Nonreductive Individualism
Part II—Social Causation

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In Part I, the author argued for nonreductive individualism (NRI), an account of the individual-collective relation that is ontologically individualist yet rejects methodological individualism. However, because NRI is ontologically individualist, social entities and properties would seem to be only analytic constructs, and if so, they would seem to be epiphenomenal, since only real things can have causal power. In general, a nonreductionist account is a relatively weak defense of sociological explanation if it cannot provide an account of how social properties can participate in causal relations. In this article, the author extends NRI to address this weakness and provides an account of social causation that he refers to as supervenient causation.

Keywords: individualism; collectivism; social realism; social causation

In Part I, I argued for nonreductive individualism (NRI), and I provided an account of the individual-collective relation that is ontologically individualist, in holding to token identity and supervenience of the social on the individual. Token event identity (TI) is the claim that there is only one kind of event in the universe, regardless of the terms, concepts, or laws used to describe those events. Supervenience is the claim that if two token events are indiscernible with respect to their lower level description, then they cannot differ in their higher level description. I then presented the wild disjunction account of multiple realizability to argue that TI and supervenience do not entail methodological individualism. There is an open empirical possibility that social properties are multiply realized in wildly disjunctive sets of individual properties. This possibility shows that neither methodological individualism nor methodological collectivism can be proven theoretically; the proper methodology for any given social
phenomenon must be empirically determined. The balance of empirical evidence to date suggests that wild disjunction obtains for many social properties, thus leading to a nonreductive individualism.

However, NRI seems to have a weakness that limits the strength of its collectivist argument. Because social properties are supervenient on individual properties, they would seem to be epiphenomenal, since all causal power must reside in the supervenience base; therefore, the existence of social laws is called into question, since laws are regularities that assume some notion of causal mechanism. NRI would be a relatively weak defense of collectivist sociology if it could not provide an account of how social properties can have causal powers. In the following, I extend NRI to address this weakness, providing an account of social causation that I refer to as supervenient causation (SC). My goal is to argue that sociologists are warranted to develop causal laws in which social properties of events can be causally related to individual properties and social properties of later events and that these causal laws may be irreducible to individual-level causal accounts.

My arguments here are analogous with arguments in the philosophy of mind regarding whether supervenience is compatible with mental causation (Heil and Mele 1993; Horgan 1989, 1993; Kim 1989, 1992b, 1993; Loar 1992; Lowe 1993). Epiphenomenalists like Kim argue that according to TI and supervenience, mental events cannot be the cause of any physical events, because they are token-identical with physical events. If mental event $M(t)$ seems to be the cause of physical event $P(t + 1)$, then the cause is actually the token-identical physical event, $P(t)$. For example, a desire to drink does not have causal power in virtue of its being a desire but only in virtue of being the same as its realizing brain state, and this realizing physical state carries the causal force. Thus, the epiphenomenalist holds that the mental is causally inert. Given TI and supervenience, Kim argued that there is no place for irreducible mental causal relations.

As a result of the criticisms of Kim and others, philosophers of mind are divided about the best way to account for mental causation. Most philosophers of mind wish to retain an account in which the mental can have causal power; consequently, they have expended significant effort in responding to this epiphenomenalist critique. Most of us have a strong intuition that our mental states can cause physical events to happen. If we want another drink from our glass, this desire causes the muscles in our arm to move in such a way that we reach out toward the glass, grasp it, and bring it to our lips. Yet mental causation
seems to require realism concerning the mental, because only real things can have causal power. Explaining the appearance of mental causation is one of the major tasks facing philosophy of mind. Several philosophers of mind have proposed accounts of mental causation that are compatible with TT and supervenience, and I will draw on these accounts in extending NRI to account for social causation.

Contemporary debates concerning individualism and collectivism also center on whether social properties can have causal force. Many structural sociologists seem to accept a form of NRI but without responding to the parallel arguments that nonreductive materialism fails to account for mental causation. Structural sociologists have not made an explicit argument for social causation (as noted by Cohen 1989; Giddens 1984, 13-14, chap. 4; King 1999; Porpora 1993; Varela and Harré 1996, esp. 316-19). Gellner’s ([1956] 1968) criticism that a “mere construct” cannot causally affect reality (p. 256) has been frequently repeated by contemporary critics of sociological realism. Although many structural sociologists propose social causal laws, it is unclear whether these are meant to be descriptive conveniences or to represent real causal relations. For example, Blau’s (1977) examples of social laws—for example, that the larger an institution is, the higher its degree of differentiation of function—could be useful descriptions of phenomena, even if individuals are not constrained or influenced by these structural-level phenomena. Cohen (1989) noted that although structural sociologists say that their proposals for emergent social structures are merely analytic abstractions, they nonetheless propose that these structures guide behavior and resist change. But analytic abstractions cannot do these things; only real entities with causal power can. Giddens’s (1984, 174) influential work was particularly critical of the structural sociologist’s notion of social causation (cf. Layder 1987, 36). Giddens’s systems are always dependent variables and are thus epiphenomenal (Archer 1982; Porpora 1993, 219-20).

