

## PRIVATE EVENTS

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**ABSTRACT:** What are “private events” and what is their significance? The term is B. F. Skinner’s, but the idea is much older. Before J. B. Watson challenged their methods and their metaphysics, virtually all psychologists assumed that the only way to discover a person’s supposedly private states of mind was to ask her about them. Not a believer in minds, Skinner nevertheless agreed that sensations, feelings, and certain unspecified forms of “covert behavior” cannot be observed by others, because they take place inside the body underneath the skin. Then he added that these inner events are of interest only to the physiologist; the concern of the behavior analyst is how intact organisms interact with their environment, not how their inward parts interact with each other. That compromise enabled Skinner to pursue behavior analysis in disregard of neurophysiology, which there was at the time no good way to study anyhow. But Skinner’s talk of ineluctably private events was ill considered and ill conceived. There is no well understood sense in which people *observe* their own sensations, feelings, and “covert behavior,” but if these take place inside the body, as it is reasonable to believe, the physiologist *can* observe them given the sophisticated new machines now available. And since these events inside the body vary with circumstances and influence behavior, the psychologist cannot afford to ignore what the physiologist has to say about them. Black box psychology is out of date. Though it is opaque, the skin is not an epistemological barrier.

*Key words:* private events, covert behavior, functional analysis, physiology, phenomenal qualities, privileged access, mental images, introspection, topic-neutral description, identity theory, intentionality, observation, reducibility

### Introduction

Do events ever occur that can be observed by only one person? Certainly. Right now there are things going on in my presence to which only I am witness; for there is nobody else here to see them. Could somebody else (e.g., my wife) observe them if she were here? Of course. As David Palmer notes in his wise and beautifully written contribution to the present symposium, and as Hayes and Fryling affirm in their learned and crystalline piece, observability is not an intrinsic property of events; it does not belong to them as their shape does, independently of potential observers. That some events can be observed means only that somebody is in a position to observe them, and sometimes there is only one such person.

Is this what some psychologists have in mind when they talk of private events? Apparently not. What these psychologists appear to be after is something

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that is private in a more esoteric sense of the word. They mean to refer to events that go on inside a person's mind or body, where, it is supposed, she and only she can give witness to them. And since the point of observing something is not merely to contemplate it for esthetic effect but to become informed about it, these psychologists mean to say that there are some facts about these inner events that can be discovered only by their single witness, the only person who can know what they are like. In short, these psychologists believe in what Gilbert Ryle (1949) called *privileged access*, a phrase that I shall sometimes amplify as *privileged observational access*.

Are there any events and facts that are private in this sense? The answer I want to give and explain here is an emphatic No. The idea of events private in the sense just spelled out seems to me to be poorly thought out. I believe that this idea, though ancient, pervasive, and tenacious, violates two methodological principles of common sense and empirical science, so ought to be abandoned, torched and burned to the ground. To make sure the point is made, I'll spell it out in tedious detail.

Not wishing to get lost in airy abstractions, I will focus my argument on a single example—the hallucinatory experiences of an alcoholic having DTs. And my question will be: What feature of these experiences, if any, might be supposed to count as observable by the alcoholic herself but not by anybody else? Addressing that question, I shall first explain why the *objects* of the alcoholic's experience must be regarded as unreal. Then, I shall argue that, although the *experience* is itself real, there is no clear sense in which the person who is having it can be said to *observe* it. However, if it goes on inside the body, as seems reasonable to suppose, then the physiologist equipped with machines now available should be able to observe it; and, since it makes a difference to behavior, the psychologist should not ignore what the physiologist has to say about it.

## Two Principles

According to a methodological desideratum that I shall call the *reality principle*, what could conceivably be observed in only one way by only one person *cannot* be real; and what is not real cannot be an object of knowledge, privileged or public. I regard this principle as definitional. Normally, we do not count as real anything that fails to satisfy it; nor should we. The same goes for an auxiliary of the reality principle that I shall call the *efficacy principle*. According to this principle, the real is causally efficacious, it matters; what makes no difference to the world is no part of it. So, nothing can be known about it.

