Introduction

'. . . So I was in the foyer waiting to get into a five o'clock performance at one of the cinemas in a new complex and my father and a woman came out of the earlier performance in another.

There was my father; the moment we saw one another it was I who had discovered him, not he me. We stood there while other people crossed our line of vision. Then he came towards me with her in the dazed way people emerge from the dark of a cinema to daylight.

He said, You remember Hannah, don't you—

And she prompted with a twitching smile to draw the gaze from him—for I was concentrating on him the great rush of questions, answers, realizations, credulity and dismay which stiffened my cheeks and gave the sensation of cold water rising up my neck—she prompted, Hannah Plowman, of course we know each other.

. . . . . .

Then he signalled a go-along-and-enjoy-yourself gesture, she murmured politely, and they left me as measuredly as they had approached. I watched their backs so I would believe it really had happened . . . Then I ran from the cinema foyer, my vision confined straight ahead like a blinkered horse so that I wouldn't see which way they were going, and I took a bus home, home, where I shut myself up in my room, safe among familiar schoolbooks.'[1]

This story describes quite a genuine process where perception, thought, and action are involved. It sounds rather natural to portray this sequence as a causal process that comprises three fundamental transitions:

(1) Will, the narrator, sees his father coming out of the cinema with a woman, and this perception *leads him* to believe that his father has a lover;

(2) and this belief *brings about* in him a growing feeling of anxious perplexity;
(3) which, in turn, *induces him* to undertake a certain course of action, say, shut himself up in his room to restore his shaken emotional balance.

These causal transitions must surely take in intentional phenomena. The contents of Will's perceptions, thoughts, or feelings at a given moment are crucially relevant to his perceptions, thoughts, feelings, or actions at a later stage. In (1), what Will sees is what causes him to adopt a certain belief, namely, that his father has a lover. In (2), it is the content of this belief that arouses his feelings of perplexity, which, in turn, induce him to undertake, in (3), a certain course of action.

It is clear that Will's mental processes produced certain effects on the material world. His brain structure was modified in certain ways, and his body moved towards a certain direction. Moreover, contemporary philosophers tend to assume that, unless these transformations in the material condition of the world were a matter of magic, they must have not only a mental explanation in terms of Will's psychological tension and perplexity, but a physical explanation as well (i.e. an explanation that would solely appeal to processes that can be fully described in material terms, say, neurophysiological, chemical, etc.). This is why they would insist that a physical, material process must underlie Will's psychological story.

The demand of an underlying physical process appears, at first sight, to be in conflict with our intuitions about the causal efficacy of Will's mental contents. Gordimer reports that 'Will sees his father coming out of the cinema with a woman'. It sounds then plausible to assume that there is a causal chain that leads from the complex array of inputs impacting on Will's body to those movements of him that are, at least prima facie, the effects of his perceptual contents. The description of that causal chain might mention neurophysiological states, muscular contractions, chemical reactions, etc, but nothing that, at first sight, could be recognized as 'mental'. Moreover, this causal chain seems to be enough, if anything is, to explain Will's movements. Yet, the existence of such a causal chain may pose a problem as to the causal relevance of the mental properties that figure in Gordimer's description of Will's psychological processes. For, how can these properties be causally relevant if a nonmental causal chain is enough to causally explain their effects? How can we, on the assumption that such a complete nonmental causal chain must exist, preserve the pre-philosophical intuition that mental states and mental contents are causally relevant?

To solve this perplexity, one may address the following question: what is the connection between the causal chain that does not seem to involve mental features and the causal chain that does involve those mental features? It seems clear that if they were totally unconnected, if their joint coinstantiation were just a sort of coincidence, then every case of mental causation would necessarily involve the existence of two different and independent causal chains for the same effect and, thereby, mental causation will appear as a case of overdetermination, like two darts (say, the physical and the mental) that simultaneously hit a certain target. It is not easy to believe, however, that the causal efficacy of our minds on the material world has to be accounted for in those terms. For, as most people grant, overdetermination is necessarily a rare coincidence and, therefore, any account of causation that entails the spread of overdetermination must contain something wrong within it. So, if massive overdetermination is to be avoided, then the causal efficacy of a particular causal chain in which mental features occur cannot be independent of the causal efficacy of the particular causal chain that is picked out in nonmental terms: mental states and mental contents cannot have but a parasitic kind of causal efficacy.

