

Abstract:

Determination, Realization, and Mental Causation

Jessica Wilson*

How can mental properties bring about physical effects, as they seem to do, given that the physical realizers of the mental goings-on are already sufficient to cause these effects? This question gives rise to the problem of mental causation (MC) and its associated threats of causal overdetermination, mental causal exclusion, and mental causal irrelevance. Some (e.g., Cynthia and Graham Macdonald, and Stephen Yablo) have suggested that understanding mental-physical realization in terms of the determinable/determinate relation (henceforth, ‘determination’) provides the key to solving the problem of MC: if mental properties are determinables of their physical realizers, then (since determinables and determinates are distinct, yet don’t causally compete) all three threats may be avoided. Not everyone agrees that determination can do this good work, however. Some (e.g., Douglas Ehring, Eric Funkhauser, and Sven Walter) object that mental-physical realization can’t be determination, since such realization lacks one or other characteristic feature of determination. I argue that on a proper understanding of the features of determination key to solving the problem of MC these arguments can be resisted.

*Department of Philosophy, University of Toronto; jessica.m.wilson@utoronto.ca