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# Causality and “the mental”

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## ABSTRACT

Many analytic philosophers of mind take for granted a certain (broadly Humean) conception of causality. Assumptions deriving from that conception are in place when they problematize what they call mental causation or argue for physicalism in respect of the mental. I claim that a different (broadly Aristotelian) conception of causality is needed for understanding many ordinary causal truths about things which act, including truths about human, minded beings – sc. rational beings who lead lives.

Keywords: mental causation; Descartes; Davidson; Aristotle; causality

## 1. Introduction

When “a problem of mental causation” has been discussed, various assumptions have been in place. They are assumptions which pervade the philosophy of mind of the last fifty years; but there is recent philosophical work on causality which puts them into question. In what follows, I take sides with the recent work, and challenge the conception of causality that many philosophers of mind have come to take for granted.

I start with something about how “mental causation” has come to be understood when it is taken to be a suitable case for problematization or to supply a premise in an argument for physicalism in respect of the mental (§2). I then bring the recent work to bear: I argue that the properly causal aspect of agency is not accounted for using a relation “cause” obtaining between pairs of items (§3). The argument puts me in a position to dislodge a certain style of account of human agency, which is something I attempt to do (in §4) before concluding.

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## 2. “Psychophysical Interaction”

On 10<sup>th</sup> June 1643, Princess Elisabeth, in a letter to Descartes, said that «it would be easier for [her] to concede matter and extension to the soul than to concede the capacity to move a body and to be moved by it to an immaterial thing» (trans. Shapiro, 2007). Elisabeth’s thought has come to be put by saying that Descartes’s belief in the metaphysical distinctness of souls and bodies ensured that he could not admit causal interaction between them. More than three centuries on, an idea of causal interaction is used in an argument for a kind of physicalism. Donald Davidson propounded a Principle of Causal Interaction which says that «at least some mental events interact causally with physical events» (1970). This was in an essay which some will see as setting off a problem of mental causation.

Davidson’s Principle can apparently be endorsed by someone who has no truck with the idea of minds as immaterial things that might move bodies. For Davidson distinguished *events* of two different kinds, not substances of two different kinds as Descartes did. Still, as any student of philosophy of mind knows, Davidson’s Principle combines with other claims to launch a new problematic. These other claims are rested in a conception of the physical causal world and its workings which may be rather different from Davidson’s own; but, like Davidson’s, is thought to be conducive to physicalism in respect of the mind. If the physicalism reached is of a non-reductive sort (as with Davidson and others), then some will say that the mental in that case must be epiphenomenal; and if the physicalism reached is of a reductive sort (as with e.g. Papineau and others), then some will say that the mental in that case might as well be deemed eliminable. Either way, the conclusion that might be reached is unpalatable.

Of course there are some who still side with Descartes, and there are many who defend physicalism, whether non-reductive or reductive, taking their version of it to be free of any troublesome consequences. But believing that there is a trouble-free view of the place of human beings in the natural causal world, which is not a physicalist one, I think that one does well to ask what mental/physical interaction might be supposed to be. Exactly what claim or principle is it that, being combined with claims about the physical world, has generated a great debate? It may strike one as indubitable that there is “psychophysical interaction”. But how is “interaction” understood when it strikes one so? What does “physical” mean? What are they which are supposed to “interact”?

Suppose that a boulder has flattened a barn. Is there here an example of physi-

cal/physical interaction? *Yes*, presumably. What understanding of “physical” is brought to bear in treating it as such? An ordinary one, presumably, according to which boulders and barns are both of them physical. Well, this appears not to be the understanding of “physical” of those who adduce claims about the PHYSICAL causal world in their arguments in philosophy of mind. In those arguments we are told, for instance, that «all PHYSICAL effects are fully determined by law and a purely PHYSICAL prior history»; and when PHYSICALISM is endorsed, the “ism” is often said to relate to «current physics or a future development of it».

