

# *Super-Hum(e)an Supervenience*

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4<sup>th</sup> May, 2010.

*A.* In about the last half-century, the concept of supervenience has been indispensable to the way in which philosophers in the Anglophone world— most prominently, metaphysicians and ethicists—have examined perennial metaphysical questions. Their battles over being, essence, plurality, and change are concerned with finding the truth about the links between the actual limits of phenomenal, empirical, and rational knowledge, on the one hand, and our human needs and habitats of making prediction, laws, judgments, and identity. The general concept of supervenience provides a basic framework on which to arrange, according to the programmatic interests of the analyzing thinker, the many ways we have of understanding things with respect to their empirically observable properties and also, sometimes, with respect to their logical necessary relations. It is heart and soul a metaphysical concept, requiring no epistemic answers. Like growing a fruit tree on an espalier, it is intended to set the pattern for an efficient and elegant plant. It is someone else's business to make a pie once the ripe fruit is plucked. The argument from supervenience can be used in a further march against the fundamentals of the approaches to philosophical questions based on subjectivity, such as phenomenology, existentialism, and structuralism; and it can make tough work of pie-baking in ethics and aesthetics. Both contemporary metaphysical logic and subjectivity, however, share an opposition to the epistemic approach to their

issues. From a generically subjectivist point of view, Humean Supervenience tells valid truths about epistemic philosophy. They are allies up to the edges of various fault lines. One of these fault lines is this: Humean Supervenience does not validly support physicalism; and, to the extent to which one employs Humean Supervenience to support physicalism, one's account of a world without necessary connection is a misunderstanding of what the illusion of necessity means for us.

David Lewis in 1986<sup>1</sup> simply stated that comprehensive notion of the supervenience of necessary connections on entities in the world which he dubbed "Humean supervenience." It is a notion that has the happy effect of extracting the least possible price from the ordinary plodding human search for meaning that was in accord with Lewis's realism and his form of materialism. Here is that statement of the idea:

Humean supervenience is named in honor of the great denier of necessary connections. It is the doctrine that all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another. (But it is no part of this thesis that these local matters are mental.) We have geometry: a system of external relations of spatio-temporal distance between points. Maybe points of space-time itself, maybe point-sized bits of matter or aether or fields. And at those points we have local qualities: perfectly natural intrinsic qualities which need nothing bigger than a point at which to be instantiated. For short: we have an arrangement of qualities. And that is all. There is no difference without difference in the arrangement of qualities. All else supervenes on that.<sup>2</sup>

Lewis also amplified this into a modest and generous cosmology:

Suppose we think of the entire history of the world as one big event. It is not caused by any event distinct from it... Likewise it does not cause any event distinct from it. So it has no causes or effects at all. Not as a whole, anyway. Its parts, of course, do all the causing there is in the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>In this paper I restrict myself to Lewis first conception of Humean Supervenience in the texts of various dates in which he stated the first conception, except for a few words at the end about the later modifications of the idea. These include Lewis 1980, Lewis 12983, and Lewis 1994 *inter alia*.

<sup>2</sup>Lewis PP 2.ix-x.

<sup>3</sup>Lewis 1986, p. 213.

Nothing in the history or the world is isolated from any other thing, the whole and the sum of its parts being the same “mosaic:” a “total history supervenes on the history of events.”<sup>4</sup> Notions are complete provided they supervene on truths. Anything not attached to truth by supervenience is no part of the total history of the world, though it might exist in other possible worlds.

This mosaic is the supervened “arrangement of qualities.” Since this arrangement is our history’s “one big event,” we should say that Lewis offers it here as a definition of truth: all that is true comprises all that which is supervened. This refers to metaphysical truth, which seems for Lewis to be different from the kind of systematic philosophical truth intended to blanket the spectrum of human endeavor. The truth is precisely the sum of local arrangements. I shall call this world according to Humean Supervenience the *true-world*. Consider, then the following six points about such a world *semé* with perfectly local and perfectly natural truths:

- (1). The judgment of truth or falsehood applies in exactly the same manner to information about local and particular facts supervenient physical wholes of all amplitudes, from the particulate (such as neural or atomic) to “medium-sized dry goods” to jumbo-sized earthly and celestial objects—and to persons.
- (2). No part of this true-world is intentional, moral, personal, conscious, purposeful, or spiritual. All nomothesis is supervenient cogitation.
- (3). Thinking about this true-world requires providing each quality with a minimal home-base of instantiation called a point. I call this a *quality-point* as it relates to events.
- (4). Events that are part of this true-world are different from qualities at the least by comprising more than one quality—perhaps by nothing further but certainly by nothing less. I shall call such events *event-parts* of the true-world.<sup>5</sup>
- (5). Because any of the event-parts of the true-world are characterized by their local natural qualities, each event-part consists of two or more non-identical qualities.
- (6). As between these two or more quality-points in each event-part of the true-world any notion of conflict or incompatibility is supervenient. The seemingly unavoidable tendency of human cogitation to resolve contradiction is to be viewed as our endeavor to understand the true state of affairs, and how it came to be, rather than as the expression of any existent other than the true-world it busies itself supervening, so far as we now know.

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 260-262.

<sup>5</sup>My reason for using the neologisms “quality-point” and “event-part” is to amplify Lewis’s own distinctions by separating concepts that are miscegenated in the phrase “spacetime points” used by Ned Hall in his article “David Lewis’s Metaphysics,” and its “Supplements,” in the online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lewis-metaphysics/#SpaRelSpaPoi>).

(To the side of these matters, it should be noted that Lewis carefully divorces Humean Supervenience from reductionism and correctly argues instead that the latter is derived from the former, that in fact it supervenes upon it; and that Humean Supervenience is no herald for “accommodationist projects,” which seem always an unhappy compromise and never more so than in ethics, where it is resorted to when the vision of a world strictly without moral values is too ghastly to bear.<sup>6</sup>)

**B.** Bearing these six points in mind, consider this description of Humean Supervenience by Lewis. Both example and metaphor, it is a notably guileless, straightforward account, recalling a bit of the man as well as making the argument:

Consider cylindrical combination locks for bicycle chains. The definitive characteristic of their state of being unlocked is the causal role of that state....; namely, that setting the combination typically causes the lock to be unlocked and that being unlocked typically causes the lock to open when gently pulled.... ...the lock contains a row of slotted discs; setting the combination typically causes the slots to be aligned; and alignment of the slots typically causes the lock to open when gently pulled. So alignment of slots occupies precisely the causal role that we ascribed to being unlocked by analytic necessity, as being the definitive characteristic of being unlocked (for these locks). Therefore alignment of slots is identical with being unlocked (for these locks). They are one and the same.<sup>7</sup>

The supervenience described by Lewis here is that of the state of being unlocked (or open) on one precise arrangement of properties, these being an alignment of slotted discs in the lock; the same supervenience onto a different precise arrangement of parts of the lock holds when we consider the lock to be locked (or closed). In the example we also have a neat dose of Lewis’s analysis of causality: the cause (locking or unlocking) occurred because no tumbler was in any position other than that set by the combination, and the effect (locked or unlocked) occurred because no tumbler was in any position other than that set by the combination. We take each

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<sup>6</sup>As in Mark Timmons, *Morality Without Foundations: A Defense of Ethical Contextualism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 199), esp. pp. 11-15.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis 1996, p. 100.

position of each of the tumblers of slotted discs to be a quality-point; all arrangements of these are event-points, of which one specific arrangement is supervened by the notion of unlocked because nothing had happened, prior to our approach to the lock, to prevent the tumblers resting at the prescribed settings. The notion of locked supervenes upon all states of affairs of the tumblers other than being at rest at the prescribed settings. As to the unlocked position, all other combination of tumbler settings are counterfactual conditions. And as to the locked position, one specific combination of tumbler settings is a counterfactual condition (or a local set of same). Everything is local and natural, cause and effect supervene on hypotheses, and hypotheses supervene on the true-world. Thus, those concepts (or judgments) we make by ascriptions of states of affairs such as locked and unlocked are exactly the same as the arrangements of qualities into events in the true world. One way to define Humean Supervenience is as an explanation of the connections denoted by the phrase “exactly the same as” in this example. But the supervenient notion, in order to cover the local world beneath it, must have three parts inside of the one occurrence that it is supposed to describe. In the next paragraphs I will try to pick apart the three parts locked into a the idea of a supervening description.