This argument against the possibility of social causation is one of the strongest arguments made by both individualists and interpretivists against structural sociology. Given supervenience, a reductionist could respond that all of the causal work is done by the lower level individual substrate (e.g., Kim 1989). Perry (1983) drew on similar arguments to claim that even if you accept the collectivist’s claim that logical reduction of social wholes is impossible, social wholes cannot be causes even though they are not reducible. This is commonplace among social theorists; even those that reject method-
ological individualism (such as Giddens) nonetheless often argue that only human actors can be the sources of social action. Even the realists Varela and Harré (1996, 316) claim that only agentive human beings can be the source of social causation.

These arguments are quite similar to antirealist arguments in the philosophy of mind concerning mental causation. I take seriously those claims, both in social theory and by analogy from the philosophy of mind, that accepting TI and supervenience seems to imply that the social is epiphenomenal; these arguments demonstrate that NRI, as presented in Part I, does not provide an account of social causation. In the following, I extend NRI to provide an account of social causation, drawing on analogous arguments for mental causation in the philosophy of mind.1

As a result of the widespread acceptance of TI and supervenience, most philosophers of mind accept that mental causation cannot be a causal relation between two classes of events, mental and physical. Rather, scientific causal laws are laws relating properties of two successive events. The argument for mental causation starts from property dualism: the view that the mental and the physical comprise two different classes of properties that are both instantiated in the same objects or events. Philosophers of social science who wish to reject epiphenomenalism can take two approaches to property dualism: traditional realist arguments that social properties are autonomous from individuals and the supervenience approach (taken here) that social properties are not autonomous from individuals. Most rejections of social causation have been directed against autonomous causation (AC):

AC. Social properties are real and have causal powers that are autonomous from the causal powers of their composing individuals.

Some philosophers of mind reject arguments for realism of the higher level and counter that if one holds to TI and supervenience, then AC must be rejected (Kim 1989; Lowe 1993; Sober 1999). These critiques of mental causation and nonreductive materialism show that supervenience alone does not entail the irreducibility of social laws.2 In a critique of AC, Sober (1999) argued that supervenience entails the following:

Causal completeness of the lower level postulate (CCL). With respect to the mental, physics is causally complete; with respect to the social, indi-
individualism is causally complete. The chance at time \( t \) that an event will occur at time \( t + dt \) is fixed by the lower level properties that the system has at time \( t \); this probability is unaffected by taking into account the system's higher level properties at time \( t \) as well.\(^3\)

CCL claims that knowing the higher level properties of a system is unnecessary, once you know the physical properties. Higher level properties emerge from lower level conditions, and without the presence of these lower level conditions, the higher level properties could not exist (Kim 1999, 25). AC is the denial of CCL; AC holds that the occurrence of a mental property at time \( t \) makes a difference in the behavior that will occur at time \( t + dt \), even after all the physical properties at time \( t \) are taken into account (Sober 1999, 142). Supervenience entails CCL, and if one accepts CCL, one must reject AC. Thus, supervenience is incompatible with the claim that higher level properties can have causal power independent of their realizing lower level properties. To hold otherwise would result in *causal overdetermination* or *causal dualism* (Loar 1992; Sober 1999).

Because NRI definitionally accepts supervenience, and supervenience entails CCL, NRI entails CCL. Because CCL and AC are incompatible, NRI must reject AC. However, the rejection of AC does not require the sociologist to reject the formulation of laws that posit social causation. I will argue that NRI is consistent with supervenient causation (SC):

**SC.** Social properties do not have autonomous causal force, because their causal consequences obtain in virtue of their realizing individual supervenience base. However, a social property \( S \) with supervenience base \( I \) at time \( t_1 \) can lawfully be identified as the cause of social property \( S^* \) and individual property \( I^* \) at time \( t_2 \), even though \( I \) cannot be lawfully identified as the cause of \( I^* \) (see Figure 1).