I have placed the word “physical” in small capitals here. I intend to signal the difference between different understandings of the word; and I shall write “PHYSICAL” wherever I take it that it would be supposed to be understood by allusion to science. I acknowledge that proponents of PHYSICALISM are likely to say that there is a single sense of “physical”, true both of macroscopic things such as boulders and barns, and also of whatever belongs in the domain of the science of physics (atoms?, fermions?, quarks?¹). These PHYSICALISTS rely on the idea of an extraordinarily compendious domain containing everything physical in some putative, suitably encompassing sense. I suspect that the idea of such a domain has some appeal if one imagines the world frozen in time: thinking of the boulder just at an instant, one might think that it could be identified with the collection of those particles which might be supposed to be parts of it exactly then. But if it is allowed that causality is a feature of a changing world, in which some things persist through change, others not, then it must also be allowed there are entities that are no part of a universe that might as well be static. When the conception of causality which PHYSICALISTS bring to bear is enforced, there appears to be no room for genuinely continuant objects which exist for a time, which may survive changes in their parts, and which (like the barn) may be destroyed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Higgs Boson particles?? I don’t think I know how proponents of physicalism conceive the domain of science of physics (“or a future development of it”). Some want biology to be reckoned a PHYSICAL science for the purposes of their arguments. In the next section, I shall introduce considerations which suggest that causal notions having application in biology are not all of them governed by such principles as are supposed to govern everything brought under the head of the PHYSICAL.

<sup>2</sup> Here I mean to put directly into question an assumption made by many physicalists and explicitly introduced by Kim – that all macroscopic things (whether continuants or events) relate to microscopic things as wholes to parts. (For more detailed argument against such an assumption, taking the case of events, see Hornsby, 1985). Still there are PHYSICALISTS who are happy to deny part-whole PHYSICALISM, but say that what they call “levels PHYSICALISM” is still sustainable (Hüttemann and Papineau, 2005). Myself I think that recognition of the ontology presupposed to ordinary causal truths creates an obstacle to arguments for levels PHYSICALISM as much as to part-whole PHYSICALISM. The levels PHYSICALIST says that «any putatively non-physical entity is identical to, or at least metaphysically supervenient on, PHYSICAL entities». Well, I think that the supervenience thesis that would be needed if Papineau’s views about causation in his 2013

So much for the boulder and the barn. Suppose now that some person has flattened some dough, this being something that she meant to do. Is this now an example of *mental*/physical interaction? If the answer is *Yes*, then, granting that the boulder and its action on the barn that it flattened are physical in some good sense, we may now be supposed to think that the person who flattened the dough, or perhaps her action on the dough she flattened, was *mental*. This, however, will not seem right to anyone who is inclined to allow that people are physical in whatever sense it had seemed that boulders are. Some may say that the person's *body* or some part of it, rather than the person, is what acted on the dough that she flattened, and that *mental*/physical interaction gets onto the scene only when one considers how it came to be that she flattened the dough. Well, I shall come to this in §4. For the time being I note that it can be a real question whether there has been *mental* causation by virtue of a person's having flattened some dough – or, as it might be, cooked a meal, or wrapped a parcel, or hailed a taxi, or done anything else that some human being may have done meaning so to do.

What now about interaction? *Interaction* would seem to be a two-way matter. Certainly it was causality in both directions as it were which concerned Princess Elisabeth,<sup>3</sup> and which Davidson had in mind when he framed his Principle and brought perception, as well as action, in its scope. Likewise Jaegwon Kim, who has probably written as much as anyone else under the head of mental causation, has taken mental causation to be found wherever there are «causal relations involving mental events» (1996, p. 125). Kim once argued that it follows from a principle of PHYSICAL causal closure that «if you pick any PHYSICAL event and trace out its causal ancestry or posterity, that will never take you outside the PHYSICAL domain». Kim then thought that someone who endorsed mental/PHYSICAL interaction but resisted the closure principle was committed to «a radical diversity in the domain of events ..., quite on a par with Descartes's belief in two radically diverse domains of substances» (1998, p. 40). Subsequently, however, Kim, although he has continued to investigate putative PHYSICAList implications both of human action and of human perception, has wanted to treat the two of them separately, taking there to be specific

were to gain any argumentative purchase, would speak to a domain from which continuants would perforce be absent. My reasons for thinking this show up in §4.

