ABSTRACT. Jaegwon Kim’s causal exclusion argument says that if all physical effects have sufficient physical causes, and no physical effects are caused twice over by distinct physical and mental causes, there cannot be any irreducible mental causes. In addition, Kim has argued that the nonreductive physicalist must give up completeness, and embrace the possibility of downward causation. This paper argues first that this extra argument relies on a principle of property individuation, which the nonreductive physicalist need not accept, and second that once we get clear on overdetermination, there is a way to reject the exclusion principle upon which the causal exclusion argument depends, but third that this should not lead to the belief that mental causation is easily accounted for in terms of counterfactual dependencies.

1. NONREDUCTIVE PHYSICALISM

Physicalism is the view that the world is the way it is, because the physical world is the way it is. All the facts, including all the mental facts, are fixed by the physical facts. Restricting our attention to the mental and physical realms, this means that properties within the former must at least supervene on properties within the latter:

(Supervenience) Necessarily if something has any mental property M, there is a physical property P such that the thing has P, and necessarily anything with P has M;

where the notion of necessity in play is taken to be metaphysical necessity.¹ There are three important points. First, this rules out substance dualism if we assume that mental substances are those with only mental properties. (Supervenience) says that anything with a mental property necessarily has a physical base property, so nothing has only mental properties. Mental...
properties are thus necessarily physically realised. Second, whatever particular physical property realises M is necessarily sufficient for M. This follows from the fact that (Supervenience) is a version of so-called strong supervenience. Second, whatever particular physical property realises M might not have done so. (Supervenience) is an asymmetric necessitation relation. We can think of (Supervenience) as the shared commitment of all forms of physicalism, as a kind of minimal physicalism. Third, whatever particular physical property realises M might not have done so. (Supervenience) is an asymmetric necessitation relation. We can think of (Supervenience) as the shared commitment of all forms of physicalism, as a kind of minimal physicalism. Reductive physicalists, however, go further and identify mental properties with physical properties, whereas nonreductive physicalists insist that mental properties are irreducible: (Property Dualism) Mental properties are distinct from physical properties.

Now, one might think that since the problem about mental causation has traditionally been wedded to substance dualism, and nonreductive physicalism is incompatible with substance dualism, nonreductive physicalism should have no difficulties in handling this common sense phenomenon. But Kim has forcefully argued that all forms of dualism face this problem, regardless of how the mental is otherwise determined by the physical. This causal exclusion argument is Descartes’ revenge! Moreover, Kim has argued that the only way for the nonreductive physicalist to respond to this argument is to reject completeness and accept emergentism including the possibility of downward causation.

This paper attacks both arguments. In section 3 I show that Kim’s other argument rests on a principle of property individuation that nonreductive physicalists should not accept, especially not those with functionalist leanings. This means that completeness is sound, hence that the exclusion principle upon which the causal exclusion argument depends must go. The justification for this principle derives from considerations about overdetermination, but I argue in section 4 that given (Supervenience), there is a subtle way to avoid the undesirable consequences of overdetermination. The fact that this involves recognising a counterfactual dependence between the supposedly overdetermining causes has lead some nonreductive physicalists to suggest that mental causation can be accounted