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Causal After All

A Model of Mental Causation for Dualists

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I develop and defend a model of causation that allows for dualist mental causation in worlds where the physical domain is physically complete.

In Part I, I present the dualist ontology that will be assumed throughout the thesis and identify two challenges for models of mental causation within such an ontology: the exclusion worry and the common cause worry. I also argue that a proper response to these challenges requires a thoroughly lightweight account of causation, i.e. an account that allows for causes to be metaphysically distinct from the phenomena that produce or physically necessitate their effects.

In Part II, I critically evaluate contemporary responses to these challenges from the philosophical literature. In particular, I discuss (i) List and Stoljar's criticism of exclusion worries, (ii) Kroedel's alternative dualist ontology, (iii) concerns about the notion of causal sufficiency, and (iv) Lowe's models of dualist mental causation. I argue that none of these proposals provide independent motivation for a thoroughly lightweight account of causation and therefore leave room for improvement.

In the first four chapters of Part III, I develop a thoroughly lightweight model of causation, which builds on interventionist approaches to causation. First, I explain how so-called 'holding fixed'-requirements in standard interventionist accounts stand in the way of dualist mental causation. I then argue that interventionist accounts should impose a robustness condition on causal correlations and that, with this condition in place, the 'holding fixed'-requirements can be weakened such that they do allow for dualist mental causation. I dub the interventionist model with such weakened 'holding fixed'-requirements 'insensitive interventionism', argue that it can counter the exclusion worry as well as the common cause worry, and explain under which circumstances it would predict there to be dualist mental causation. Importantly, these circumstances might, for all we know, hold in the actual world.

In the final three chapters of Part III, I defend insensitive interventionism against some objections. I consider the objection that causation must be productive, the objection that causes must (in some sense) physically necessitate their effects, and the objection that insensitive interventionism is too permissive. I respond by drawing from the literature on causation by absences and on the relation between causation and fundamental physics. Overall, insensitive interventionism performs as well as standard interventionist accounts. I conclude that insensitive interventionism is a credible model of causation.

Keywords

Mental Causation, Dualism, Non-Reductionism, Causal Exclusion, Causation, Interventionism, Negative Causation, Omissions, Neo-Russellianism, Causation and Physics

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