<sup>3</sup> Elisabeth in the first instance asked «how the soul of man ... can determine the bodily spirits to perform voluntary actions», and she is often taken to have been concerned specifically with “mental→physical causation”. But Elisabeth also doubted whether Descartes could allow for “physical→mental causation”, as the quotation from her at the start of §2 above attests.

problems about the conscious sensory events involved (as he thinks) in perception (2010). Most writers on mental causation of the last thirty years follow the more recent Kim and concern themselves exclusively with the influence of a person’s mental life on what happens outside her (action), rather than with the difference that her sensory experience of things outside her makes to her mental life (perception). The concern just with action is a consequence of the fact that the PHYSICAList principles don’t speak to putative mental effects but do demand a PHYSICAL cause for any effect that may be thought of as physical.<sup>4</sup> Well, it may be clear already that I think that the PHYSICAList principles don’t have very much to do with ourselves. But in what follows, I shall, like the problematizers and the PHYSICALists, confine attention to what we are supposed to think of as causation *by* the mental.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile I note how curious can seem the supposition that uni-directional relations, in whichever direction, between “mental” and “physical” could be extracted from what one might naturally think of as “psychophysical interaction”. “Interaction” suggests a sort of simultaneous to-and-fro, so that psychophysical interactions might be thought to be exemplified when a person moves about the place aware of what she sees or hears as she does so. She might be thought of as caught up in the world which impinges upon her and upon which she simultaneously impinges. It then isn’t plausible that what is going on with her could be factored into events of two sorts about which one might wonder whether or not they should be reckoned “radically diverse”.

### 3. Agency and Powers

In recent years, there has been a rise in neo-Aristotelian, anti-Humean approaches to causation. The initial anti-Humean thought may be that the very various phenomena which attract the label “causation” cannot all be brought

<sup>4</sup> Patterson (2005) shows that principles such as those of PHYSICAL Sufficiency and Causal Exclusion are needed to generate the 20th century problem of mental causation but played no role in the problem that Elisabeth found in Descartes.

<sup>5</sup> Matson (1966) and King (2007), who show that a certain way of problematizing the mind is distinctively modern, are worth citing in the context of the present paper, which attempts to draw on bits of neo-Aristotelianism as an antidote to problematization. In the context of the present paragraph, where I suggest that putative mental→physical causation (rather than physical→mental causation) has been at issue in the debate about “mental causation”, it is worth noting that both Matson (on ancient philosophers) and King (on medievals) take it for granted that *if* the ancients or medievals had faced a problem, then it would have to have been in respect of what Kim calls conscious sensory events, i.e. a problem about perception, rather than action.

under the head of “cause” if this is understood as a relation between events. More specifically, the suggestion may be that a different understanding is required in order that *agency* – a phenomenon in which something *acts* – should be recognized as the causal phenomenon it is.

Many verbs apparently introduce descriptions of causal goings on. There is a range of rather general verbs which one might think any treatment of causality would need to take into account – verbs such as “influence”, “produce”, “determine”, “control”. And there are the so-called verbs of action of which I’ve already introduced examples – “flatten”, “cook”, “wrap” “hail” – , to which might be added (as we shall see) “push”, “pull”, “lift”. It seems that when these verbs have application, so that something is said to be acting, or to have acted, on something, their subjects and objects for the most part do not pick out events. (To this it makes no difference whether events are taken to be concrete individual particulars [as with Davidson] or to be instantiations of properties by individuals at a time or throughout an interval of time [as with Kim]). Still, if Humeanism about causation is supposed to derive from Hume, then it doesn’t matter to a Humean that these apparently causal verbs should sometimes have substances as their subjects and objects. When Hume spoke of the relata of “cause” as objects, he did not mean “objects” to apply to events exclusively. Hume said «The idea of causation must be derived from some *relation* among objects» ([1740], I, iii; [1978], p. 75), and he meant substances, as much as events, to be covered.

