

FROM DUNS SCOTUS TO DAVIDSON ANOMALOUS MONISM, SUPERVENIENCE, AND THE FORMAL DISTINCTION

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It is a well-known fact in the history of philosophy that the scholastic doctrine of distinctions, which was widely discussed in the XIVth century by Scotus and Ockham in particular and by late scholastics such as Suarez, resurfaced in the XVIIth century with Descartes and the Cartesians when the latter attempted to understand Descartes's view that there is a real distinction between mind and body. The problem of distinctions emerges in particular in Antoine Arnauld's objections to Descartes, when Descartes argues that because I can conceive of my mind as something different from my body, it follows that they are really distinct, and when Arnauld argues that it does not follow that from the fact that I can have a notion of myself without having any notion of my body, it does not follow that my notion of myself is complete.

It is less often remarked that these problems and concepts have their counterpart in contemporary philosophy within the recent discussions of the mind/body problem. The aim of this paper is to try to bring together these two sets of problems, through an analysis of one of today's most influential doctrines about the mind/body issue, Davidson's "anomalous monism". I shall not, however attempt to confront directly the scholastic doctrines and Davidson's view about the mental and the physical. The views of one philosopher will serve here as an intermediary between the medieval and the contemporary view. The philosopher in question is Spinoza, whose monism has been acknowledged by Davidson himself as having many points in common with his own kind of monism (Davidson 1994).

My aim, however, is not historical, and I have little competence in this domain. I intend to draw attention to the specific problems of Davidson's anomalous monism by putting them into the frame of the medieval and spinozistic vocabulary.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, I recall, in a necessarily sketchy manner, Duns Scotus' theory of the formal distinction, and its criticism by Ockham. Then, in a second part, I draw attention to the use of this theory within Spinoza's system, and state his version of monism. In a third part of the paper, I state Davidson's anomalous monism and its similarities with Spinoza's views. In

the last, and fourth part, I examine some problems for anomalous monism, which have an echo in the problems encountered by Duns Scotus and Spinoza.

I. DUNS SCOTUS ON THE FORMAL DISTINCTION

It is generally agreed the the point of departure for the medieval scholastic doctrines on distinction is passages from Aristotle's work where he spoke of entities which are "one or the same in number" yet "distinct in definition" (or in being or form). The idea is that even when there are cases where we are confronted with a single phenomenon rather than with a class of several phenomena, when there are several non synonymous descriptions applicable to it, there will be a distinction between the individual entities that coincide in that phenomenon. For instance, says Aristotle, the road from Athens to Thebes and the road from Thebes to Athens coincide spatially and materially, but but because going from Athens to Thebes is not the same thing as going from Thebes to Athens, these are distinct in definition or being. In other terms, there can be different ways of defining a single individual subject, in so far as the predicates which apply to this subject are non synonymous. Aristotle even allowed that one could ascribe contrary predicates to a single thing under different descriptions, without claiming that the same item bears directly these contrary attributes, and thus by violating the law of non-contradiction.

These questions were of particular interest for the scholastics not only in their own right, but also for theological reasons, for it was quite important to draw distinctions where there are not supposed to be any, namely in God, who contains three persons in one, as well as with respect to the divine attributes. The question of distinctions is more or less the same as the question of the relationship between the individuating principles of individual substances and these substances, and the same as the question of whether the natures of individuals, which are in any way universal, can exist in these individuals. In other terms, it is a version of the problem of universals. One can hold that the individuating principles and the natures of substances are really distinct; that they are formally distinct, and that they are the same, although there is a distinction of reason between them. This is why it is necessary to deal with three kinds of distinctions at least, which one can formulate in the following way, according to the XIVth century thinkers, most notably Ockham and Duns Scotus¹.

1) A real distinction is a distinction between real things. It implies that if two things are distinct, they cannot share all their properties, which is a version of the discernability of differentials, a version of the indiscernability of identicals. Any two things which can exist without each other are distinct. The criterion for real distinction is separability by divine power. If God can separate two things,

¹ I follow here Adams 1987, p. 16 sq.

then they are really distinct. Paradigm cases of really distinct things are distinct substances such as Socrates or Plato.

