

## Can nonreductive physicalism solve the problem of mental causation?

In this paper I assess the nonreductive physicalist (NRP) approach to the problem of mental causation. My aim is twofold. First, I examine and refute Jaegwon Kim's objection to NRP, which is based on the exclusion argument; second, I call into question the NRP version of nonreductivism.

As Kim put it, if nonreductive physicalist does not want to commit herself to the odd phenomenon of magical-mental causation, she has to abandon the following homogeneity principle about mental causation:

*Homogeneity Thesis (HT):* Mental causes are effective in the same way as physical causes.

First, I attempt to show that there are two possible interpretations of HT: mental and physical causes are effective and either (1) they bring about their effect through different mechanisms, or (2) they bring about their effect through the same mechanism. The second interpretation brings with itself no commitment against the homogeneity of mental causation. However, at first glance, HT seems to be compatible only with the first interpretation.

Next, I examine in detail an argument to the effect that NRP is bound to collapse into emergentism, and attempt to show that the argument is fallacious. Special emphasis is put on Kim's reasoning, according to which for a mental property to be causally efficacious (and not merely causally relevant) it needs to have causal powers that are something 'over and above' the physical. For Kim, this amounts to a form of emergentism and as such is incompatible with physicalism. Kim's argument goes as follows:

- (P1) Mental properties are real
- (P2) If mental properties are real, then mental properties have causal powers
- (C1) Mental properties have causal powers
- (P3) Mental properties are irreducible properties
- (P4) Irreducible properties have irreducible causal powers
- (C2) Mental properties have irreducible causal powers
- (P5) If mental properties have irreducible causal powers, then they are emergent properties
- (K3) Mental properties are emergent properties

I will show that the argument lends its support from an ambiguity in (P5). If the expression "irreducible causal powers" is understood as saying that mental properties have causal powers that are not physical in nature, then the argument is valid. However, from the claim that the mental and the physical have different causal powers it does not follow that the mental has more causal powers than the corresponding physical. Indeed, it is a live option (one actually defended by some NRP theorists) that physical properties have more causal powers than mental properties, for the latter is a subset of the former. The subset view is a version of NRP that does not identify mental properties with physical properties; nonetheless, it is a physicalist theory.

Finally, I will discuss a worry that naturally emerges at this point: if the supervenience relation is strengthened in the way indicated above, are we not thereby falling back into reductive physicalism? It is a common feature of NRP and emergentism that they reject ontological reduction. However, it is far from clear that the causal/functional reduction put forth by proponents of the the subset view differs from ontological reduction. If I am correct, there is only one kind of physicalism that is compatible with the homogeneity thesis; namely, reductive physicalism.