For an illustration, consider the pink rats that Sarah, a reforming alcoholic, reportedly "sees" when having DTs during withdrawal. That nobody else can see these rats means, not that there is something to which Sarah has privileged observational access, but that her rats are phantoms, figments of her imagination, non-entities, unrealities. The same conclusion follows from the fact that these phantoms leave no marks of themselves on anything in the world and are wholly impotent to do so. That, too, means they are unreal.

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A psychiatrist friend has replied that patients having hallucinations sometimes bruise themselves trying to escape their phantoms, which are so vivid they seem unarguably real. But vividness is also no proof of reality. It is not the alcoholic's phantoms that leave bruises on her but her futile attempts to escape them. Do not conflate her phantoms with the experience of hallucinating them. Sarah's experience is real; her pink rats are not. She seems to herself to see pink rats; but there are none to be seen. What she seems to see does not exist; it is unreal.

It is now a widely recognized principle of logic that nothing true can be said of what is not real; for there is nothing to say it about. Because Sarah's phantoms do not exist, they have no shape, no size, no color, no weight, no character, no anything. So, there is nothing that can be said about them that will be true—not even that they are pink and rat like. Therefore, there is nothing that Sarah or anybody else knows, or could know, about them, much less something that *only* she could know. The unreal cannot be an object of knowledge.

Granted, Sarah appears not only to refer to rats but also to describe them. No matter. A century ago, Bertrand Russell (1905) showed that grammatical appearance of reference is no guide to reality. If it were, we would refute ourselves every time we denied that something exists. "Unicorns do not exist" would be self-contradictory. To avoid solecism, Russell showed how to rephrase apparent reference to such unreal entities as unicorns. Just say "Nothing that exists is a unicorn," or "The set of unicorns is empty," or "The word 'unicorn' describes nothing."<sup>1</sup>

How can Sarah *see* pink rats if they do not exist? She can't. That nobody else can see Sarah's phantoms means that *she* can't see them. Despite what she says, Sarah is not *seeing* pink rats; she is *imagining* them. If she thinks she has seen them, it is because she has mistaken her imagining for seeing. We, however, need not share her mistake. Instead, we may conclude that her report of seeing pink rats cannot be taken literally. Later, we shall see how to take it.

That Sarah is having an experience that seems to her to be an instance of seeing may be so. But Sarah's experience is not an instance of seeing; it is an instance of hallucinating, seeming to see. Real seeing has its *object* as its *cause*; x sees O only if O is the cause of x's seeing. Sarah's "seeing" has no real, only an apparent, object; and its cause is not unreal pink rats but a real change in the chemistry of her brain, which Sarah cannot see. What does not exist cannot be seen.

### **Mental Images**

Despite the conclusion just reached by straightforward logical means, many readers will feel a strong impulse to retort that Sarah *must* be seeing *something*; so, if not *pink rats*, then *mental images* of pink rats.

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<sup>1</sup> As Russell noted, his point had been made earlier by Jeremy Bentham, in his discussion of the need for "paraphrase" when discussing legal fictions mistaken for real entities.

That nobody but Sarah can see these images will be said to prove not that they are unreal but that they exist only in Sarah's mind. In other words, they are mental, not physical, images; so, they have mental, not physical, reality. This theory—if you can call it that—was given its definitive modern form by René Descartes in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Descartes' theory is still regarded by many people as self-evident truth. Supporting this assessment have been two lines of argument. A favorite grammatical argument is that, as seeing requires an object seen, so imagining requires an object imagined. But what would that object be if not a mental image? And how could it be an object if it were not in some way real? By such reasoning, Descartes convinced himself that the phantoms of dreams have "objective reality" (i.e., reality as objects of the experience of dreaming).