1. If a bicycle lock with two tumblers—funds are low so I can provide merely a cheap lock, but fortunately this is helpful for the sake of simplicity—each of which has ten slots numbered 1 through 10, where the sole correct combination to set it to the unlocked position is the first tumbler at 10 and the second tumbler at 2, we may say under Humean Supervenience that the true-world of the unlocked lock has at least two quality-points (the setting at 10 and the setting at 2), even though one may identify the event-parts in a number of different ways (each tumbler as an event, any combined setting of the two as an event, etc.). Because these two settings cause the unlocking, I call that event-part of the true-world in which they are correctly set the *occurrent cause*. These two qualities comprising the occurrent cause are different, non-identical properties. They do not conflict, and neither makes the other not possible. Setting any of the ten slots on one of the tumblers never makes setting the other tumbler to any of its ten slots impossible. All settings of the cylinders are mechanically possible, but neither tumbler can be set to more than one numbered slot at any one time. Thus each tumbler regarded as a single event-part has ten non-contradictory possible qualities, both tumblers together regarded as a single event-part having 100 non-contradictory possible qualities. In the true-world, the setting of the tumblers at 10 and 2 is just as local

and natural as setting them at 7 and 9, at 3 and 3, or at any of the 97 remaining mechanical possibilities. The setting at 10 and 2 is no more local, natural—physically real and mechanically possible—than the settings that do not unlock the lock.

2. What then metaphysically distinguishes the setting at 10 and 2 as the occurrent cause of unlocking the lock? They are an indispensable means to opening the lock. When the lock is unlocked, every other arrangement of settings is counterfactual to unlocking the lock or to the state of being unlocked for this lock. This state of affairs I shall call the *occurrent effect*. So in the true-world, that perfectly natural and local world as viewed according to Humean Supervenience, the occurrent cause is indispensable to the occurrent effect. In other locks, and other worlds, different tumbler settings or a large heavy channel-lock of tempered steel can open the lock; or, a laser ray, a nuclear bomb, or a magician, or certain tools in the hands of skilled lock-pickers can unlock the lock. But in the natural local world there is one occurrent cause, defined and bounded; and there is one occurrent effect, defined and bounded. Without these the unlocked lock would be no event-part of the true-world in these circumstances. In this case, the occurrent effect supervenes on the occurrent cause. It is the same thing by another name. The ordinary names for this state of affairs, “unlocked” or “open,” makes the settings at 10 and 2 different from every other setting. Yet it seems unhelpful to say that cause and effect differ in name only.

3. Both the occurrent cause and the occurrent effect are tied to the entire chain of causality that preceded our spinning the tumblers. Someone invented the workings, someone made the lock and set its combination, someone bought it and locked it into our bicycle. But this historical explanation while certainly (well, probably) true requires epistemic analysis, historical constraints, a batch of physical laws, social actions, communication, personal agency for the clear reason that the event-parts occurrent in the example of the bike lock are defined and bounded. They come pre-packaged. The occurrent cause cannot be undone and hence the occurrent effect cannot be undone. In-between them lies another object of study, to which the theory of Humean Supervenience devotes its chief consideration. I shall call this the *causal occurrence*. It is to the causal occurrence that the metaphysical analysis of necessary connections is directed, and it is in the time of this occurrence that the true-world must function or fail as an account of what supervenes and what is supervened.

C. For Lewis the contingent supervenience of the occurrence supports physicalism.<sup>8</sup> In the following two arguments I shall try to show, first, that it does not support physicalism and, second, that Humean Supervenience requires a doctrine of necessity that disables the coherence of its account of reality.

For the first argument, we need to picture a causal occurrence. Just about any straightforward and relatively simple regular action of cause and effect in matter will do. I've chosen one of the best-known episodes in the history of science, the Magdeburg Sphere of 1656. An engraving of the demonstration (fig. 1, attached), based on the drawing of a live observer,<sup>9</sup> remains one of the famous images in the history of science and serves here as a lively and enjoyable picture of the experiment. One of two copper hemispheres milled to precisely fit each other into a sphere but without any locking mechanism, was fitted with an external valve, by which a recently invented air-pump created a vacuum within the sphere created by joining the hemispheres. Since the pressure of the atmosphere was thousands of times greater than the nil or virtually nil pressure within the sphere, the two halves became so tightly joined that they could not be pulled apart by two teams of eight horses, each pulling one hemisphere in a direction opposite the other. The inventor, Otto von Guericke, put on this show in Magdeburg, of which he was mayor. The inseparability of the spheres must have seemed bizarre to the observers on the scene because nothing visible mechanically locked its constituent hemispheres.