2) A distinction of reason implies that the things can be separated, but only by the thinking mind. It is thus a distinction which exists only in thought, not in reality. In this sense, Ockham holds that “to be distinct in reason” is only to have different descriptions” (Adams 21, n.33).

3) Most authors recognized the existence of these two kinds of distinctions. The difficulties start with the problem whether one should also recognize another form of distinction, different both from the real distinction and the distinction of reason. Scotus held that one needed to introduce another kind of distinction, intermediate between the first two, the *formal distinction*. It is a distinction which is both conceived by the mind and which has a real ground in things themselves.

According to many commentators Scotus had two different versions of the formal distinction. The earlier view says that distinctions in conceived objects must be mirrored by distinctions between real things, if the real things are to fall under distinct concepts at the same time. There are cases in which prior to the act of the intellect what is really one and the same thing is apt to fall under distinct concepts, and that these distinct concepts indicate that there is some sort of nonidentity among entities within the real thing. He calls these entities “realities” (realitates), “formalities” (formalitates), “aspects” (“rationes”), “formal aspects” (rationes formales), “intentions” (intentiones) or “real aspects” (rationes reales). For instance man is a rational animal, and “rational animal” is formally the same as man. This does not render the thing itself composite or dual, as if there were two things in one. Thus Socrates is indeed a composite substance since he is made up of two things, a matter — body— and a form — soul. But a thing can be composite in a less strict sense if it contains formalities or potentialities one of which is in potentiality with respect to the other. For instance the specific difference with respect to the individual difference. Where genus and differentia are formally distinct, the reality from which the genus is taken is in potentiality with respect to the reality from which the specific difference is taken. In these cases, the formally distinct entities are not the same “by identity”, but are only “the same thing”. (Adams, p.25)

In a second version, Scotus reacts against the criticisms of his views which stressed that the formal distinction would imply the existence of a plurality of entities or properties within a single thing. He claims that the real/formal distinction is rather a distinction between a distinction *simpliciter* and a distinction *secundum quid*. The latter is a “diminished” or “reduced” mode of nonidentity within a thing. “A is not formally B” does not entail “A is not B”; it is only a mode of identity, not absolute identity, which is denied.

(This recalls the distinction, held by some contemporary logicians such as Geach, between absolute and relative identity : “A is not the same F as B” does not entail “A is not the same as B”)

In other terms, for Scotus, a particular real thing such as Socrates can be distinguished “into many formally distinct realities of which this formality is not that, and this formality is the entity of the particular and that formality is the entity of the common nature.” Thus the nature of a thing is completely universal in so far as it exists in the intellect. (Adams p.45). Thus formalities have a double mode of existence: they can exist in reality as constituents of real things, or can have a non-real mode of existence in the intellect as objects of thoughts or concepts. Some properties are true of the formalities of themselves — their essential properties; others are predicated of the formalities only in so far as they exist in one mode of existence or the other. For instance the nature of man is, of itself, rational, mortal, and animal. Man is universal in so far as it exists in the intellect and can be predicated of many, but particular in so far as it exists in reality. But man of itself is neither universal nor particular, but indifferent to each. This follows Avicenna: “Animal non est nisi animal tantum”. This is Duns Scotus famous doctrine of the univocity of being.

To summarize Scotus claims about distinctions. Entities which are separable by divine power, in the sense that one can exist while the other does not, are “absolutely really” distinct, and those which cannot be so separate are “absolutely really” the same. But within the class of entities which are “absolutely really” the same, we can find pairs of entities which are “qualifiedly” distinct. For example where a and b are absolutely really the same but each is definable independently of the other, a and b are “formally” distinct. The formal distinction is, as Duns Scotus says, “on the side of things”; it is not a mere conceptual or rational distinction. Thus formal distinction is compatible with real sameness. This is the doctrine which is important for my purposes here: certain things which are true of an entity can be distinct although they belong to the common nature of this entity. The individuating difference is in the individual in question really the same as the common nature that it determines, but nevertheless formally distinct from it.