SC claims that a full and complete description of observed sociological regularities may require social causal laws that cannot be reduced to individual causal laws. Why can't the causal law \( S \rightarrow S^* \) simply be reduced to an individual causal law by substituting the equivalent individual supervenience bases, deriving the law \( I \rightarrow I^* \)? A large body of argument in the philosophy of mind has been directed at exactly this question, with epiphenomenalists like Kim arguing that if \( S \rightarrow S^* \) is a lawful relation, then \( I \rightarrow I^* \) must also be a lawful relation, and with mental realists like Fodor arguing that just because \( S \rightarrow S^* \) is lawful does not necessarily entail that \( I \rightarrow I^* \) is a lawful rela-
tion. In the following argument for SC, I will draw on philosophers of mind including Davidson, Fodor, Horgan, Kim, McLaughlin, and others. Although I ultimately reject the epiphenomenalist arguments of Kim, I believe that they are instructive in highlighting some common weaknesses in arguments for social causation. I base my argument for SC on the mental realist arguments of Fodor and others, to show that NRI is compatible with the existence of irreducible causal laws of two forms (arrows numbered in Figure 1):

1. **Social constraint.** Social property \( S \) at time \( t_1 \) lawfully causes individual property \( I^* \) at time \( t_2 \), even though the supervenience base \( I \) at time \( t_1 \) does not lawfully cause \( I^* \).

2. **Macrosocial laws.** Social property \( S \) at time \( t_1 \) lawfully causes social property \( S^* \) at time \( t_2 \), even though the supervenience base \( I \) at time \( t_1 \) does not lawfully cause the supervenience base \( I^* \) at time \( t_2 \) or social property \( S^* \) at time \( t_2 \).

CAUSATION IS A RELATION BETWEEN EVENT TYPES, NOT EVENT TOKENS

Several philosophers reject arguments for mental causation, arguing that one cannot hold both to materialism and to property dualism because supervenience entails CCL, the causal completeness of the lower level. Even if a token event has both social and individual properties, CCL entails that the individual properties fully determine the event’s causal powers. Consequently, an event’s social properties cannot affect the event’s causal powers. In the following, I provide an account of social causation that responds to these criticisms.

Most philosophers agree that causal laws describe relations between event tokens but that these event tokens participate in causal
relations in virtue of falling under event types (McLaughlin 1989, 112). Although it is event tokens that cause and are caused, such relations must be grounded or backed by appropriate type-type relations if they are to be described by any scientific categories, theories, or laws. Events causally interact in virtue of instantiating event types that are nomologically related; causation requires laws that are such that if events fall under them, the events count as causally related. To argue that social causation is a necessary element of scientific explanation, we have to argue that (1) there are causal laws framed in terms of social types or properties, such that when token events instantiate the social types or properties of the law they can be shown to be causally related, and that (2) there is no causal law framed in terms of individual types or properties that causally explains the relationship between those successive event tokens.

The argument for SC begins with the distinction between token epiphenomenalism and type epiphenomenalism (following McLaughlin 1989). Both types of epiphenomenalism deny the social a role in causation but in different ways. Token epiphenomenalism is the weaker claim that a token social event cannot be a cause; supervenience entails token epiphenomenalism because each social event token is identical to an individual event token, and the causal power of any token social event will inhere in its individual supervenience base. Type epiphenomenalism is the stronger claim that events cannot be causes in virtue of falling under social types. Type epiphenomenalism is true iff there are individual causal laws and no social event type is a partial or complete cause factor in a causal law.

Token epiphenomenalism does not entail type epiphenomenalism (cf. Horgan 1989, 1993; McLaughlin 1989). For example, Horgan’s (1989, 1993) argument for quasation accepts token epiphenomenalism while rejecting type epiphenomenalism. In Horgan’s account, a token event c causes a token event e in a causal law only in virtue of being instances of event types F and G. Scientific laws are phrased in terms of event types, not tokens; otherwise, there would be no generality and thus no explanation. To say that c caused e is actually to say that, in Horgan’s (1989) formulation, “c qua F caused e qua G” (p. 47). Horgan elaborated this argument by appeal to an account of causation involving counterfactual relations.

Philosophers of mind are of different opinions on type epiphenomenalism concerning the mental. Most sociological theorists who reject social causation hold to type epiphenomenalism with
regard to social properties, including subjectivists like Giddens and methodological individualists like Homans and Coleman. This is a prominent position in the philosophy of social science as well. Referring to Figure 1, type epiphenomenalism is the claim that if $S \rightarrow S^*$ is a lawful relation, then $I \rightarrow I^*$ must also be a lawful relation and, therefore, that the social type $S$ does not do any causal work. Rejecting type epiphenomenalism requires one to argue that in some cases, $S \rightarrow S^*$ may be a lawful relation even though $I \rightarrow I^*$ is not a lawful relation. In the following, I elaborate the arguments of Part I to show that in certain cases, type epiphenomenalism regarding the social may be incorrect. If so, sociological theory may of necessity contain social causal laws that are irreducible to causal laws at the individual supervenience base.

