consumer Report* moves to a self-exempting version because it advises against itself, but rather that it *can't* advise against itself. In so far as it is an inductive method, it just never *would* in the first place. Indeed, it's difficult to imagine how that would even be possible, since the method by which it would rate methods would be identical to itself, thus seeming to infallibly result in rating itself the highest (which is the idea of self-assertion).¹⁴

Now apply this necessary self-assertion to conciliationism: it's not that when our reasoning brings us to accept conciliationism it is thereafter endangered by apparent self-defeat; rather, when our reasoning brings us to conciliationism, it necessarily brings us to a self-exempting conciliationism, and the problem of self-defeat doesn't arise at all. So to answer Pittard's demand, the reason why skeptical pressure usually generated by conciliationism isn't generated with regards to itself is that it's a natural part of the view to preclude it in the first place.¹⁵ It is the overlooking of this nature of inductive methods that can lead one to think otherwise. If this is correct, that means that implicit self-assertion is a necessary aspect of any inductive method, and thus appealing to it isn't ad hoc. And since implicit self-assertion precludes self-denying advice, conciliationism must necessarily be self-exempting.

The second charge to Elga's self-exemption view is that if the preceding argument is correct, it appears that *any* principle would be able to avoid self-defeat objections by appealing to it. If every principle features an implicit self-assertion that precludes self-denial, then it's hard to see how self-

¹³ The same intuition is found when we consider that statements like “everything I say is a lie” cannot possibly make sense unless they are self-exempting.

¹⁴ It may be argued that such a possibility of *Consumer Reports* rating some other magazine as superior is in fact conceivable, e.g. if their ratings are based on something like a random drawing and one of the options are that *Consumer Reports* is untrustworthy. But again, to stipulate that one of the options are that *Consumer Reports* is untrustworthy is to miss the point. Elga's argument is that such an option is precluded by the very fact that the inductive method asserts anything at all, since advice entails self-assertion.

¹⁵ To better understand Elga's view, perhaps it would be helpful to consider an inductive method's implicit self-assertion as being logically prior to actual instances of its advice.

defeat could ever obtain. But one might think that there are certain views for which self-defeat objections are obviously legitimate. Pittard makes this claim, saying, “Examples of self-defeat arguments that seem to pose legitimate challenges to the targeted theory might include Alvin Plantinga’s (1981) arguments against “classical foundationalism” and George Bealer’s (1992) arguments against empiricism” (22).¹⁶ If Pittard is correct, then such theories are counterexamples to Elga’s view.

However, I fail to find this charge convincing. Elga’s view aside, the self-defeat objection against conciliationism doesn’t seem any less plausible than those against other views, including Pittard’s examples. If Elga’s view has been shown to be correct, it means that the self-defeat objection against conciliationism is false despite initial plausibility. The natural consequence of this seems to be to apply Elga’s view to other principles facing self-defeat objections. The upshot is that in order to object to these principles, one must look elsewhere besides self-defeat, like arguments that attempt to show that the actual reasoning behind them is flawed.

The Third Response to the Self-Defeat Objection

This response attempts to show that even if Elga is wrong, self-defeat objections are never sufficient in and of themselves to motivate rejecting the target principles. That’s because they fail to show any actual flaw in the reasoning that got one to believe in the target principle in the first place. Note these two different ways to argue against a view: one is to argue against the premises and the inferences used (what the view is based on), attempting to show where the thinker went wrong, which usually leads to advocating some alternate view; the other is to use arguments like the self-defeat objection that claim that the view leads to some unacceptable consequence, and thus should be rejected itself (i.e. *reductio ad absurdum* arguments). The distinction can be seen in the following schematic: $e \rightarrow (R1) \rightarrow V \rightarrow (R2) \rightarrow UC$. Let e be subject S ’s body of evidence, $R1$ be some reasoning process that gets S from e to some view V (call this *basis reasoning*), and $R2$ be some reasoning process that gets S from V to some unacceptable consequence UC (call this *consequence reasoning*). If the targeted view is V , then the first method of argument stated above is to argue *against* $R1$ (the basis reasoning for V), while the second method like self-defeat objections argue *for* $R2$ (some consequence reasoning for V). Assuming that S has arrived at V , successfully arguing against her basis reasoning would be sufficient to motivate rejecting V , since it removes her initial justification for V . However, if V is objected to only by some line of consequence reasoning, it’s not clear that S has been given sufficient motivation to reject V . That’s because S ’s basis reasoning for V , $R1$, is left untouched. Arguments like the self-defeat objection doesn’t give any direct reason to think that $R1$ is wrong, and doesn’t give any direct reasons for supporting alternative views. As such, to S , the basis reasoning for V still appears as sound as it ever was.

¹⁶ Other examples may include logical positivism and the view that all statements are based on egoistic goals not ultimately aimed at truth.