Scotus’ contemporaries were prompt to criticize his views on the ground that it seemed to multiply entities within a real thing. The most famous of these criticisms is Ockham’s. He denies that there is any other sort of distinction than real or of reason. He argues that it is impossible for any two things to be formally distinct without being really distinct. And his main arguments rest on the principles of non contradiction and of the indiscernability of identicals. If two things could be formally distinct without being really distinct, two contradictory pairs of assertions, “A is F” and “A is non F” could be predicated of both.

(Again, this reminds us of the argument by Wiggins against relative identity see NV)

Hence, for Ockham, all distinctions which are not distinctions for separating real things are “rational”, or mind dependent. Thus the formal distinction reduces to a distinction of reason or to a real distinction, but there is no intermediary.

Other critics of Duns Scotus, such as Suarez, objected to the idea of a distinction which would be, like the formal distinction, intermediate between the real distinction and the distinction of reason. Suarez, however, held that one could find some room for a distinction which would be neither real nor rational, which he called “modal” distinction: it covers cases where one reality is different, but ontologically dependent on the other, as figure for a body or inherence of a quantity in a subject which depends on the quantity.

2. SPINOZA ON MIND-BODY IDENTITY

Echoes of these problems, as I have mentioned earlier, can be found in classical philosophy. Caterus, in his objections (First objections) to Descartes’s *Meditations* says in particular :

“S’il y a une distinction entre l’âme et le corps, il semble la prouver de ce que ces deux choses peuvent être conçues distinctement et séparément l’une de l’autre. Et sur cela je mets ce savant homme aux prises avec Scot, qui dit qu’afin qu’une chose soit conçue distinctement et séparément d’une autre, il suffit qu’il y ait entre elles une distinction qu’il appelle *formelle et objective*, laquelle il met entre la *distinction réelle* et celle *de raison*; et c’est ainsi qu’il distingue la justice de Dieu de sa miséricorde” (AT VII, 80).

Descartes, following Suarez, answers that this distinction “ne diffère point de la modale, et qu’elle ne s’étend que sur les êtres incomplets” (AT VII, 95). For a complete being, says Descartes, the only distinction which is needed is the real distinction, which exists only if I can conceive of it “fully” (“clearly and distinctly”) as real:

“Je conçois pleinement ce que c’est que le corps (c’est à dire que je conçois le corps comme une chose complète) en pensant seulement que c’est une chose étendue, figurée mobile, etc. encore que je nie de lui toutes les choses qui appartiennent à la nature de l’esprit; et je conçois aussi que l’esprit est une chose complète, qui doute, qui entend, qui veut, etc. encore que je n’accorde point qu’il y ait en lui aucun des choses qui sont contenues en l’idée du corps; ce qui ne se pourrait aucunement faire, s’il n’y avait une distinction réelle entre l’esprit et le corps.” (Première réponses, AT VII, 95).

For Descartes, then, if one can conceive the mind and the body as distinct, through a clear and distinct representation, they are *really* distinct. In other terms, one can move from an epistemic distinction, to a distinction *in re*, i.e from the way one conceives of an attribute of a substance (as thinking, as extended) to the real nature of this substance (as mind and as body) .