This grammatical argument is sometimes reinforced by appeals to the evidence of personal experience. A cognitive psychologist with whom I used to go fly fishing once challenged me to picture my house and count the windows. He allowed as how my doing that would be impossible unless I were "looking" at a mental image, though he did not say how I could be looking at what was behind my eyes rather than in front of them. More formal experiments of the same sort are common in the literature of cognitive psychology, where it is argued, for example, that the increased time it takes to assay a rotated image proves its reality (Kosslyn, 1980).

Although arguments of this sort convince many people, they are fallacious. First, that one cannot *see* what does not exist does not mean that one cannot *imagine, dream, or hallucinate* it. Furthermore, people often do. Second, that the alcoholic's phantoms are "real to her" means only that they *seem* real to her, which proves nothing to the point. Neither do window counting and image rotation experiments. If one can imagine something, one can imagine surveying it or rotating it; no images are needed, just a little time.

The usual retort is "What is your explanation of imagination if not that it involves observation of mental images?" Later I shall cite Jack Smart's (1991) description of imagining as "having something go on in your brain that is like what goes on there when you are seeing"—which makes no reference to mental images and would not be improved if it did. Why not? Because invoking such images explains nothing. How could it? Brain images, if they exist, might explain something. But mental images make no difference to the world, and what makes no difference explains nothing.

Descartes thought he had gotten around this difficulty by declaring that mental images have *mental reality* even though they lack *physical reality*. He also expressed this idea by saying that mental images exist *in the mind* if not also in the physical world. It was clever word play, but "mental reality" is not a form of reality. And in workaday English, "X exists only in Y's mind" and "X exists mentally but not physically" do not *assert*, they *deny* X's existence. Both mean "Y thinks (or imagines) that X exists, but Y is mistaken, for X does not exist."

The sum and substance of the matter is that Sarah's mental images are as unreal as her pink rats. That these supposed images exist in Sarah's mind as the

mental objects of her experience does not mean that they have a special kind of reality or that they are a special kind of objects; it means that *they are unreal*. Sarah's experience is real, but her rats and her images are not.

### Phenomenal Qualities

So, grant the unreality of both Sarah's pink rats *and* her mental images. Isn't it still beyond dispute that Sarah is the one who is having her experiences, so is the one whose opinions about them must remain authoritative?

It has long been thought so, and three decades ago the philosopher Thomas Nagel reaffirmed this thought. In a now famous essay, Nagel (1974) insisted that only a bat can know "what it is like" to be a bat; or more fully, that only a bat can know what it is like *to a bat* to be a bat.<sup>2</sup> By this portentous phrase, Nagel did not mean "Nothing but a bat knows what a bat is like," for you and I know that. Rather, Nagel meant, "Nothing but a bat can know what it *feels like to a bat* to be a bat," for nothing but a bat can have a bat's feelings.

Not interested in bat psychology as such, Nagel did not venture an opinion as to whether a bat knows what it feels like. That would depend, he thought, on whether the bat was conscious and had feelings. Presuming, reasonably enough, that a stone has no idea what it feels like to be a stone, Nagel attributed that fact to the stone's lack of consciousness and reiterated Descartes's belief that every *conscious* being necessarily knows what its conscious experiences are like. So, grant that Sarah is conscious; then, according to Nagel, she must know what her experiences are like. Having the experience must be sufficient to give her knowledge of its properties.

What does Sarah know about her experience that nobody else can know? Nagel's answer is that Sarah knows its *phenomenal quality*. This means, one supposes, that she knows how it *seems* to her. Thus, Sarah knows that she seems to see what appear to be pink rats; and since nobody else is in a position to dispute this supposed knowledge, it must count as privileged. In general, to use Jay Moore's phrasing, knowledge of the phenomenal qualities of one's own experiences must count as a form of *subjective* knowledge for which no *objective* information gained by other parties can be a substitute.