**SUPERVENIENT CAUSATION**

The argument against type epiphenomenalism requires a return to the arguments of supervenience and wild disjunction presented in Part I. Supervenience is a synchronic claim: the individual events and properties at a time determine everything that happens at that time. In Figure 1, $I$ determines $S$ and $I^*$ determines $S^*$ (dotted vertical lines). But as a synchronic claim, supervenience does not apply to processes of causal determination over time. Type epiphenomenalism goes further than the ontological claim of supervenience in making the epistemological claim that according to supervenience, if $S$ explains $S^*$, then $I$ explains $I^*$. Likewise, if $S$ explains $I^*$ (what would appear to be a social constraint on an individual), then $I$ explains $I^*$. Explanations in terms of $I$ and $I^*$ are what Watkins (1957) famously called “rock-bottom” explanations.

In Part I, I demonstrated that if the individual-level equivalent of a social property is wildly disjunctive, then explanations in terms of $I$ and $I^*$ are not necessarily lawful, even when the relation between $S$ and $S^*$ is lawful. In complex systems in which wild disjunction obtains, methodologically individualist explanation may be in principle impossible. Here, I extend this argument to provide an account of social causation, again drawing on philosophy of mind responses to epiphenomenalist critiques.

Davidson (1970) used supervenience to ground the rejection of type identity (and type epiphenomenalism) and the acceptance of token identity (and token epiphenomenalism). Because Davidson
accepted the monist ontology of supervenience, given any social causal law, the individual supervenience base of the nomically antecedent social property is causally responsible for the token event. Yet because causal laws are couched in terms of types and natural kinds, a social causal law refers to a social event type, rather than an event token.

Kim (1979, 1984) later called this “supervenient causation.” Kim noted that the nonreductive accounts of Fodor and Davidson were compatible with physicalism, in accepting that the mechanisms of higher level causation must be eventually physical. In terms of Figure 1, if S is instantiated by being realized by I at time t₁, then the causal powers of this instance of S are identical with (perhaps a subset of) the causal powers of I. Higher level properties are causally efficacious but only because they are supervenient on lower level properties, which realize that higher level property and which figure centrally in the lower level causal explanation of the same phenomenon that the higher level property purportedly explains.

Kim (1993) argued that given this account, one doesn’t need the higher level property at all, because the state of a system at time t₁ is identical with its lower level description, so one could just as well say that the lower level description was the cause of the state at t₂. SC seems to leave the higher level without any true causal powers; all of the causal power attributed to higher level properties inheres in the lower level supervenience base. Thus, Kim argued that higher level causal laws are useful in explanation only because of the limitations of our observational and analytic powers (Kim 1999, 32; 2000).

Social causal laws posit that a social property at time t₁ lawfully causes a social property at time t₂. For example, a standard law of structural sociology is that an increase in the size of a group results in an increase in the differentiation of the group (Blau 1977). Given supervenience, both of these macrosocial properties exist only in virtue of their supervenience bases. To cause any social property to be instantiated, you must cause the individual base conditions from which it arises (Kim 1999, 24). Therefore, using the notation of Figure 1, the only way for social property S to cause S* is for social property S to cause I*, and S can do this only in virtue of its realization as I (Kim 1992a, 136). Nonreductivists must go further than SC, Kim claimed, and argue that higher level causal powers are “determined by” but not identical with the lower level causal powers.

These arguments against higher level causation are also found in abbreviated form in the philosophy of social science. Gellner ([1956]
1968) agreed with the individualist’s instinct that if a causal law has a social fact antecedent, that antecedent must “be translatable into individualistic terms” (p. 262). Kincaid (1997, 74-76) argued against Kim, holding that supervenience is compatible with higher level causation, but his argument was not well elaborated and did not respond explicitly to the above argument. Pettit (1993) criticized SC in arguing for his program model, which is based on an externalist variety of supervenience. Pettit argued that because structural regularities supervene on intentional regularities, structural powers can never deprive individuals of autonomy, and thus he rejected the possibility of social causation over individuals (pp. 27-32, 152-54). But his critique of Kim’s account drew on multiple realizability examples and “some-states,” and these are not problematic for Kim and other advocates of SC. Thus, the exact ontological relationship between Pettit’s and Kim’s arguments remains unclear. In spite of his rejection of causal social properties, Pettit (pt. 2) elsewhere referred to higher level states as “causally relevant . . . in a non-causal way” (p. 37). These apparently contradictory claims can be clarified and strengthened by drawing on the account of nonstrict causal laws presented below.

**CAUSATION AND SOCIAL LAWS**

In the following, I respond to these critiques of SC and present an account of how there may be irreducible social causal laws that do not necessarily refer to autonomous social properties by drawing on Part I’s wild disjunction critique of type identity.