As well known, this is precisely the view which was criticized by Descartes's followers, in particular Spinoza and Leibniz. Leibniz and Spinoza, as well as Malebranche, balked at Descartes's dualistic interactionism: they could not understand how a real substance, such as mind, can interact causally with another real substance, body, when it was claimed that their attributes are different. How can mental things cause physical happening? This is the traditional problem of mental causation. Both Spinoza and Leibniz rejected the interaction, and thought instead that there must be a parallelism, or a preestablished harmony between the two substances. They held that the explanatory principles which are true of one substance could not be applied to the other. Nevertheless Spinoza held that *in spite of* this difference in explanatory principles, the two substances were just the same one. Spinoza holds that there is a distinction between the two attributes, thought and extension, of the unique substance, God, although these are attributes of the *same* substance. But this distinction between the attributes of thought and of extension is *not* a real distinction. It is a formal one. Each attribute, thought and extension is distinct, because it has a "formal reason" which is distinct. Each attribute attributes its essence or quiddity to the substance as a different thing from these attributes. To the formal distinction between attributes corresponds no division in being. The thing which is different from the attributes is the same for all the attributes. The understanding reproduces objectively the nature of the forms which it grasps. In other terms, to qualitative differences correspond a real unity from the point of view of quantity. Thus a formal difference does not imply a numerical one.

As many commentators have remarked (e.g. Deleuze, 1968 p.56-57), this is just the Scotistic doctrine of formal distinction. Formal differences are compatible with real identity.

Applied to the mind-body issue, this doctrine comes down to a form of monism: mind and body are a single thing, while they can be viewed from the point of view of two kinds of attributes, thought and extension. To an epistemological distinction between the attributes corresponds an identity in the thing to which these attributes are attributes. From a different angle, we see what is in fact just the same thing. In Scotistic terms, to a formal distinction corresponds a real identity.

As I shall argue in the following section, this is just what Davidson calls *anomalous monism*. But before we come to this, let us try to phrase Spinoza's views on the mind-body problem in a way which will allow us to the apparently surprising result that Davidson is a spinozist. I shall first describe the spinozistic reasoning in a way which will be more or less free from his own vocabulary, although I hope that the Spinozistic doctrines will be easily recognized from this description (I am here following closely Davidson 1994)

1) In the sequence of events in the material world— the world of extend objects— everything happens according to the laws of nature. there is no event that is not fully determined by what goes on before, and no state of the universe that does not fully determine what follows. The system is comprehensive,

deterministic, and closed. If nothing can interfere with the workings of this system, we, as human agents, cannot interfere. Our actions, in so far as they belong to this system, cannot be free in the sense of being undetermined; our actions are caused by what goes on before, and what we effect by our actions is likewise just part of the ineluctible course of nature. God can neither interfere in the natural course of events, nor can he be prior to it as an independent creator. Since everything that can affect the system is included in it, every natural event can be fully explained by the laws of nature and any total prior state of the universe.

2) Both thoughts and extended bodies are real. Yet our conception of thoughts, desires, memories and reasoning is a conception that does not include the defining properties of physical objects such as precise location in space, a shape, physical texture and chemical composition. For this reason, our physical system, which explains causal interactions in terms of such properties, leaves no room for mental events. It seems to follow that if there are mental events, then they can neither be caused by events in the physical world (as perception seems to require), nor can they cause events in the physical world (as action seems to require).

3) Yet even aside from the fact that action and perception seem to require some close relation between thought and the world of extended objects, we have reason to believe in a close relation. We are constantly aware, for example, of what goes on in our bodies. We are not aware, in the same way, of what goes on in the bodies of other people. Our thoughts are directly expressed in the physical motions of our bodies in a way that our thoughts are not expressed in the bodies of others.

Thus the order of our thoughts precisely parallels the order of extended things and events. This holds very generally, for if the physical world is fully determined by laws and the distribution of bodies and their motions at some other moment, then we know that there exists an infinite set of propositions about the distribution of bodies and their motions at some moment which, in conjunction with the laws, would enable an infinite mind to calculate the entire history of the universe. If we think of the world of thoughts as consisting all of all these truths, then there is clear sense in which “the order and connections of ideas is the same as the order and connexion of things (E. II; P7). The connection of ideas is that of deduction; a proposition describing one state of the universe may be deduced from a description of an earlier state of the universe by appeal to the laws of nature. the order in which one state of the universe may be inferred from a prior state is the same as the temporal sequence of events it predicts and explains.