One might object by saying that the self-defeat objection works simply based on its parallel structure to *modus tollens*, which states that if x entails y and y is false, then x must be false. In the same way, since V entails UC and UC should be rejected, it seems to just follow that V should be rejected, too. But looking at it this way arbitrarily puts exclusive focus on the consequence reasoning over the basis reasoning. Looking at $e \rightarrow (R1) \rightarrow V$, we see that it is structurally parallel to *modus ponens*. If $R1$ entails V , and $R1$ is correct, then V must be correct, too. Given that there's no reason to favor *modus tollens* over *modus ponens* since they're equally valid, merely showing that V leads to UC isn't sufficient for making one think that V is incorrect. In fact, the reasoning can easily be turned against the objection while using the same strategy: given that $e \rightarrow (R1) \rightarrow V$ and we know $R1$ is correct, then we know V is correct by *modus ponens*; so when considering the hypothetical "if $V \rightarrow (R2) \rightarrow UC$ is correct then V is incorrect (and should be rejected)," given that *we already know that V is correct*, by *modus tollens* we know that the antecedent of the hypothetical (that $V \rightarrow (R2) \rightarrow UC$ is correct) is false. (This is just *modus tollens* applied to the contrapositive of $V \rightarrow (R2) \rightarrow UC$.)¹⁷

What this shows is that self-defeat arguments, and any argument that objects to some view V based on some consequence reasoning without objecting to the basis reasoning, are insufficient by themselves to motivate rejecting V . At best they should motivate one to double-check their basis reasoning for V . Of course V should be rejected if it turns out that there is a flaw in the basis reasoning, but this amounts to facing direct arguments against the basis reasoning for V , apart from arguments from consequence reasoning like self-defeat objections. When facing an objection merely based on some consequence reasoning we have no reason to think it more likely that the mistake lies in the basis reasoning rather than the consequence reasoning itself.¹⁸ Thus, when we're only faced with arguments from consequence reasoning, we may rightly presume the soundness of our basis reasoning. And since mere arguments from consequence reasoning presume things we already established as false in the basis reasoning (as shown above), *modus tollens* advises us to reject them. The implication is that, in order to successfully motivate rejecting a view, an objector must provide arguments against its basis reasoning, and that arguments from consequence reasoning like the self-defeat objection are never sufficient. Even if this response doesn't establish that the basis reasoning always trumps consequent reasoning, it need not commit to such a claim. It's only meant to establish that arguments like the self-defeat objection can always be turned on themselves, which seems to leave them at the very least insufficient. If this is correct, the objector needs something more than the self-defeat objection to put pressure on conciliationism.

¹⁷ Perhaps this may be called a sort of Moorean Shift.

¹⁸ In fact, it may even be that we should privilege basis reasoning over consequence reasoning if within one's noetic structure the former is logically prior to the latter, and in that way is sequentially prior in our application of logical rules.

Conclusion

In this paper I introduced the conciliationist's argument from disagreement. Then I addressed the many possible formulations of the self-defeat objection, before offering three responses to what I believe to be the strongest. If these responses are correct, that means EWC (and conciliationism in general) is naturally self-exempting and overcomes the self-defeat objection, and that such objections that fail to attack the basis reasoning of a view is never sufficient to motivate rejecting it.¹⁹ Then we can turn to other objections to conciliationism over which there is plenty of debate, e.g. those given by Thomas Kelly (forthcoming), King (forthcoming), and Joseph Kim (2012). There are also indirect arguments that attempt to restrict the application of EWC, e.g. those given by Peter van Inwagen (1996), Ralph Wedgwood (2010), and Jerome Gellman (2000).²⁰ If these objections fare better, the conciliationist will have to respond further. But until it is shown that EWC fails, we find ourselves in the humbling position of reducing confidence in the face of EPDs.

¹⁹ It should be noted that apart from my responses to the self-defeat objection there are still other responses which the objector should consider, e.g. those made by Graves (2013), Pittard (2013), and Thomas Bogardus (2009). Pittard's paper is currently in the form of a draft on his website, for which I have received permission to cite in this paper.

²⁰ One might even try to limit the application of conciliationism by appealing to Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology (2000, 2011), though it is a view which I and many others believe ultimately fails.

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Resources for Philosophy Undergraduates

This section includes listings of journals, contests, and conferences — all of which are available to undergraduates in philosophy. If you have comments, suggestions, or questions, or if you would like to be listed here in the next issue, please contact us and we will gladly accommodate your request.

JOURNALS:

There are numerous journals, published both in print and online. The information is as recent as possible, but contact the specific journal to ensure accurate information.

Aporia: Brigham young University. Submissions are due early fall. Papers not to exceed 5,000 words. Send submissions to: Aporia, Department of Philosophy, JKHB 3196, Brigham young University, Provo, UT 84602. Visit: <http://aporia.byu.edu/>.