Consider then how Hume’s claim plays out when it is allowed that causal verbs betoken some sort of causality, and that the relata of causation may be substances or events. Here is what might be said, by someone apparently taking Hume’s side.

The relations of pushing, pulling, lifting ...might naturally be considered modes of causation: they are specific ways of causing something else to happen. There also seems to be a more general relation which these relations exemplify – causation itself. (Siegel, 2009, p. 520)

This can’t be quite right.<sup>6</sup> Certainly relations may be expressed in sentences containing verbs such as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ and ‘lift’. For if A is pushing X, then A and

<sup>6</sup> Siegel was concerned with our experience of, not with the nature of, causation. And I’m happy with the conclusion of her paper when she formulates it in the words “Causation is represented in visual experience” (although I’d prefer to say that *causality* is represented, thinking that, when the word “causation” is used, an assumption that a *relation* is named is apt to creep in).

X now stand to one another in the relation in which two things stand if one is now pushing the other; and if A lifted X, then A and X stand to one another in the relation in which two things stand if at some past time one lifted the other. But A is not causing a cart if A is pushing a cart; nor has A caused the book if A lifted the book. These verbs evidently do not express a relation of causation between two substances. Perhaps they will be said to express a relation between a substance and something of a different “happening” kind, as Siegel suggests. So what might be the “something *else*” that A was “causing to happen” if A was pushing a cart? Not the cart’s being pushed. For the cart’s being pushed was the cart’s being pushed by A, which was A’s pushing the cart, not something *else*. It is true that once A has stopped pushing the cart there can be said to be an event in Davidson’s sense – A’s pushing of the cart.<sup>7</sup> But this event is not something that A caused: A, who could push the cart, had no need to cause her pushing of it. Speaking generally, it appears that whatever A may have done, if A’s having done it were a matter of A’s having produced an effect, then the existence of that effect could be explained by A’s *having* caused it. But in that case, it cannot be that A stands to the effect in a *relation* of causation: a relation can obtain at a time only if its two relata then exist; and that which A has caused does not exist before it has been caused (by A). Pushing, pulling, lifting can be considered modes of *causing*, then, just as Siegel suggests. But they cannot be thought to exemplify the relation of causation.

Neo-Aristotelians do not treat *cause* as everywhere a relation – neither as a relation between two events, nor between two objects, nor between an object and an event. Neo-Aristotelians find fault with the empiricists’ treatment of dispositional properties as analyzable away in favour of counterfactual conditionals which introduce relations between events.<sup>8</sup> They take an object’s

<sup>7</sup> If A’s pushing of the cart is something there is by virtue of A’s having completed some particular pushing of the cart, then I assume it is an event in Davidson’s sense – an unrepeatable particular. Whether it is an event in Kim’s sense is less clear. But presumably Kim would say that there were times, say  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , at which A respectively started and stopped pushing the cart, and that there was an exemplification of pushing a cart by A throughout the interval from  $t_1$  to  $t_2$ . I’m unclear how that exemplification of a property might be supposed to be related to the putative exemplifications of pushing a cart *at*  $t_1$  and *at*  $t_2$  and *at* any of the times intermediate between  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ .

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. Lowe (2011): he provides a diagnosis of contemporary philosophers’ reluctance to admit such notions as powers. (Terminological note: some philosophers’ understanding of “disposition” seems to have been informed by an empiricist conception of dispositions. It may be that when a faulty empiricism is set aside, “dispositions” and “powers” can be taken to be more or less equivalent; but then it must be allowed that there are passive as well as active powers. It seems impossible to find a terminology on which all will agree. I say “potentiality” hoping to convey an idea of what a neo-Aristotelian might mean both by “power” and by “liability”).

powers to tell us what kinds of processes the object can engage in, so that they connect our understanding of causality with our recognition of the display of the potentialities of things by the things having those potentialities. Thus they defend a metaphysics in which a substance ontology belongs, and to which such notions as powers, capacities, liabilities are central. They have no problem treating examples such as I have considered. Objects may be such as to act upon things because of powerful properties they have, and they may be such as to be acted on by things because of liabilities they have. So, for instance: one who pushes a cart exercises its power to act on another thing a liability of which is manifest so long as it is being pushed. Causality, then, is present in the world inasmuch as something is actually exercising its powers, perhaps affecting something else in doing so. When an agent is the subject of a causal verb, the agent is (or was) engaged in a causal process by virtue of exercising (or having exercised) a power it has. Such an agent could be a person, an animal of another sort, or a mere object.