This requirement leaves plenty of room as to how this dependence between particular processes should be accounted for. The general conviction is, however, that the only way to render intelligible the idea of nonphysical causation is by reducing its autonomy, at least in this minimal sense. Whenever a genuine cause produces an effect, the causal efficacy of the nonphysical properties involved in that process will ultimately depend on the instantiation of certain basic (physical) properties. For whatever the causal efficacy of a nonphysical property may be *in a particular case*, it cannot go beyond the causal powers of the physical properties that are involved on that particular occasion. We shall use '*causal physicalism*' to refer to this general view. And we may provisionally characterize *the dominant view* about mental causation as the attempt to vindicate the causal efficacy of the mental by showing that mental properties meet the demands that causal physicalism imposes. The main purpose in this book is, nevertheless, to challenge both causal physicalism and the dominant view. Our criticisms will mostly have the nature of a *reductio*. We will elaborate a number of arguments that, on the basis of some dominant assumptions, lead to results that are not only intuitively intolerable, but also conflict with some of the fundamental principles that the dominant view endorses. We will thus conclude that the causal efficacy of the mental is inconsistent with causal physicalism, although this will not induce us to renounce mental causation, since there are important independent

reasons to doubt the other horn in the dilemma, namely: causal physicalism.

It will soon become clear that problems in the dominant picture derive from its commitment to a certain view about causal powers and, in particular, about the sense in which such powers must be intrinsic to their bearers. We shall firstly describe how this conception of causal powers has some untenable implications about the way in which causal dispositions should be ultimately individuated. We will thus show, for instance, that, contrary to what the dominant view assumes, the view about the intrinsicness of causal powers is at odds with the phenomenon of multiple realization, with the fact that functional properties admit of different physical realizations. Secondly, we will see how that view is closely interconnected with the idea of a complete physical explanation, which is surely at the core of the argument for causal physicalism. In fact, it is the idea that that every physical effect has a complete causal explanation in physical terms, together with the horror of massive overdetermination, that motivates the claim that every causal process must be physically implemented. The problem is that the causal physicalist must construe the notion of 'a complete causal explanation in physical terms' in the context of a redutionist approach to causation. But, if we are right, any approach of that kind is at odds with some elementary intuitions about causation on which the causal physicalist relied in the first place. We shall conclude, in this respect, that, even if one of the fundamental assumptions in the physicalist argument is the rejection of massive overdetermination, reductionist accounts lack the appropriate metaphysical resources to avert the abundance of overdetermination and, therefore, retain the intuition that causes are, at least in paradigmatic cases, counterfactually necessary for their effects. So, we may say that causal physicalism is wrong not only about mental causation, but about physical causation too.

On this basis, we will subsequently sketch an alternative, nonreductionist approach which, apart from shedding some light on certain fundamental aspects of causality (e.g. the avoidance of massive overdetermination), will permit us to recognize the causal relevance of functional properties, and apprehend the reason why mental contents occupy a privileged position that allows them to enjoy the highest degree of causal autonomy. So, we shall point out that it can be true of Will's emotional upset that:

> If Will had not had the perceptual content 'my father is coming out of the cinema with a lover', he would not have been emotionally distressed,

even if it is false of every specific (i.e. detailed enough to count as a proper cause) brain state of Will that:

> If Will had not been in such-and-such brain state, he would not have been emotionally distressed.

We shall argue that the truth of the former causal counterfactual is not only consistent with, but also entails the falsehood of the latter. To put it bluntly, we shall conclude that, contrary to the dominant view, Will's emotional distress has a psychological cause, but not a neurological one. In this context, we will show that the causal relevance of a functional property is consistent with the existence of an implementing mechanism for each instance of it. This line of reasoning will lead us to see that the notion of 'implementing mechanism' involves the truth of certain causal counterfactuals. We shall argue, however, that the fact that fine-grained mental contents are individuated on the assumption that they track the world, entails that no neurophysiological mechanism holds the required causal counterfactuals with regard to them. So, if we are to recognize the causal efficacy of such content, we must also grant the possibility of causation without the existence of implementing mechanisms. And it is, indeed, part of our task to show why this is not a matter of magic.

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A Case Against Physicalism

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