I shall call this the *phenomenological argument* for privacy. It seems to me to conflate the truth that only X can *have* X's experiences with the falsehood that only X can *observe* X's experiences. Indeed, the argument loses all appearance of cogency if the two things are not identified. But grant that Sarah is the one having her hallucinations. The claim that she also observes them is highly doubtful. Talk of *observing* our own experiences is not part of workaday speech. So, it is not self-explanatory. Furthermore, it raises more questions than it answers. We see with the eyes, hear with the ears, smell with the nose, and so on. With what organ of sense are we supposed to *observe* our subjective experiences?

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<sup>2</sup> For further commentary see Hocutt (2008).

### **Introspection**

Some people will think that Descartes gave the answer to this question when he said that we know our own states of mind by *introspecting*, or *reflecting on*, them. In other words, we turn our minds in on themselves, in order to discern what is in them.

This metaphor has satisfied many people, but it does not solve the mystery; it merely gives it a name. What, exactly, is supposed to be involved in looking into one's own mind? How, exactly, are we supposed to do it? Where does the mind get the metaphorical light with which it illuminates itself and the thoughts in it? With what sorts of eyes does it see what is there? No good answers are forthcoming.

That talk of observing one's own states of mind suffers from these obscurities is a serious enough problem, but it pales in comparison with a second difficulty. If the "phenomenal quality" of an experience is discernible by whoever is having it but only by her, and if it makes no discernible difference in the physical world, then it too violates both the reality principle and the efficacy principle, so must count as unreal. Remember: What is real is observable in more than one way by more than one person; also, it leaves a mark. Merely phenomenal qualities do neither; so they are unreal.

Please don't reply that phenomenal qualities have *phenomenal* reality. Phenomenal reality is no more a kind of reality than is mental reality. To call it phenomenal (i.e., apparent) reality is to admit as much. Merely apparent qualities are qualities that seem to be real but are not. So, if Sarah is the only observer of the phenomenal qualities of her subjective experiences, and if these putative qualities leave no evidence of their existence anywhere but in Sarah's mind, then the rest of us may justifiably regard them as unreal. Phenomenal qualities are in the same leaky boat as Sarah's pink rats and mental images.

The Cartesian idea of introspective access to privileged facts about private events has yet to be given determinate meaning.

### **Covert Behavior**

Despite the manifold defects of this idea, Jay Moore tries to defend it in his contribution to the present symposium. Unfortunately, he seems to me to succeed merely in multiplying its contradictions and obscurities.

Moore, a self-styled radical behaviorist and follower of B. F. Skinner, accepts the Cartesian doctrine of privacy but rejects the metaphysical dualism that goes with it. Like the Cartesian, Moore acknowledges that some events are private. But where the Cartesian says that these events occur in immaterial—so invisible and intangible—minds, Moore replies that they occur in material—so visible and tangible—bodies. They are private, not because they exist in a different metaphysical realm, but because they are *covert*—literally covered up—by our skins, through which others are unable to see. However, that we are "in contact" with our own sensations and covert behaviors makes them "directly accessible" to us if not to others. Or so Moore contends.

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What does this contention mean? Overlook the fact that Moore is not very forthcoming about just what sorts of events and behaviors he is talking about. Focus on the words “direct access” and “contact.” Moore’s use of these metaphors suggests that he thinks propinquity alone suffices to enable observation, while distance precludes it. Thus, I gather, he thinks that we know about our own thoughts and feelings directly, by observing them; but we know about the thoughts and feelings of other persons only indirectly, by inferring them from what they say and do. In short, “direct access” means *observational* access; “indirect access,” *inferential* access. Except for the bit about the mind and body, this is straight Cartesianism.

Two things are questionable about this Cartesianism. The first is the assumption that we not only have but also observe our own mental states. How exactly are we supposed to do that? What organ of observation do we use? Unless you count Moore’s brief and cryptic mention of special interior receptors, Moore does not say. Nor does he say what privileged information we are supposed to get from those mysterious interior receptors. So, the notion that we observe our internal states remains not just vague but mystifying.