The neo-Aristotelian literature that has accrued in the last twelve or so years<sup>9</sup> reveals that the understanding of causality as we first know it is out of line with the understanding of any relation of *cause* having a place in scientific theory or in the principles of the PHYSICALISTS. Earlier, but still recent, work abjures a Humean treatment of causality and accommodates a neo-Aristotelian view of it.<sup>10</sup> If I have here drawn attention specifically to work that can be

<sup>9</sup> The literature I have in mind starts perhaps with Molnar (2003), afforced by Heil (2003). Many of the essays in Kistler and Ganassounou eds. (2007), in Marmodoro ed. (2009), and in Greco and Groff eds. (2012), and some of the essays in Groff ed. (2008) and in Tahko ed. (2012) enquire into one or another aspect of what I'm calling a neo-Aristotelian view. Lowe (2013) is good for a quick and careful introduction to the basics of a neo-Aristotelian view. (Mumford and Anjum (2011) might be thought to belong on this list. But although their position is avowedly anti-Humean, I take their claim that "causation is a relation between property instances" to put them outside the neo-Aristotelian camp). It should be said that on many issues there is far from perfect agreement among these various writers. And I should especially note that I would myself resist Lowe's conception of laws as both regulating movements *and* as "merely descriptive of the domain of non-normative facts", so that I don't see eye to eye with him on the matter of specifically rational agency. Compare also Jacobs and O'Connor (2013). Evidently there is room for debate about rational powers in neo-Aristotelian metaphysics (but not room here).

<sup>10</sup> Three good women should be mentioned. 1. G.E.M. Anscombe put paid to the empiricist orthodoxy of Humeans in her (1971) where she drew attention to the fact that there is an understanding of causality which is parasitic on an understanding of verbs of action. 2. Nancy Cartwright's work over the years has drawn attention to the multi-faceted nature of causality: see e.g. Cartwright (2004). 3. Helen Steward shares a sort of causal pluralism with Cartwright: she has long argued that: «The idea that there is some completely determinate 'web' of causal factors waiting to be extracted from our everyday explanations of particular effects is a myth, based on the idea that every such explanation works by adverting somehow to a causally efficacious particular» (Cartwright, 1997, p. 40).

brought under the neo-Aristotelian head, then that is because it so obviously has something to say about *agency*, examples of which the problematizers and the PHYSICALISTS treat as examples of “mental causation”. Yet none of this work appears to have made any impression upon work in mainstream philosophy of mind.<sup>11</sup> (In philosophy of *action*, by contrast, there is now plenty of literature – much of it taking inspiration from, Anscombe (1957) – which rejects Humeanism and illuminates human agential phenomena without problematizing them. But this work has been ignored when action is a topic in philosophy of mind where questions about the truth of PHYSICALISM are at issue).

#### 4. Causation by the Mental?

In order to bring out the point of thinking about agency in general, let me return to the boulder that flattened a barn and the person who flattened some dough. I hope that it might now be allowed that in both cases, so long as flattening was ongoing, the presence of causality is not accounted for by advert-ing to a relation of causation obtaining between two items. In §2, I imagined someone responding to the suggestion that boulders and people are “physical” in some same sense by saying that a person’s *body* is what acts, and that one must look to the antecedents of the body’s movements in a treatment of mental→physical causation. The thought behind this response is that a body’s movement needs a cause. So what I now imagine someone saying is that just as something must have set the boulder in motion if it flattened the barn, likewise something must have set a person in motion if she flattened the dough. Well, I shall argue that a person is not a sort of thing that is sporadically set in motion by an efficient cause.