Many special sciences propose causal laws in terms of higher level properties. Sailboats move forward because of the wind-flow dynamics associated with the airfoil shape of the sail. However, an antirealist holds that the properties of the airfoil are not real because they obtain in virtue of their supervenience base. A complete physical description of an airfoil—all of the molecules composing the sail and the air moving past the sail—would provide a complete causal description of the system. The well-known laws concerning airfoils do not contribute any causal explanatory power above and beyond this complete physical description.

In contrast, Fodor (1989) outlined a realist account of such higher level properties: the question about whether a property P is causally responsible reduces to the question whether there are causal laws about P. Thus, even if the properties in the higher level science are
supervenient on the properties that the lower level science talks about, the properties that the higher level talks about are not epiphenomenal. For example, aerodynamic properties are causally responsible just in case there are aerodynamic causal laws. Laws about airfoils are laws about the causal consequences of airfoils. Thus, “being an airfoil,” although a property of a whole, cannot be causally inert.

By analogy, social properties can be causally responsible if there are irreducible social causal laws. Whether there are social laws has been a long-standing topic of debate in the philosophy of social science. Methodological individualism is committed to the claim that there are no social laws that are irreducible to laws concerning the behavior of individuals. Methodological individualists accept that there can be reducible social laws, although they are generally implicit about the role of causation in such laws (Kincaid 1990, 1997; Mandelbaum 1957; Mellor 1982; Pettit 1993).

Philosophers have long recognized that laws in the special sciences are different from physical laws; they apply “all other things being equal.” Such laws are said to be “hedged” or *ceteris paribus*: they specify that the law holds under normal or ideal conditions, where those conditions are specified by the theoretical context of the law. Such laws are considered problematic by many philosophers of science, because the canonical conception of a law requires it to hold of necessity; a law is a necessary relation between events, not simply an observed regularity. Clearly, higher level regularities are not necessary laws. This raises the question, In what sense are apparent causal relations between social event types lawful?

Many philosophers of mind maintain that nonstrict laws can be causal laws (Davidson 1970, 1993; Fodor 1974, 1997; Horgan 1997; McLaughlin 1989). Fodor and Davidson both argued that laws in the special sciences cannot be strict laws—necessary and exceptionless regularities—but that the special sciences can have lawlike generalizations (Fodor 1974). Davidson claimed that there are higher level laws, although they are not what he called “strict laws.” A strict law is one that contains no *ceteris paribus* qualifiers; thus, it is exceptionless and necessarily holds. Physical laws of causality are candidates for strict laws, and the exclusion principle argues that events are causally related only in virtue of falling under strict laws (Davidson 1993, 9). Davidson argued that there cannot be strictly nomic higher level properties, although there can be nomic higher level properties—in
other words, higher level properties that figure in (nonstrict) higher level laws.

Several philosophers initially misunderstood Davidson to be claiming that there were no higher level laws. Repeating this reading in sociological theory, Porpora (1993) drew on Davidson to claim that there cannot be social laws, in arguing against the possibility of the laws of structural sociology proposed by Blau (1977) and Mayhew (1980). Giddens (1984) made a similar critique of macrosocial laws, although without invoking specific philosophers. However, Davidson never claimed that there cannot be psychological laws, only that those laws cannot be strict. Porpora argued that social laws must depend on intervening individual-level laws, otherwise they could not be lawlike. Due to his failure to distinguish types of laws and to acknowledge the implications of wild disjunction, this claim was not convincingly argued (Porpora 1983).6

Laws in all special sciences admit some unexplained exceptions; this is a result of their realization at the lower level (Fodor 1974; Mellor 1982, 52-63). There are many ways that groups of people can have a given social property (e.g., being a church), and a disjunctive definition of these individual-level properties would be impossibly complex. Instead, we make do with useful approximations at the higher level, which consequently admit some exceptions. The approximation, of course, cannot be just a coincidence; it must be lawlike. Those who reject social causation claim that higher level laws are approximations to more complex lower level laws with fewer exceptions; for example, this is the explicit claim of methodological individualism.

Supervenience entails that social causes have their effects via intervening mechanisms at the individual level. But in spite of the necessary existence of such mechanisms, SC suggests that we may never be able to describe that base causal relation in a lawlike way. Davidson (1970, 100) claimed that although we know that a mental event is identical with some physical event, we may never be able to know which physical event, in the sense of being able to give it a unique physical description that brings it under a relevant law. Why not? Because of wild disjunction.

WILD DISJUNCTION

As we saw in Part I, Fodor (1974) rejected “Nagel reduction” of mental laws: the form of reduction that requires bridge laws that
replace each higher level natural kind term with a lawful, coextensive lower level natural kind term. Due to wild disjunction, such bridge laws will not be lawful; thus, Nagel reduction is impossible. Kim argued, contra Fodor, that given any causal law containing a higher level property, such as (1) in Figure 2, one could substitute the wildly disjunctive lower level individual property equivalent (2) and, thus, have a lower level law.