Since Cannon demonstrated the reality of homeostasis, there can be no doubt that the brain is so hooked up to the rest of the body by the nervous system that it has the capacity to “monitor” bodily states and cause changes in them when changes are needed. Usually, however, this happens unconsciously and automatically, in the manner of a servomechanism. But unless a thermostat counts as an observer, this homeostatic adjustment does not involve anything that would normally go under the heading of observation. So, the assumption that we observe our internal states continues to remain not only undefined but also unwarranted.

But suppose we waive this problem. Grant for the sake of the argument that some sort of undefined auto-observation occurs. It still isn’t privileged—not if that means the events in question cannot be observed by others. That may once have been true, but it is no longer so. As Professor Moore must know, such wonderful instruments as PET and fMRI now enable outsiders to peer beneath the skin to observe what is going on in our muscles, glands, and bones. Physicians and physiologists can even observe what is going on in our nervous systems and brains, the last redoubts of obscure phenomena. Though still an obstacle to observation, the skin is no longer an impenetrable barrier.

I think we must conclude that Professor Moore’s talk of private events is either baseless or incoherent. If he means events in the body, as he says, then they can become objects of observation by other persons, who can describe them in physiological terms; so, they are no longer in any metaphysical or epistemological sense private. If he means events that are private in an epistemological sense, as he sometimes suggests, they must exist in a separate metaphysical realm, which he is anxious to deny. Either way he is in trouble.

### Topic-Neutral Description

Admittedly, revealing the troubles with Moore's analysis is not solving the puzzle that recommended it to him. So, let us return to Sarah. Grant that she *seems* to be talking about *something* when she reports seeing pink rats. If it is not pink rats or images of pink rats, what is it? And what is she saying about it?

Half a century ago, the Australian philosopher Jack Smart (1991) offered an ingenious answer to this question. According to Smart, Sarah's description of her experience is misleading. Although she may say and think that she sees pink rats or images of them, what her words reveal to us is only that *something is going on in her brain that is like what would be going on there if she were seeing pink rats or pictures of them*. So regarded, Sarah is describing her experience in a way that indicates not its intrinsic *features* or its present *objects* but its normal *causes*. Smart called this *topic-neutral description*.

Venturing the hypothesis that the events described in this way might turn out to be states of the brain, Smart offered pain as an example. It is an instructive case. Despite appearances, pain is not the *object* of a feeling of pain; nor is it the cause of the feeling. The pain does not hurt; rather, the pain *is* the hurt. The pain is not the thing felt; it is the feeling. So, "x feels pain" does not mean "There is a y such that y is pain and x feels y," as "I feel marbles" does mean "There is a y such that y is a marble and I feel y." Pain is not *what* one feels; pained (i.e., hurt) is the *way* one feels. "I feel pain" means "I feel the way I feel when hurt," or "I feel as if hurt."<sup>3</sup>

Where does this feeling occur? Smart's guess was that it occurs in the brain. Thus, a feeling of pain in the leg is not located in the leg; for you can feel pain in an amputated leg, or in one that has not been hurt. That one still feels pain in one's ghost of a leg means that one feels as though one still had a leg that was hurt; one's brain responds, and causes one to respond, as to a damaged leg. Thus, to feel a sharp pain in an existing leg is to feel as though one's leg were stabbed by a knife; and so on. Description of inner states is parasitic on reference to their normal causes, which are external to the body.

If Sarah's experience is a brain event, as Smart assumed, why doesn't she describe it directly, using the terminology of neurophysiology? Because Mother Nature was more interested in equipping us to deal with the world than in enabling us to see what is going on in our heads. Therefore, lacking an ability to look into her own brain, Sarah has no capacity to observe the events going on there, so can't tell us what they look like. Unable to describe her experience in language that specifies its physiological features, she, like the rest of the human race since the beginning of time, describes it by referring to its normal causes. Hence topic-neutral description.

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<sup>3</sup> Smart gave credit for this hypothesis to his colleague Ullin Place (see Place, 1956). Thomas Hobbes of the 17<sup>th</sup> century had also anticipated this identity theory, as it would come to be called, in his *Leviathan*.