Of course mental vocabulary has a place in an account of how it came to be that the person flattened the dough and no immediate place in an account of how it came to be that the boulder flattened the barn. What many say is that the language of the mental gets in the former case because it describes the mental states of a person which *cause* her action. Human actions, these people say, are caused by beliefs and desires, or by intentions, or by decisions. For instance, it is said that your wanting to hail a taxi caused the movement of your arm (Papi-

This is a myth I try to counter in one of its aspects in §4.

<sup>11</sup> In her Introduction to her edited (2008), Groff says, about what she aptly calls a *revitalized* notion of causality, that it has particular relevance to philosophers of social science; but there is no suggestion that there might yet be new life in philosophy of mind.

neau, 2013). And it is said that «a decision to turn on the light caused Gus to move his finger thereby flipping the light switch» (Robb and Heil, 2014). Such things indeed are often said by philosophers, and even more often they are assumed. But it is possible to disagree. Certainly you might have wanted to hail a taxi and have moved your arm in order to do so. But why should we think that this is a matter of there being a brain state which made your arm move?<sup>12</sup> Again, it could perfectly well have been that Gus would not have moved his finger thereby flipping the light switch unless he had decided to turn on the light. But why should we think that Gus was caused to move his finger by his decision? «Nothing caused me to move my finger», Gus might say, «it was getting a bit dark, and I decided to turn the light on».

The oft-made assumption that a movement of a part of a human body is the effect of one or more mental states derives, I think, from the causal theory of action, according to which actions are events caused by mental states. (No need for details here!). Many suppose that such a theory is established once it is recognized that a person may have done something she meant to *because* she thought such-and-such and wanted so-and-so; and then, on the strength of the fact that this *because* implicates causality, they assume that beliefs and desires stand to actions as causes to effects (with decisions or intentions maybe intervening).<sup>13</sup> An example will help to bring out what is problematic about the assumption. So suppose that Ann has just now flattened the dough. Perhaps she has done so because she wanted flattened dough. More illuminating, however, and explanatory in turn of her wanting that, would be the fact that Ann is in the process of making bread: she has to flatten the dough at certain stages in

<sup>12</sup> When Papineau says «We can understand ‘wanting to hail a taxi’ as referring to the specific brain state that makes the relevant subject’s arm move» (2013, p. 148), he seems to me to come close to presupposing the sort of *PHYSICALISM* for which he means to be arguing. My thought in note 2 (*supra*) was that Papineau’s levels physicalism needed a disputable ontological assumption. I take his supposing that an explanation why someone did something might be recast as a claim about what a specific brain state “made happen” to be evidence that Papineau is indeed in need of the disputable assumption.

<sup>13</sup> The story derives from Davidson (1963). There the claim that reason-explanation is causal comes to be “reformulated” as saying that “reasons cause actions”. For an argument against any such “reformulation” (an argument which didn’t trade on anything Aristotelian), see Hornsby (1999). Vicente once credited me with «the idea that causal relations have events as *relata*, while causal explanations can be relations between states» (Vicente, 2002, pp. 87–88). This has never been an idea of mine. I think – as Vicente says I do – that if believing that *p* is a state, then it is a state a whole person might be said to be in; but I deny that such facts as mention of it might be used to explain are things to which it stands in a relation. So I would deny that when I distinguished between causation and causal explanation, I «introduced an unnecessary complication in the argument». I do, however, think that causal chains had a more prominent part than they should have in the work of mine that Vicente criticized. Vicente responded to some of Hornsby (1997).

the process. I do not know how many actions a causal theorist might want to say there would come to have been between the time at which Ann started to make bread (finding the first of the various ingredients she assembled) and the time when she will finish doing so (she will take a baked loaf out of the oven if all goes well). But whatever the number might be supposed to be, one won't be apt to think that each has its very own cause, in the shape of a belief and desire which conspire somehow to trigger it. One can hardly isolate a flattening of the dough, and think that one knows just what caused just it.