We thus have three main assumptions: a closed deterministic system of nature as described in physical terms, a world of thought which does not interact with the physical, and nevertheless a very close connection between the mental and the physical world. The problem is: how can we reconcile these three assumptions? In particular what can be the connexion between the mental and the physical if it is to satisfy these conditions? How can the two realms, that of the

mental and that of the physical be connected if they do not interact and if their individuating principles are so distinct? One can deny interaction, or one can deny the connection, or both. Descartes denies the connection, but not the interaction. Leibniz and Spinoza deny the interaction, but not the connection. Spinoza's answer is that the mental and physical are just two ways of viewing and understanding the same world. We think of them as different, cannot help thinking of them as different, but they are nevertheless the same.

Thus Spinoza denies a *causal* connection and interaction between mind and body. He does not deny it, however, because they would be parallel in *reality*; he denies it because they are not parallel in reality, although they are parallel in our way of conceiving them. In fact they are just the same. The reason why the relation between mind and body is not causal is not that they are distinct, but that they are identical. In other terms, it is *because* the mind-body relation is the relation of identity that is not the causal relation.

This is what it is difficult to understand. For Spinoza does not deny the causal relationship between extended things. For if *a* causes *b* under the attribute of extension, and *b* is identical with *c*, where *c* is conceived under the attribute of thought, how can one deny that *a* caused *c*, where *a* is conceived as extended, and *c* as a modification of mind?

It seems, *prima facie*, that we can escape this difficulty only in two ways. One consists in denying that there is any distinction between the mental and the physical, hence that the physical only exists, since the former reduces to the latter. The absence of interaction between mind and body would thus be explained by the fact that they do not have to interact since they are just one and the same. Notoriously this is a familiar interpretation of Spinoza, which was responsible for his infamous reputation as a materialist, especially in the XVIIIth century. The other interpretation is the opposite: it consists in denying that Spinoza is a monist, and in holding that he is a dualist. Since the attributes of thought and of extension are distinct, for this line of argument, they cannot but be *really* distinct.

It is not difficult to recognize, in these familiar reactions to Spinoza's claims, the very objections which were put by Ockham and other scholastics against Scotus theory of formal distinction: either it reduces to a distinction of reason (and the mental and the physical are just the same, although different in our ways of conceiving them) or it reduces to a real distinction (and the mental and the physical are two different things). But if we take seriously the view that the distinction between mind and body is *formal*, in the Scotistic sense, we can escape these two interpretations. But what can "formal" mean in such a context?

In the context of Duns Scotus's thought, we saw that it means that the *definitions* of each attribute are distinct, although they are definitions of the same thing. The problem to which we are faced becomes obvious when we substitute "explanation" for "definition": how can two attributes which do not *explain* each other, as thought and extension, be nevertheless attributes of a single thing? Spinoza does not talk of "explanation", but of "determination". He says, in a typical statement of the denial of interaction: "The body cannot determine the

mind to thinking, and the mind cannot determine the body to motion” (E, III, P 2). In today’s vocabulary, what we understand by “determine” and by “explain” is *causal explanation*. We say that an event is explained by another because it is caused by it. But Spinoza, as commentators emphasize, does not use “cause” in this sense. He identifies it with *reason* : “*causa sive ratio*” . A thing is the cause of another if it explains it in the rational, or logical sense, or, in Scotistic terms, through its “formal reason”. This is the sense in which causality means intelligibility, and the sense in which causality means necessary connexion. This is not the modern sense, post-Humean, in which causality is a contingent feature of particular events which fall under laws. So the problem of mental causation cannot be translated simply in the modern vocabulary of the causality of events, in the more or less Humean sense which we use today. We thus would have an explanation of why Spinoza can deny causal interaction between mind and body, in the sense that the formal reason of the one is not the same as the formal reason of the other.

But this leaves us with the same problem as before, for Spinoza allows, in the modern sense, that there are causal connexions, through laws, between the extended things. So, to rephrase the previous problem: how can one physical thing, if it described under the attribute of extension, cause another physical thing, but described under the attribute of thought, as when a sensation or perception is caused by a physical event, although the two descriptions are descriptions of the same thing or unique substance?