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Actually, Sarah's "I see pink rats" may be better regarded not as a *description* of her experience but as a *verbal symptom* of it. Sarah isn't *telling* us what is happening to her; she is *giving expression* to it. Thus, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein suggested, "I am in pain" is more like a *cry* of pain than a *report* of pain. By contrast, "She is in pain" is an observational report of pain, not an expression of pain. Thus, I can observe your pain but I cannot express it. You, on the other hand, can express your pain but not observe it. In Wittgenstein's view, it was this asymmetry that has been misinterpreted as privileged access.

Smart's identity theory, as it has come to be called, was the progenitor of the theory that Nathan Stemmer espouses in the piece discussed with great care in the present symposium by Jose Burgos. Stemmer calls his theory *parsimonious behaviorism* and attributes it to Willard Quine, who thought ontological simplicity could be achieved not by identifying states of mind with brain states but by dropping mental language for neurophysiological description.<sup>4</sup> Finding talk of such states of mind as memory too logically peculiar to be scientifically sound, Quine expected psychologists would ultimately abandon it in favor of talk about empirically determinate brain traces.

In his commentary, Burgos complains that talk of brain traces is vague; but given our ignorance of the details, vagueness is called for. As a general principle, where there is function, there must be supporting physical structure, even if we do not yet know precisely what it is. So, if states of mind are physically embodied at all, as they presumably are, the most logical place for their embodiment is the brain. The specific form that embodiment takes can and should await detailed empirical investigation. In the meanwhile, we may talk, however vaguely, of brain traces and other as yet undetermined processes.

Although Burgos sees little virtue in Stemmer's defense of parsimonious behaviorism, it seems to me to improve in two ways on the Cartesianism it replaces. First, it does not imply, falsely, that Sarah observes her experiences. So, it does not raise awkward questions about how she does it. Second, the theory avoids both Descartes's metaphysical dualism and Nagel's obscure appeals to phenomenology. These are considerable advantages.

### Reducibility

So, why do Moore and Burgos resist anything resembling an identity theory? (Why, for that matter, did Skinner reject it when it was proposed by his senior colleague E. G. Boring [1933]?)

Moore gives two reasons. First, identifying states of mind with their physiological underpinnings "risks conflating different explanatory categories." Second, it suggests, wrongly, that behavioral psychology can be reduced to

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<sup>4</sup> I owe a reminder of this important distinction to Burgos. I shall not pause to explore it. In my view, as in that of Stemmer, the identity theory and Quine's repudiation theory are close kin, though not identical.

physiology. Citing an argument of Skinner's for the autonomy of behavioral analysis, Moore goes on to suppose that autonomy justifies talk of privacy.

In my opinion, both arguments fail. To see the error in the first, reflect on the following commonplace fact. What a faithful wife has to say about her beloved husband will never be reducible to what an abused worker has to say about his detested boss. Yet, the wife and the worker might be talking about the very same man, who is at once generous husband and oppressive supervisor. Different sciences use different predicates, but difference of predicates is consistent with identity of subject.

With this fact in mind, Hayes and Fryling explain very clearly how Skinner viewed the relation between psychology and physiology. In Skinner's view, the physiologist is concerned with the interactions of the various parts of the organism, while the psychologist is interested in how the organism interacts with its surroundings. So, the physiologist and the psychologist discover different facts and state them using different vocabularies. To Skinner, this meant that behavioral psychology can be an autonomous science, one independent of physiology even if the events studied are the same.

For an example of what Skinner had in mind, consider a starved lab rat. Turned loose in a maze, it is fed when it arrives at the end. Next time, it gets there sooner. Eventually, it goes straight to the food, without hesitation or false turns. So, we conclude that the rat has learned where food is to be found. What role has the rat's physiology—its blood sugar level or the condition of its hippocampus—played in arriving at this conclusion? Absolutely none. Food deprivation-maze running-reinforcement. That is all the behaviorist cares about. Let the physiologist worry about what is going on in the rat, underneath its skin.