When a person's actions are treated by the causal theory, as effects of mental states, it seems that we might as well think of the occurrence of any of them as a matter of the agent's ceasing to be idle. It is as if we could picture any piece of agency – hailing a taxi, turning on the light – as an interruption in a state of abeyance: now this belief and desire cause an action, next this other belief and desire cause another one ... . This might not be a very inaccurate picture of boulders: they lie around, and from time to time they may be subjected to one or another force or come to be in contact with one or another object. But it is not a realistic picture of a human agent who may have many projects on the go at any time, and whose individual bodily movements (however these might be supposed to be individuated) cannot be explained one at a time. When she is doing anything, thanks to her capacity to do it, there will be explanations of what she is doing which show her as having a reason to be doing it. She is a rational creature, leading a life, equipped with powers of thought and self-movement.

Let it be clear then that boulders don't have very much in common with human beings! If I have brought boulders (and the like) into the argument that is because macroscopic mere objects and human beings do have it in common that they have capacities whose exercises are causal processes. Allowing that they have that much in common, one must account for the differences between them not by appeal to different sorts of triggers for their respective actions, but by appeal to differences between inanimate things and rational beings who lead a life.<sup>14</sup> The causal theory of action not only misconstrues the role of mental states in taking them to be causes of actions, it also, and correlatively, fails to recognize that human beings are capable of moving.

And there is another reason to pay attention to the fact that macroscopic mere objects and human beings alike have capacities to act. An understand-

<sup>14</sup> I'm aware that here and elsewhere there is a signal absence of mention of non-human animals. I cannot go into questions about how rational animals differ from non-human animals (who of course for their own part lead lives); cp. note 9 supra.

ing of the nature of non-human agency has a bearing on an understanding of the human case. Human beings inhabit, learn about, and act within, the causal nexus of the macrophysical objects admitted in neo-Aristotelian metaphysics. In participating in agency ourselves, we rely on our knowledge of the properties of the objects upon which we may act; and we draw upon such knowledge in acting. Consider, for the sake of having an example, the knowledge that might be at the service of someone who has the opportunity to lift a book she wishes to read from the shelf above her. If she takes the book down from the shelf, then a capacities-based understanding of causality enters into explanations not only of what rendered her capable of taking the book from the shelf – she knew how to get it down, but also of how the book came to be in her hands – it was liftable down from the shelf. The concepts that enter the knowledge a person uses in acting are ones that she employs in learning how things are, knowing how they may come to be, and knowing how to make a difference to how they are. Thus the kind of causality involved in the goings on of objects about which a person can know could hardly be different from the kind of causality that a person's actions involve. Still the capacities of inanimate things and persons are as different as can be, with a person's capacities consisting in the knowledge of someone who has lived and is living in a world containing things her knowledge of which may inform what she is doing at any moment.

## 5. Conclusion

«The problem of mental causation» has come to be thought of as a problem about causation *by* «the mental». My suggestion has been that whatever “causation by the mental” might be supposed to mean, it is not a matter of cause-effect relations between mental things and physical things. Indeed my main point has been that causality at large as we understand it does not consist simply in cause-effect relations. Thus have I attempted to show why the principles about causation employed by problematizers and physicalists fail to make contact with any ordinary truths about ourselves as minded beings. I take philosophers of physicalist persuasion to be engaged in a vain attempt to reframe ordinary truths about ourselves by making use of some falsifying assumptions both about the scope of the PHYSICAL, and about the nature of causality.

I have not given arguments for the neo-Aristotelians' account of a powers-based species of causality (still less said anything about its roots in Aristotle). But I have tried to show how such an account can accommodate ordinary truths

about something that is doing (or has done) something or other (and perhaps is doing [or has done] it *to* something or other).

Nor have I attempted to give an account of human agency. But I hope to have said enough to suggest that any correct account of it might give the PHYSICALIST reason to pause, even if only to ask what it is for a person to be *in the process of doing* something that she means to be doing.

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