At the moment pictured in the engraving we can say that the state of affairs is static. The air outside the sphere, the air inside, the metal mass, and the "horsepower" are sufficiently near to equilibrium to keep the hemispheres bonded. In the true-world, there's a lot of quality-points of one kind in the sky, a few such inside the ball, a thick mass of them comprising the ball, and other kinds forming the organic forces harnessed to stress the hemispheres. We, however, understand

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<sup>8</sup>Lewis frequently states this, but note his own careful distinction between metaphysical materialism and the materialist view of causality as applied to identity theory at Lewis 1966, pp. 102-104. Cf. Leuenberger, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup>The engraving illustrates Gaspar Schott's *Mechanica Hydraulico-Pneumatica....* (Würzburg, 1657). My attached reproduction is of the Posner Collection copy at Carnegie-Mellon University, at [http://posner.library.cmu.edu/Posner/books/pages.cgi?call=533\\_G93O\\_1672&layout=vol0/part0/copy0&file=0128](http://posner.library.cmu.edu/Posner/books/pages.cgi?call=533_G93O_1672&layout=vol0/part0/copy0&file=0128). A picture of the original copper hemispheres, now in the Deutsches Museum, München, will be found at [http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Pneumatics/Magdeburg\\_Hemispheres/Magdeburg\\_Hemispheres.html](http://physics.kenyon.edu/EarlyApparatus/Pneumatics/Magdeburg_Hemispheres/Magdeburg_Hemispheres.html).

these by adding conceptions of both qualities and powers to the event-points. These conceptions range across many levels of universalization and nomothesis, for they include motion, mass, force, steel, and horse. The mental business of Humean Supervenience is like that of a distorting mirror, very specially equipped to focus and relate quality-points in many different ways in every region on the field it reflects. The mirror has the capacity of distorting the true state of affairs, such as by adding dispositions that do not actually exist—but no more or less of such distortion than has any metaphor for human understanding or for the activity of our understanding itself. The doctrine of Humean Supervenience describes supervenience as the activity of human understanding—or at least the part of it outside of mathematical necessity—just as the mirror is the site of the activity of vision for anyone looking into it. Yet if this is the case, then according to Humean Supervenience we do not understand matter itself and we can only perceive it.<sup>10</sup> Human understanding is conceptions (which might be termed images or ideas) formed out of perceptions that themselves are not “understood” but merely sensually received. When we supervene conceptions onto the Humean true-world we batch up adjacent qualities, like the two settings of the bike lock. We do the same at each amplitude, from particulate to jumbo: our understanding is of conceptions and not of matter. This contradicts physicalism.

To add a dynamic element to the picture, let us say that Bürgermeister von Guericke orders enough horses to be added to the teams that, as a result, the force the animals exert will exceed the pressure of the atmosphere. In reaction to the increased horsepower, air starts to enter the sphere (perhaps through microscopic faults in the milling), pressure then builds within the metal wall, the inflow increases its rate of growth as the vacuum bond diminishes, and finally the hemispheres visibly separate. In this case, the occurrent cause includes both animal motive force and atmospheric pressure. The occurrent effect is the divorced hemispheres. For our purposes, two points follow.

First, the causal occurrence—the steady exchange of solid stability for gaseous pressure—is the understanding we gain by the action of supervening concepts onto qualities. According to the theory, the causal occurrence is conditionally necessary, and it is also contingent upon the observer’s ways of conceptualizing event-parts. It is hard to see why the contingent choice of observers create any

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Schopenhauer, p. 119.

kind of true-world reality out of counterfactual possibilities. If there is any factual necessity in the true-world, it could not have been inserted as a fact by our understanding. For our understanding is not of matter but of conceptions, whereas the true-world is physical according to Humean Supervenience.

Second, occurrent causes are taken to be (re-)arrangements of qualities hitherto established, the “mosaic” at which the action of the occurrence begins. These arrangements are part of the subsequent occurrence, and yet they have come into being wholly as contingencies. Why should the past, with its inheritance of innumerable historical necessities, be more contingent than the present arrangement into which we have grouped matters in order to understand them?

I’ll have a bit more to say about causality at the end of this paper, but my topic here is Humean Supervenience rather than counterfactual analysis of causality. Peter Unger says that the enlargement strategy of “the two Davids,” intended to defend supervenience by including, in effect, all of history, cannot provide sufficient reason for any existence without recourse to propensities (dispositions or powers).<sup>11</sup> I have made a related point, correct to the same effect as Unger’s point, that matter *simpliciter* must have causality or be mysterious to any physicalist. For the non-physicalist, it is hard enough to account for our understanding through the sensorium even with a wider range of causality than we these days will consider: centuries of theorizing about *species intelligibilis* are proof of this. Enlarging the mosaic of the true-world to all history weakens the logical tie between supervenience and physicalism because both contingency and necessity, joined by Humean Supervenience “conditional necessity,” lose their meanings at the amplitude of history or the world, except by resort to something unreal in so far as it is non-physical: a world of possibility so vast and so lawless that it does not account for the physical world.