Fodor countered that (2) would not be a law, because the wild disjunction of lower level properties is not a natural kind and thus cannot participate in lawful relations. Given the occurrence of any token event, its cause is only explained by that single element of the antecedent disjunction that applies to that event token; the other terms in the disjunction are unnecessary and have no lawful relation to the observed token event we wish to explain.7

Under SC, higher level properties are supervenient on lower level properties and thus are determined by them; yet, due to wild disjunction, it may be impossible to lawfully describe event regularities in terms of the lower level description. Therefore, disjunctive lower level properties are not causal properties; on any occasion when a disjunctive lower level property is instantiated, the causal work is done not by the whole disjunction but only by whatever specific disjunct is instantiated on the given occasion (e.g., Horgan 1997, 167). This is similar to Yablo’s (1992) argument for mental causation that causes should be commensurate with their effects; part of commensuration is that nothing causes an effect that has a lot of extra stuff that is irrelevant to the effect. But lower level causes often fail to be commensurate, because they bring along a lot of causally irrelevant stuff. Although a higher level cause is less determinate, its essences are better attuned to the effect’s causal requirements.
Note that arguments for higher level causation require a rejection of the causal exclusion principle and CCL, when causation is considered as a type-type event relation. For example, Horgan argued that causal properties are properties that figure in patterns of diachronic counterfactual dependence among properties. Higher order causal properties meet this definition, and these properties are not necessarily nomically coextensive with lower level causal properties. In Horgan’s (1994) view, a single event can be subject to a variety of different explanations, involving properties from a variety of different counterfactual relation patterns. Horgan (1997) argued that causal explanations at different levels of analysis are not in competition, because they refer to “different, but equally real and objective, dependency-patterns among properties” (p. 179). Thus, as a consequence of type dualism, Horgan advocated “robust causal compatibilism,” that properties at multiple levels may each be causal.

Wild disjunction demonstrates that a social law may not have any corresponding law at the individual level. Social properties can participate in tractable social laws, even if the underlying individual-level explanation is too complex to submit to lawful description. If this is the case, then our laws must be formulated as if social event types have causal powers, even though each token social event is identical to its individual supervenience base.

Given this presentation of the relation between collectivist sociology and individualism, we expect both that there will be exceptions to the laws of collectivist sociology and that those exceptions could potentially be explained in terms of individuals. This is one of the senses in which individual descriptions are more basic than social ones. This is also why there are no strict laws of sociology but only nonstrict laws.

Philosophers of mind generally accept that special science laws are different from basic science laws, because there must be a mechanism in virtue of which the satisfaction of its antecedent brings about the satisfaction of its consequent. Yet just because there is an implementing mechanism doesn’t mean that the properties that the law projects are causally inert (Fodor 1989, 68). Under the above account of social laws, if wild disjunction is characteristic of the relationship between the social and the individual, then although social properties must be implemented or realized by individual properties, this does not mean that social properties are causally inert.
CONCLUSION

I have argued that the relation between the social and individual levels of analysis is analogous to the relation between the mental and the physical. Sociological theory and the philosophy of mind are both concerned with the relation between two levels of analysis, a componential level and an emergent higher level. Both are concerned with an ontological question, whether the higher level is anything more than the lower level components, and a methodological question, whether higher level properties and laws can be explanatorily reduced to lower level properties and laws. And both are concerned with the issue of higher level causation—What is the status of causation from the higher to the lower level, or between successive event descriptions at the higher level? I have argued that the various theoretical stances that sociologists have taken on these issues—in the debates between nominalism and realism, between methodological individualism and structuralism, between structuration theory and morphogenetic dualism—are parallel to oppositions found in the philosophy of mind.

By drawing on the philosophical debates that led to the current consensus position of nonreductive materialism, I presented an argument for a sociological stance that I called NRI. NRI rejects both autonomous sociological realism and methodological individualism. In Part I, I used supervenience and wild disjunction to argue for NRI. In Part II, I extended these arguments to show that sociologists may be warranted in developing laws of social causation and in arguing that these laws are not necessarily reducible to individual causal laws.

The above account of SC is distinct from an account that is widely accepted by sociologists: that social properties gain their causal power only in virtue of being perceived, interpreted, or internalized by individuals. For brevity, I will refer to such theories as interpretivist, although they are also called subjectivist or voluntarist. Like methodological individualists, interpretivists reject sociological collectivism and realism in arguing that social properties do not exist and cannot be considered to have causal power. This modern tradition originates with Weber, was elaborated in Talcott Parsons’s work, and is characteristic of a line of theorists extending through Schutz, Garfinkel, Giddens, and Bourdieu. In the past two decades, Giddens has perhaps made the strongest and best-known interpretivist arguments against social causation. For Giddens (1984) and other interpretivists, only individuals’ perceptions of and orientations toward social facts
can be causal antecedents: “structural constraints . . . always operate via agents’ motives and reasons” (p. 310). The task of the sociologist is not to objectively describe social properties and the lawful relations among them; rather, it is to consider how interpretations of such phenomena influence agents’ actions.

