PHIL 255
Week 7: Mental Causation
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Please turn off and put away all electronics.
Please avoid the last 2 rows.
Mental causation
Eliminativism

Mental Causation

Event = something that happens
Nonmental events cause mental events:
E.g. puck makes hockey player duck
Mental events cause nonmental events:
E.g. person wants cake so cake gone
Mental events cause mental events:
E.g. thinking of snow makes you sad

What is Causation?
Alternatives

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

Mechanistic Explanation

How does a bicycle move?
Parts: frame, wheels, gears, chain, pedals, etc.
Structure: e.g. pedal connected to gear.
Interactions: e.g. pedal moves chain.
Changes: e.g. wheels turn.
What is a Mechanism?

1. A mechanism is a system of parts whose interactions produce regular changes.

2. Biological examples: digestive system, evolution by natural selection

3. Social example: families, organizations.


Views of Mental Causation

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

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

2. **Dualism**: Mind and body interact.
   
   Objection: how does interaction work? Replies:
   
   Causality is constant conjunction.
   
   Parallelism: God coordinates mental & physical.

3. **Epiphenomenalism**: Physical events cause mental events but not vice versa. Objection: thoughts cause actions.

Exam 1

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

How do you think mental events cause physical events?

Brain Mechanism


Eliminative Materialism

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

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

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

Paul & Patricia Churchland

Folk Psychology

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

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

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

Reply: Folk psychology is at least approximately true.
Propositional Attitudes
Examples: beliefs, desires, fears, doubts, etc. E.g. I believe (doubt, desire, fear ...) that spring will be late this year.

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

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

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