**D.** Humean Supervenience is not to be thought of as being entirely concerned with causality. If it were, it should stand or fall with the counterfactual analysis of conditionals, and well it may— but not because supervenience ideas necessarily rise from ideas about causality. The reverse is more logical: that an analysis of causality

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<sup>11</sup>Unger, pp. 134-136.

deployed with Humean Supervenience is dependent on the deeper ontology, even though Hume or anyone else reached the ontological position following upon his new thoughts about necessity in causation. At this point the baby cannot be left on Hume's doorstep. A "mosaic" of "entirely local" parts is still a metaphorical mosaic. As I indicated in Lewis's example of the bicycle lock, the causal occurrence, being the opportunity for supervenience, never fully accounts for causality. And as I tried to show in case of the Magdeburg sphere, the theory of supervenience does not succeed in accounting for the causal occurrence in physicalist terms. With enlargement pitting Humean Supervenience up against its ontology, I will now turn to the farthest end of the amplitude-meter, out in the danger zone marked in biohazard yellow: the matter of persons. I approach the second argument by means of a different image of a very special causal occurrence.

It is the visual record of action preserved by two stills from the silent film *Steam Boat Bill, Jr.* (1928, dir. Charles Reisner) starring Buster Keaton (see fig. 2, attached).<sup>12</sup> One of the stills shows the beginning of the 12-second scene and the other shows the end. At the beginning of the action, after many narrow escapes from harm in the prior parts of the film, Buster arrives hapless and bewildered in front of a derelict house. The house is one story plus an attic, about 20 feet high. Suddenly the entire front wall of the house tips over at a right angle and in the space of about three seconds it falls to the ground more or less in tact in its general shape. The part of the wall that lands on the spot Buster stopped at happens to be the rectangular attic window, and it has no glass. The window frame slips right around Buster as the wall crashes. After it's all over he's still upright, apparently unharmed, and rather more bewildered than he was before a house fell on him. Finally, with the interior of the house exposed behind him, Buster dashes away from the scene. If Buster had stood or moved a couple of inches, or more, in any direction, he would have been harmed because the wooden boards of the house frame would have crashed onto him.

The occurrent effect is the unharmed Buster. But the effect was not the result solely of what occurred when the studio grip pushed the wall down from behind. The effect was due to Buster also because he did not move. If I saw a wall toppling onto me I would run away from it, and so would you. But Buster had trained since

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<sup>12</sup>The attached image is copied from [http://13.media.tumblr.com/tumblr\\_krfk3hKA421qzdvhio1\\_r1\\_400.jpg](http://13.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_krfk3hKA421qzdvhio1_r1_400.jpg). The full clip may be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsyRhRR5Iu4>.

childhood to control his muscles so as to move in very precise ways when on stage. Slapstick depends on such precision. Keaton's discipline and training made it possible for him to do slapstick stunts and to survive them evidently unharmed, though he apparently was actually harmed in several stunts without knowing it. The force of control necessary to resist the instinct to run away from the wall, to stand still without automatically moving a muscle beyond a tiny tolerance, and to stay sufficiently still so as to create the visual effect and to avoid harm was tremendous and rare. So in this case the effect, Buster, was not merely passive, though the point of the scene is to make him appear passive. As his character Buster looked like the patient sufferer, but as an actor Buster exerted active and forceful will just in order to stand still. He was, let us say, an *im-patient effect*.

Every effect must precisely fit its cause or causes. Even when we regard every cause and every effect as a causal occurrence, each having its own predecessor causes and successor effects, all causal occurrences still depend on an historical fit. We can and do regard this fit as the residue of gold from silt in a miner's pan. We may and we do conceive of a reality operated by an infinite number by other possible worlds. Every possible world is as fragile and as improbable as our world if each can be changed by an infinite number of finkish thingamajigs. The essence of the fragility of every event is that it has to fit our world just exactly as the window frame fits over Buster. To speak metaphorically, each effect reaches back toward its past cause, and every cause reach ahead to its effect. To speak literally, when we supervene causality onto the true-world, we describe something that is both fragile and inevitable— chancy necessity and necessary chance. By analyzing our description as counterfactual, or as regularity, or as law, we claim that this fit must be absolutely necessary and at the same time entirely chancy. To accept supervenience as an account of any explanation of causality we must hold two contrary views at the same time: that everything in the true-world must be completely necessary, no thing being capable of being just a little bit necessary, and that everything in the true-world must be entirely chancy.<sup>13</sup> If the causal occurrence is merely the occasion for our supervenient ideation it is also the meeting-point of the rationality and irrationality of our world. It is attractive because everything seems just to slip into what it is and avoid greater chaos than the reality seems to hold by the slimmest of margins. Between living ordinary life and surviving a comic series of accidents there is hardly any daylight. Like the