Even those contemporary philosophical accounts that are nonreductionist about the social are typically grounded in theories of individual intentionality (e.g., Gilbert 1989; Pettit 1993). In contrast, the above account of social causation does not require any consideration of the mental states of individuals and, as such, provides a grounding for structural sociology. Although social properties are supervenient on individual properties, the causal force of social properties does not have to be mediated through a conscious awareness of them on the part of individuals. The above argument applies to any pair of contiguous levels of analysis, without any consideration of subjectivity, intentionality, or consciousness. Of course, the argument originated in the philosophy of mind to provide an account of how mental facts cause physical neurological events, and obviously an individual neuron has no internal representation of the overall conscious state of the mind. The analogical argument for SC of the mental does not require a theory of agency or subjectivity, because mental causation is thought to exist even though neurons have no agency. Similarly, supervenient causation is an account of social causation in which social properties may cause individuals to behave in certain ways, and it does not require a theory of the agency or subjectivity of those individuals.

At the same time, there is nothing in this account that requires one to reject theories of interpretivism and intentionality. However, if one accepts the above argument for SC, the theoretical path available to interpretivism is much more circumscribed. Interpretivism has found success by arguing that if social facts are not hypostatized, then they are merely analytic constructs and thus can only have causal power when they are perceived and interpreted by conscious agents. But NRI shows how social properties can participate in causal laws even when the affected individuals do not perceive them, and the existence of such irreducible causal laws is consistent with the supervenience of social properties on individuals.

NRI results in a methodological approach similar to that of Archer’s (1995) emergentist analytic dualism. NRI provides an account of how macrophenomena both are constituted by individuals and, at the same time, can exert causal force over individuals. Like Archer’s
emergentism, NRI rejects Giddens’s structuration theory in arguing for the separability of individual and social properties, and for causal relations between them. NRI can provide a philosophical foundation for Archer’s theory of social emergentism, in the same way that mental emergentism has been linked with supervenience (Kim 1992a).

In addition to these implications for interpretivist theories, NRI also has implications for theories of the micro-macro link. NRI does not correspond exactly to any of the existing solutions to the micro-macro problem; for example, it does not correspond to any of the five approaches identified by Alexander and Giesen (1987), because it combines elements of each, accommodating both individualist and collectivist insights. For any given sociological phenomenon, the extent to which individualism or collectivism is a useful part of the complete explanation must be determined through empirical study (cf. Fodor 1974; Kincaid 1997, 13-30). There is no a priori reason a given sociological phenomenon would be more amenable to one methodological approach or the other; the question of which properties of complex systems are reducible is an empirical one. On empirical examination of a specific social phenomenon, wild disjunction may turn out not to hold for its social properties; for these relatively simple social systems, there may be type identity between social and individual properties such that individual-level causal laws can be identified to explain social-level regularities. The import of NRI is that we do not yet know which method of explanation will ultimately be the most successful for a given social property.

Thus, NRI raises problems for both methodological individualism and those structural sociologists who claim that “questions about the relationship between ‘the individual’ and ‘society’ . . . are not central to sociology” (Mayhew 1980, 358). I have noted that individualists often fail to distinguish between ontological and methodological arguments; the same is true of structural sociologists. Structural sociologists have not provided an adequate account of how structural phenomena can be real and causally efficacious even while they supervene on individuals; thus, they are open to the criticism that they hypostatize social structure. One reason why individualists are so quick to dismiss methodological collectivism is that structural and realist sociologists have not presented convincing arguments that collectivism is compatible with ontological individualism. Ontological individualism accepts that collectives do not exist apart from their constituent individuals, and NRI accepts this ontological commitment of individualism. However, NRI shows that ontological indi-
individualism does not entail methodological individualism; science may be required to proceed as if social properties exist.

NRI is stronger than the epistemological claim that social-level explanations may be better than individual-level ones, even if the latter were possible and available. Individualists are usually willing to grant that social laws may be a useful shorthand for describing what are essentially lawful relations among individuals (e.g., Elster 1985; Watkins 1957). Instead, NRI holds that social-level causal explanations may be possible even when individual-level causal explanations for the same events are not possible. Social laws are not necessary only because the individual-level explanation is extremely complex; they are necessary because the individual-level explanation is not always lawful. Thus, NRI is more than a claim about the limitations of our scientific abilities; it is a claim about the complex nature of social reality, and to this extent, it is a form of sociological realism.

