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God and Mental Causation

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ISSN 2211-4548
SpringerBriefs in Philosophy
ISBN 978-3-662-47425-9
DOI 10.1007/978-3-662-47426-6

ISSN 2211-4556 (electronic)
ISBN 978-3-662-47426-6 (eBook)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015941500

Springer Heidelberg New York Dordrecht London
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Printed on acid-free paper

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To Sora

Preface

Ever since I can remember I had questions about God. I wondered: if God exists, how does God causally interact with the world? This was, and continues to be, a deeply mysterious issue and I was never able to provide myself with a satisfying account. Years later, as a computer science undergraduate student in the 1990s at the University of California, Berkeley, I stumbled upon a philosophy course taught by John Searle. This opened my eyes to the world of analytic philosophy—in particular the philosophy of mind. It wasn't long before I was confronted by the so-called problem of mental causation. If the mind is, in some way, distinct from the body, how does the mind causally interact with the world? This fascinating question has kept me interested in philosophy for the better part of the last decade.

It was only toward the tail end of my doctoral dissertation writing that I began to see the connections between my questions about the God–world relation and the mind–world relation. They shared a number of similarities and I found it quite natural to pose the theological problem in terms of Jaegwon Kim's so-called Supervenience Argument. Given this isomorphism I found that the mysteries surrounding the God–world relation were no more mysterious than the mysteries surrounding the mind–world relation. And a small research project was born.

Since arriving at Renmin University of China in Beijing I have been focusing my research on these topics and have made efforts to bridge the work that has been done in the philosophy of religion regarding the God–world relation and the philosophy of mind regarding the mind–world relation. At the urging of my dean, Yao Xinzong, and my colleagues, Wen Haiming and Liu Yongmou, I decided to put a few of my published papers into a single coherent narrative. This has been a rewarding exercise because it has forced me to explicitly connect the dots and, in the process, see a bit more clearly how an account of the interconnections between God, mind, and world might be fleshed out.

Beijing, China
March 2015

Daniel Lim

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to colleagues, students, and staff at the School of Philosophy at Renmin University of China for the wonderful environment they have provided during my stay in China thus far. I am indebted to several key mentors I've had over the course of my academic journey in philosophy: J.P. Moreland, Garry Deweese, Martin Kusch, and the late Peter Lipton. They have, with care and sacrifice, helped me each step of the way and have positively influenced me not only in my intellectual development, but in my development as a person. I would also like to thank Mike Shook who took the time to read the entire manuscript and give me constructive feedback.

Significant parts of this essay have been drawn from material I have published in a variety of academic journals. Chapter 2 draws on “Occasionalism and Non-Reductive Physicalism: Another Look at the Continuous Creation Argument” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 75 (1): 39–57. Chapter 3 draws on “Why not Overdetermination?” *Heythrop Journal* 54 (4): 668–677 and “Causal Exclusion and Overdetermination” *International Philosophical Quarterly* 53 (4): 353–369. Chapter 4 draws on “Zombies, Epiphenomenalism, and Personal Explanation: A Tension in Moreland’s Argument from Consciousness” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3 (2): 439–450 and “Can a Dualist Adopt Bennett’s Strategy?” *Philosophical Forum* 45 (3): 251–271. I would like to thank Springer, Wiley, *International Philosophical Quarterly* and the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* for allowing me to use the material from these papers in the present essay.

Every year that goes by I realize more and more how the love and support of my friends (too many to name here!) and family have carried me through the ups and downs of pursuing a life in academic philosophy. I am so grateful to my parents Kwang and Young Lim, my in-laws Samuel and Sharon Lee, and my sister-in-law Lila Lee. And finally a special thanks to my wife Sora. You’ve sacrificed so much supporting me these past several years—this would not have been possible without you.

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Introduction

The driving conviction behind this essay is that there is a lot of fruitful dialogue to be had between philosophers of mind and philosophers of religion—insights gained in one area of research can be adapted to make progress in the other (and vice versa). A recent example of this dialogue can be found in the work of Nagasawa (2008). By laying out the basic structure of the so-called “knowledge arguments” against physicalism in the philosophy of mind he shows that these arguments have striking parallels with arguments in the philosophy of religion that purport to demonstrate the nonexistence of God. By exposing the deep structural similarities latent in these distinct areas of research, Nagasawa successfully demonstrates that new lines of research can be developed by simultaneously and carefully interacting with the work done in both fields.

While Nagasawa focused his efforts on juxtaposing debates regarding the metaphysics of consciousness in the philosophy of mind with debates regarding the existence of God in the philosophy of religion, I will focus my efforts on juxtaposing some of the work done regarding the metaphysics of mental causation in the philosophy of mind with debates regarding divine action, creaturely causation, and the existence of God in the philosophy of religion. More specifically, I will examine two specific debates within the philosophy of mind regarding mental causation: (i) the so-called “Supervenience Argument” against non-reductive physicalism and (ii) the alleged incompatibility that holds between mental causation and the possibility of zombies. These debates will be juxtaposed with several debates within the philosophy of religion including: (i) the possibility of creaturely causation, (ii) the science and religion debate, and (iii) the so-called “Argument from Consciousness” for the existence of God. My claim is that these various debates are connected with each other and results in one area will have critical import in other areas.

This essay is divided into two parts. The first part, comprised of the first three chapters, deals with the Supervenience Argument (SA) and its relation to the possibility of creaturely causation. In Chap. 1, I lay out Kim’s (2005) most recent formulation of the SA. I argue that the two stages of the SA are really instances of, what I will call, the Generalized Exclusion Argument (GEA). In Chap. 2, I show how Malebranche’s so-called Conservation is Continuous Creation Argument (CCCA)