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Lewis 1980, pp. 111-113.

audacious crow, we grab what suits us and then loudly chatter as if nothing can touch us as at perch on top of the lamp-post.

*E.* David Lewis was aware of the problem that the concept of chance, or probability, presented to Humean Supervenience as he examined probability between 1975 and 1986. In the “Principal Principle” of 1980, which de-formalizes probability from a statement about the external world into an assertoric form of credence, he realized that fit (or balance<sup>14</sup>) and probability were in conflict. In 1994 he attempted to resolve the conflict by the “New Principle.” According to the New Principle, our credence in a specific event is based on applying a theory of chance to the whole causal chain of history and that chance itself, in turn, is based on application of a theory of chance to a specific event, apart from the causal chain of history. The difficulty with this is that it does not affect the conflict between historical necessity and chance. Whatever has passed is absolutely necessary but once was conditionally necessary. How does the past pass from one state to another? On a physicalist view of the world, events must always have the historical necessity they seem to have when they are past. My mother often said, “The spoken word can never be taken back”—advice that has proven wise, though I ought to have remembered it more often in classrooms. You can’t unpickle a cucumber: once a cucumber is pickled, no one can return it to being just a cucumber. Yet it is this kind of irredentist present that both the Principal Principle and the New Principle propose we regard as physically embodying the actual chanciness of singular events. There is, Lewis says, no perfect solution.<sup>15</sup> Of course not: because necessity and chance are not separate. They truly are not distinct parts of reality or of the way we regard reality. That no necessary connection can be proven means not that reality is a true-world of local and natural quality-points, but that physical reality cannot be fully understood in terms of the necessity we require to act in it.

My argument is not a new one. I stole it from Plato:

For the generation of this universe was a mixed result of the combination of

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<sup>14</sup>Lewis 1994, p. 479.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 490.

Necessity and Reason. Reason overruled Necessity by persuading her to guide the greatest part of things that become toward what is best; in that way and on that principle this universe was fashioned by the victory of reasonable persuasion over Necessity. If, then, we are to tell how it really came into being on this principle, we must bring in also the Errant Cause—in what manner its nature is to cause motion....<sup>16</sup>

Dodds dubs Errant Cause the “unreliable junior partner” of Necessity in the Demiurge’s creation of the universe.<sup>17</sup> Plato means that necessity and chance are the same and that there are two kinds of Reason in reality. Relying on one kind of reason distinct from chance (and *vice versa*) will lead any realist ontology to swallow up dispositions. If necessity is what we supervene onto the natural world, chance is supervened as well, being no less universalized and no more localized than necessity—in fact, different in no fundamental from it.

Lewis said that his project was part of the separation of truth from being in modern thought. His anti-essentialism identified essence with necessity, which we never can lay hold of. Such a fragile world nonetheless has come into place. In it, a human being “cuts and binds” the threads that link the truth and being, as Heidegger put it in his *Holzwege*. We might seek merely to be delivered from necessity and delivered to our desires—or at least to chance—but this desire points out that to live without necessity is more than human and that the existence of any world is something super-human.

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<sup>16</sup>*Timaeus* 48a, trans. by F. M. Cornford in his *Plato’s Cosmology* (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1957), p. 160, where he persuasively argued that in Plato Necessity and Chance (Errant Cause) are the same thing; *q. v.*, pp. 160-77. This idea was canonized by Guthrie and most fluently and elegantly presented, as usual, by E. R. Dodds.

<sup>17</sup>Dodds, p. 21.

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- Figure 1:** The "Magdeburg Experiment," anonymous engraving after a drawing in Gaspar Schott's *Mechanica Hydraulico-Pneumatica....* (Würzburg, 1657).



**Figure 2:** Two stills from the house-wall collapse scene in *Steam Boat Bill, Jr.* (1928, director, Charles Reisner), starring Buster Keaton (on-screen in both stills).