Many sociologists have dismissed the possibility of an objectivist science of the macro level; for example, it is common in sociological writing to see pejorative references to positivism (cf. Turner 1993). This anticollectivism has become a widespread attitude in part because sociological theorists have not yet developed an argument for an objectivist and collectivist science that avoids hypostatizing or reifying social phenomena. NRI shows that sociology can be an objectivist science of the macro level and that with regard to some sociological phenomena, this may be the only form that such a science can take.

NRI makes it clear that there is no necessary similarity between social properties and individual properties. By analogy with the philosophy of mind, mental properties have no clear connection to properties of neurons; the fact that a person holds a belief does not imply that his or her individual neurons must have anything like a belief. Likewise, the fact that a group has a social property does not imply that the component individuals must hold that property. Much sociological theory has presumed that for a collective to take an action or hold a dispositional state, the composing individuals must take similar actions or hold similar dispositional states. For example, the claim that a collective has made a decision is often presumed to imply that the composing individuals have individually made decisions. NRI makes it clear that although sociological properties are supervenient on properties of individuals, there is not necessarily a lawful connection to the properties of those individuals. Note in particular that it is compatible with NRI to develop a sociological theory
that attributes agency to collectives, even if that theory denies agency to individuals. It is also compatible with NRI to argue that social agency may have very little in common with individual agency and may hold to different laws.

My argument here has assumed an analogy between two relations: the mental-biological and the social-individual. The philosophers of mind who make these arguments have generally held that they apply to any contiguous pair of levels of analysis. Of course, there are myriad differences between people and neurons, and between collectives and people, and social kinds may be quite different from natural kinds. However, the argument holds if social kinds are “natural” in the sense that they exist in the world independent of scientific convention, and in the sense that membership in a social kind is determined by the causal structure of the world (see part I, n. 14). I have argued that whether this is true of social kinds is an empirical question and that the debate about sociological realism must be resolved empirically.

Émile Durkheim ([1898] 1953) was the first to make this argument from analogy. In his article “Individual and Collective Representations,” he argued that “the relationship which unites the social substratum and the social life is at every point analogous to that which undeniably exists between the physiological substratum and the psychic life of individuals” (p. 25; see Sawyer 2002a). In these two articles, I have argued that the analogy between these pairs of levels should be revisited in light of recent developments in the philosophy of mind, and I have shown how these developments can contribute to contemporary debates in social science. Many social scientists assume the type identity of social and individual properties, even as they reject type identity of individual and biological properties; in fact, this is the classic statement of methodological individualism found in Popper and Hayek. In sociological theory, Durkheim’s claim for social causation has been widely rejected, whereas in the philosophy of mind, the dominant contemporary position is that there is mental causation. If my analogy holds, it requires an extraphilosophical account to explain why the social and the mental have received such distinct treatments in social science and philosophy. I suggest that this contrast is an oddity of intellectual history, perhaps attributable to our culture’s ingrained individualism and the accompanying folk theories of intentionality and agency.
NOTES

1. As in Part I, I occasionally replace the original terms mental/physical used in these sources with either social/individual or higher level/lower level, while continuing to attribute these modified arguments to the originating philosopher of mind.

2. Some philosophers of social science mistakenly hold that supervenience entails irreducibility; see Sawyer (2002b, n. 10).

3. Also see Papineau (1993, 16) on completeness. This is also known as the exclusion argument for epiphenomenalism (Yablo 1992, 246) and is similar to Pettit’s (1993, 151) causal fundamentalism.

4. Kim (2000) has recently called this downward causal explanation. For additional discussions of these arguments, see Clarke (1999, 311-13).

5. In earlier work, Kim (1979) called this supervenient dualism to contrast it with epiphenomenalism; he did not deprive the mental of its causal powers but rather held that their causal powers were dependent on the causal powers of underlying physical processes (pp. 47-48). Kim’s (1999, 2000) earlier position on supervenient causation (SC) later evolved into a rejection of the possibility of mental causation, due to his commitment to causal exclusion (cf. Horgan 1997). Although rejecting autonomous causation and realist versions of SC, Kim (2000) continued to accept that a nonrealist form of SC may still be valid and that science may still need downward causal explanation (cf. Clarke 1999).

6. Also see Blau’s (1983) response in the same issue.


8. This also seems to be Pettit’s (1993) position.

9. Also see Horgan’s (1993) account of preservative irrealism: preservative irrealism treats the higher order discourse as legitimate and indispensable, while repudiating its apparent ontological commitments (p. 581).

10. This point has also been made, using different arguments, in Gilbert (1989) and Pettit (2000).

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