It is at this point that we can appeal to a distinction which is not explicit in Spinoza, but which is explicit in Davidson’s thought. It is the distinction between the causation of an event and its explanation, together with the distinction between an event and its descriptions. These distinctions can be assessed against our current, modern view of explanation, without assimilating explanation to a form of logical relation, and by sticking to our usual concept of explanation through causal laws. One event, according to Davidson, such as an earthquake can be caused by another event, such as the slid of a tectonic plate of the earth, without it being the case that the *explanation* of this event is complete. We would have a complete explanation of why a slid of the tectonic plate caused the earthquake if we could derive the existence of this event from laws which would state that, under certain conditions, the event instantiate the laws. But we cannot: there are no general laws which predict the existence of a particular event, described as an earthquake, from certain physical conditions of the earth. This is because there are many antecedent conditions, which we can state fully, which have to be added for giving a complete explanation of this nomological kind. Nevertheless we can say that there was a causal connexion between the event of the earthquake and the slid of the tectonic plate. In other terms, we know that there is a cause, but we do not know exactly how to describe it in nomological terms.

As Davidson says about this example:

“The inadequacy of our knowledge of the cause and the effect does not throw in doubt the causal connection: we may have correctly identified the cause of the earthquake, even though our knowledge of the cause, and hence our understanding of the earthquake, are partial. So there are at least two ways in which our ability to explain an event may fall short: we may be ignorant of some of the causal factors...or we may lack the appropriate descriptive vocabulary for specifying the cause or the effect in a way that would allow us to see them as instantiating a law....

The ideal of a comprehensive vocabulary in which complete explanations of any events could in theory be given does not rule out the possibility of another, irreducibly different, vocabulary, in which alternative explanations of the very same events could be produced. So nothing precludes as unintelligible the idea that vocabularies of the mental and the physical belong to different, but equally complete, systems of explanation for the same world. The possibility just brooded describes Spinoza’s metaphysics: ontological monism and a multiplicity of ontological systems.” (Davidson 1994)

Davidson proposes to interpret Spinoza’s dualism of attributes in terms of a dualism of systems of explanation: neither mentalistic explanation can be reduced to physicalistic explanation nor the reverse. But this dualism at the epistemological level is compatible with monism at the ontological level. Mental and physical concepts belong to two distinct and independent explanatory systems. Causal explanation is relative to one vocabulary, mental or physical, but neither vocabulary can be reduced to the other. So it makes no sense to explain mental events and properties in terms of physical events and properties. This is not to deny that mental event can *cause* physical events, but to deny that they can *explain* them.

The crucial point is the distinction between a causal *relation* and a causal *explanation* : two events can be related as cause and effect under the relation of causation, without it being the case that the *explanation* of these events being the same. The same event, such as an action, can be described under two different descriptions, one mental, for instance through the reason which the agent had for performing the action, and one physical, for instance as a bodily movement. The mental vocabulary in which we describe the event — for instance the mental vocabulary: “He intended to jump” — is not the same as the physical vocabulary through which we describe the same event— for instance “His legs stretched— but both vocabularies describe what is in reality the same event. In the Scotistic terms, the formal reason is distinct; in the Spinozistic terms, the *ratio* is distinct. But it is quite consistent with saying that it is the same event, a jump, which is thus described, and which falls under laws.

If think of it in these terms, we can see that the *very fact* that the attribute of thought is distinct from the attribute of extension not only is not incompatible with their being attributes of the same substance, but also leads to the idea that these attributes are *ontologically* identical, although they are

epistemologically different. This is just what the formal distinction between the attributes predicts. Hence we get ontological monism, coupled with explanatory dualism. And it is quite important to see that this involves neither a real distinction between mind and body, nor a distinction of reason: for the ways we think of mind and body are not mere “ways of thinking” or of conceiving; they belong to their nature.

3. DAVIDSON’S ANOMALOUS MONISM

It is time now to describe more fully Davidson’s own argument for anomalous monism, which I have already described in terms of this comparison with Spinoza. I shall continue to emphasize these similarities.

