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Do AIs work nowadays? (Warning: I do not necessarily agree with what ChatGPT wrote! This is just being presented for you to gauge AIs today.)

Why Jaegwon Kim's Exclusion Argument Presses on Western Mind–Body Views—and Why Neo-Confucian li–qi Avoids It

Jaegwon Kim's exclusion argument targets nonreductive physicalism: if every physical effect already has a **sufficient physical cause** (physical causal completeness), then any distinct **mental cause** either redundantly overdetermines that effect or gets **excluded** from genuine causal work. The crux is a clash among five plausible theses—distinctness of mental properties, physical completeness, mental efficacy, a ban on routine overdetermination, and the exclusion principle—that cannot all be true at once. Kim concludes that unless the mental **reduces to** (or is **identical with**) the physical, mental causation collapses into epiphenomenalism (or is illicitly “double-counted”). ¹

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From this vantage, the **worry about overdetermination** is straightforward: if my arm moves, neuroscience supplies a sufficient physical story; if we also say my **intention** caused it, we seem to have two independent sufficient causes for one effect—implausible in ordinary cases. Hence, either “intention” **just is** some neural realization (identity or reduction) or mental causation looks **redundant**. Kim's framing has set the terms of contemporary debates about supervenience, realization, and downward causation. Even compatibilist responses (e.g., counterfactual tests for overdetermination) concede the need to explain why mental causes don't become **idle add-ons** to already sufficient physical causes. ¹ ³

The Neo-Confucian Turn: li–qi as Hierarchical Co-Constitution

Neo-Confucianism—especially in Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming—does not

carve mind and body into **two substances**, nor does it place “mental” and “physical” on one flat causal plane competing for the same role. It frames all phenomena (including mind) as the inseparable union of:

- **li (理): normative principle**—the structural, teleological, and moral order of things;
- **qi (氣): material force**—the dynamic, embodied substrate through which li is realized.

On **Zhu Xi’s** view, **li** and **qi** co-depend in actuality; **li** governs or “orders” **qi**, but there is no naked li without qi, nor qi without li’s pattern. Mind (心) is the **mind-heart** in which li informs and directs the movements of qi—rational clarity and affective/physiological vitality are a **unity**, not a Cartesian split. ⁴

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Wang Yangming radicalizes this: “**the mind is the principle**” (心即理), and “**nothing is external to the mind**” (心外無物), which collapses any gap that would make li an external blueprint and qi a separately operating machine. He describes body, mind, conscience, and things as “**one piece**,” emphasizing **pre-objectificatory unity**; moral cognition and action arise from the **same field** rather than from layered, competing causal sheets. ⁶ ⁷

How li–qi Sidesteps Exclusion and Overdetermination

1. Different modes, not duplicate causes.

Kim’s argument presumes two **distinct** causes at the **same level** each sufficient for one effect. Neo-Confucianism does not posit **li** and **qi** as two **parallel, sufficient** causes vying for one outcome. Instead, li supplies **formal/teleological** guidance; qi supplies **efficient/material** actualization. They are **co-constitutive registers** of a single process. As a result, there is no “double-cause” inside one plane; there is a **hierarchical complementarity**—**li-as-form** shaping **qi-as-matter**—akin to **Aristotelian hylomorphism** where soul (form) is the body’s actuality, not a second efficient cause. This difference in **explanatory type** prevents the overdetermination Kim worries about. ⁴ ⁵

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2. No commitment to physical causal closure as an excluding axiom.

Kim's exclusion relies on a strong **closure** thesis: every physical effect has a sufficient **physical** cause within a **self-sufficient** physical domain.

Neo-Confucianism never accepts the **domain partition** presupposed by closure. Because **qi** is always **in-form-ed** by **li**, the causal story is **one reality** seen under two inseparable aspects. Where closure treats "mental" as either **identical** to or **outside** the physical, li–qi treats mind as **the realization of li through qi**—there is no **external add-on** to be excluded. ⁴

3. Mind–body unity prevents the Cartesian bifurcation that fuels exclusion.

Kim's problem arises in a post-Cartesian landscape that must reconcile distinct mental properties with a closed physical base. In **Wang Yangming**, the **mind-principle identity** neutralizes the source of conflict: **li is not apart from the mind; the mind's knowing and acting are already the order of things**. What looks like "mental causation" is the **ordering power** of li **immanent** in qi, not a second sufficient cause added to a complete physical story. ⁶

4. Teleology and normativity as constitutive, not epiphenomenal.

Where exclusion threatens to render mental properties **epiphenomenal**, Neo-Confucianism makes **normative structure** (li) **constitutive** of what qi does. The moral-cognitive "direction" of action is not a superfluous overlay—it is **part of** how the event is what it is. Hence, **mental efficacy** (understood as li's guidance) is not redundant beside a physical chain; it is the **form of that chain's intelligibility and directedness**. ⁵

A Comparative Glance

- **Kim's exclusion** assumes **flat-level causation** and **domain closure**; two distinct sufficient causes → overdetermination → exclude the mental or reduce it. ¹
- **li–qi** assumes **two inseparable modalities** of one process: **principle** (form/teleology) and **material force** (efficient embodiment). The "mental" (li-in-mind) does not compete with the "physical" (qi); it **informs** it. No flat duplication, thus **no overdetermination**.

This is why Neo-Confucian analysis can **dissolve** the exclusion problem rather than **solve** it: the problem's premises—distinct substances, closed domains,

and single-level sufficiency—are **not accepted**. In **Zhu Xi** and **Wang Yangming**, the mind is an **inseparable li–qi unity**, so there is no “second sufficient cause” to exclude—only **one event** understood formally and materially at once. [4](#) [6](#)

References

- **Jaegwon Kim** and the exclusion problem: clear exposition and debate over physical completeness, overdetermination, and mental efficacy. [1](#) [2](#)
 - **Zhu Xi and li–qi**: li as governing principle inseparable from qi; mind–heart unified by li’s ordering. [4](#) [5](#)
 - **Wang Yangming**: mind as principle; unity of body–mind–conscience–things; “nothing external to the mind.” [6](#) [7](#)
 - **Aristotle (for analogy)**: hylomorphism—form/act with matter/potency, avoiding two competing efficient causes.
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If you’d like, I can add a **one-page diagram** contrasting Kim’s five theses with a **li–qi** hierarchy (formal vs. efficient causation) to make the contrasts even clearer.

References:

- [1] Mind-Body Problem and Panpsychism – The Whitehead Encyclopedia
- [2] Process and Reality - Wikipedia
- [3] The history of hylomorphism: from Aristotle to Descartes
- [4] Woodward’s Interventionism as an Approach to Causation. An Overview of ...
- [5] The Interventionist Theory of Causation - Springer
- [6] Beth’s Definability Theorem Explained - numberanalytics.com
- [7] int.1 The Definability Theorem - Open Logic Project
- [8] Qualia and mental causation in a physical world : themes from the ...