The Bertrand Russell Society Quarterly: Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Visit: <http://www.lehman.edu/deanhum/philosophy/BrSQ/>

The Dialectic: University of New Hampshire. Submissions are due in April. Essays (15-20 pages), short critical articles, book reviews, artwork. Send submissions to: The Dialectic, c/o Department of Philosophy, University of new Hampshire, Hamilton Smith 23, Durham, NH 03824. Visit: <http://www.unh.edu/philosophy/Programs/dialectic.htm>

Dialogue: Phi Sigma Tau (international society for philosophy). Published twice yearly. Accepts undergraduate and graduate submissions. Contact a local chapter of Phi Sigma Tau for details or write to Thomas L. Predergast, Editor, Dialogue, Department of Philosophy, Marquette University, Milwaukee WI 53233-2289. Visit: <http://www.achsnaatl.org/society.asp?society=pst>

The Dualist: Stanford University. Submissions are due late fall or early spring. 10-30 page submissions. For more information, see <http://www.stanford.edu/group/dualist/> or contact

the.dualist@gmail.com. Check website for information on submitting a paper and updates on the submission deadline.

Ephemeris: Union College. For more information, write: The Editors, Ephemeris, Department of Philosophy, Union College, Schenectady, NY 12308. Visit: <http://www.vu.union.edu/~ephemeris/>.

Episteme: Denison University. Due November 14. Submissions must be at most 4,000 words. Contact: The Editor, Episteme, Department of Philosophy, Denison University, Granville, Ohio 43023. Visit: <http://www.denison.edu/philosophy/episteme.html>

Interlocutor: University of the South, Sewanee. Questions can be addressed to Professor James Peterman at jpeterma@sewanee.edu. Send submissions to Professor James Peterman, Philosophy Department, 735 University Avenue, Sewanee, TN 37383-1000. Visit: <http://www.sewanee.edu/Philosophy/Journal/2006/current.html>

Janua Sophia: Edinboro University of Pennsylvania. Submissions and inquiries sent to Janua Sophia, c/o Dr. Corbin Fowler, Philosophy Department, Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, Edinboro, PA 16444. Visit: <http://www.edinboro.edu/cwis/philos/januasophia.html>

Princeton Journal of Bioethics: Princeton University. Visit <http://www.princeton.edu/~bioethic/journal/>.

Prolegomena: University of British Columbia. Visit <http://www.philosophy.ubc.ca/prolegom/> or write prolegom@hotmail.com or Prolegomena, Department of Philosophy, 1866 Main Mall, Buchanan E370, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C., Canada. V6T 1Z1.

Prometheus: Johns Hopkins University. Prometheus strives to promote both undergraduate education and research, and looks for submissions that originate from any scholarly field, as long as those submissions clearly demonstrate their applicability to philosophy. Visit <http://www.jhu.edu/prometheus/>. Write prometheusjhu@hotmail.com or Prometheus, c/o Philosophy

Dept., 347 Gilman Hall, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218.

Stoa: Santa Barbara City College. For more information, write The Center for Philosophical Education, Santa Barbara City College, Department of Philosophy, 721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara, CA 93109-2394. Visit: <http://www.sbcc.edu/philosophy/web-site/CPE.html>

The Yale Philosophy Review: Submissions due February 14. Visit: http://www.yale.edu/ypr/submission_guidelines.htm

CONFERENCES:

There are many undergraduate conferences, so contacting the philosophy departments of a few major schools in a particular area or researching on the web can be quite effective. The conferences below are by no means an exhaustive list.

American Philosophical Association: The APA website, <http://www.apa.udel.edu/apa/opportunities/conferences/>, contains an extensive list of conferences.

Butler Undergraduate Research Conference: Butler University. The conference is held in mid-April. See <http://www.butler.edu/urc/index.html> for details.

National Undergraduate Bioethics Conference: Notre Dame. Visit <http://ethicscenter.nd.edu/events/nubec.shtml> or write bioethic@nd.edu.

Pacific University Undergraduate Philosophy Conference: Pacific University. The conference is held in early April. Visit <http://www.pacificu.edu/as/philosophy/conference/index.cfm> for details.

Rocky Mountain Philosophy Conference: University of Colorado at Boulder. Visit: <http://www.colorado.edu/philosophy/rmpc/rmpc.html>

ESSAY CONTESTS:

The essay contest listed below aims at a broad range of undergraduates, but there are many other contests open to students enrolled at specific universities or interested in particular organizations.

Elie Wiesel Essay Contest: open to undergraduate juniors/seniors with faculty sponsor. Questions focus on current ethical issues. Submissions are due in late January. The top prize is \$5,000. For more information, visit:
<http://www.eliewieselfoundation.org/EthicsPrize/index.html>

The Dualist would like to thank the following contributors from Stanford University:

The Philosophy Department
The ASSU Publications Board

Special Thanks:
Lenia Constantinou
Vera Haugh
Nadeem Hussain
Krista Lawlor
Alberto Martin
Teresa Mooney
Eve Scott
Sunny Toy
Ai Tran

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