Davidson sets anomalous monism as the product of three theses:

- (1) Mental events are causally related to physical events
- (2) Singular causal relations are backed by strict laws
- (3) There are no strict psycho-physical laws.

(1) is supposed to be obvious from our common sense view: certain mental events like perceptions are caused by physical happenings; in turn certain mental events, like intentions, cause physical happenings, such as bodily movements. (2) and (3) need, to be understood, to recall what a strict law is. By this Davidson means a law of the form:

(SL) If conditions C_1, \dots, C_n hold, then if X has F , X has G

which are such that we can fully specify the conditions in questions, and where the law does not break down because of the mention of other conditions. In other terms, a strict law is a law where we do not have to add new conditions in order for the condition to hold in this sense they are not “*ceteris paribus*”). Physics, at least ideally, should give us such laws. In contrast, a non strict law is a law such that we need to add special conditions. For instance geological laws such as: “meandering rivers erode they upper bank” (if the bank is made of certain minerals, if the weather conditions are not such or such, etc.), are non strict, or *ceteris paribus* laws.

Now take a supposed law of the mental, such as: “If X desires result R , and believes that he can get R through action A , then he will do A .” the law is non strict, for there are plenty of conditions which could prevent X from doing A (if he has an overriding desire to do B , or if he believes that he cannot get R without having another result, etc.). It follows

- (3a) there are no strict laws correlating mental properties with other mental properties.

This amounts to the denial of purely psychological laws.

Davidson denies that there can be psycho-physical laws, precisely because the physical laws have to be strict, and thus fail to match with the psychological laws which they could be correlated with. This does not prevent the existence on non strict psycho-physical laws, such as

Other things being equal, if a man is deprived of water, he will
desire to drink

Hence Davidson claims that

(3b) there are no strict laws correlating mental properties with physical
properties

The deeper reason for which there are no psychological nor psycho-physical laws is that mental properties, unlike physical ones, are holistic: they do not form a close system, and are connected to each others in ways which are unspecifiable in advance. To believe that P, one needs to believe a host of other things, and one does not know what limit to set to such other things. Another reason has to do with what Davidson calls the “constitutive ideal of rationality” which governs the mental. It is impossible to ascribe a mental content to an individual without presupposing that this individual is rational in the sense that he follows principles of rationality, such as the coherence of his belief system. But there is no such presupposition for a physical system. A mental system of mental properties is always, in this sense, open, whereas a physical system is always, in this sense, closed. In this sense the mental is *anomalous*.

Principle (2) is not really argued for by Davidson, but taken to be plausible. He calls it the principle of the nomological character of causality. When there is a causal interaction between two events A and B, there must be a strict law governing this interaction. It need not be the case that under any description of the events they instantiate a law, but there must be *some* description of them under which they instantiate a law.

These are Davidson’s grounds for the anomalousness of the mental. It remains to be seen how *monism* can be proven from them. Consider a mental event that enters into causal interaction with another event (either physical or mental). According to the Principle of the Nomological character of causality, there must be some description of this mental event under which it instantiates the relevant half of a strict law. According to the thesis of the anomalousness of the mental, this description cannot be a mental description of the event. for mental descriptions figure in no strict laws. Thus there must be some non mental description of the event under which it, in part, instantiates a strict law. On the assumption that there is no relevant third type of description, this description must be a physical description. thus the mental event in question must be physically describable. But

this is just to say that it is a physical event, in addition to being a mental event. thus all mental events that enter into causal interactions must be identical with physical events. this is despite the fact, or rather *because of* the fact that, according to Davidson, there are no nomological links between mental properties and physical properties. the only mental events exempt from this argument for event identity are those that enter into no causal relations whatsoever.

We thus have an argument which, from the fact that there is an explanatory barrier or gap between mental and physical explanations, implies, together with the idea that there are causal relations between mental events and physical events, the identity of mental and physical events. Hence the monism.