I will call this the *functional* argument for the irreducibility of psychology to physiology. I believe it has merit. It shows that the *psychological* significance of a particular brain state might never be evident in its physical features; so, nobody will ever be able to tell what you believe, desire, feel or remember just by looking at your brain. As Skinner maintained, to discover such facts about you, the observer will have to know your history and circumstances; for the psychological significance of your bodily states lies in the relation between them, the environment, and your behavior, not within the states themselves.<sup>5</sup>

About that fact Skinner was almost certainly right. If *reducibility* of B to A means *deducibility* of B from A, then psychology is no more reducible to physiology than chemistry is reducible to physics; indeed, probably less so. To quote Susan Haack, it is all physical but it is not all physics. But *irreducibility* is one thing; *autonomy* another. That chemistry cannot be reduced to physics does not mean that chemistry is independent of physics. On the contrary, since every chemical process is a physical process and has a physical as well as a chemical description, the chemist will sooner or later have to use some physics. And if every state of mind is a state of the brain, as it is now reasonable to suppose, the psychologist will eventually have to pay attention to neurophysiology.

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussion of the point see Hocutt (2008).

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Now that we understand that point, we can also understand another. The irreducibility of psychology to physiology does not support, it contradicts, belief in privileged observational access.<sup>6</sup> For imagine that we had both a complete physiological description of what was going on in Sarah's body and brain; also, a complete account of her history, circumstances, and behavioral dispositions. In short, imagine that we had all of the third person information that could conceivably be discovered about her state of mind and its causes. Despite Nagel's bat and related babble by other philosophers about the unsolvable mysteries of consciousness, it is not clear what might be left for Sarah alone to know.

Why, then, do we usually know more about ourselves than others do? It is because each of us has more opportunities to observe our own behavior. It is not because each of us has a privileged way of discovering facts that are inaccessible to others. Furthermore, that idea runs contrary to commonplace facts. Mama knows better than Baby how Baby feels, and Joe's long suffering wife Mary knows his moods better than Joe does. If it were not so, Mama could not teach Baby how to recognize Baby's feelings; and Mary would not be able to anticipate Joe's moods. Contrary to the Cartesians, the mind is not a picture show to which only one person is admitted.

### **Intentionality**

The topic of Gordon Foxall's essay is intentionality. What does it have to do with privacy?

Nothing that I can see, but psychology is the study of the mental, which Descartes declared to be private. So, it might appear that intentional states must be a subset of private mental states, if not coextensive with them. Whether that is Foxall's view or not, I cannot say. What Foxall's essay argues is not that intentional states are private but that behavior analysts cannot get along without acknowledging their reality.

In another issue of this journal, I have written a long commentary on another of Foxall's presentations of this thesis and will not repeat myself here (Hocutt, 2007). Let me say simply that this thesis seems to me to be right if duly qualified. Behavior analysts do not yet know how to get along without making use of such paradigmatically intentional concepts as belief, desire, thought and memory.

Perhaps they never will. We still talk of earth, air, fire, and water. Why not belief, desire, thought and memory? Despite their well documented deficiencies, these folk psychological concepts have been around a long time and served humanity well. They are still our workaday tools of psychological analysis and description. Since his is a new science, the behavior analyst is likely to need these tools for a very long time. However deficient they might be, they are likely to be used in constructing the concepts that will replace them.

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, the converse proposition holds. Given privileged access, autonomy follows. That is why the Cartesian thinks of them as two sides of one coin. But as I try to show elsewhere, behaviorism was an attempt to break the hold of Cartesianism (Hocutt, 1996).

No sensible person throws old tools away until better ones become available. So, even though hard nosed rat runners delivering papers at conferences will justly denigrate intentional notions for their lack of empirical definition and logical rigor, these same scientists are likely when back in their laboratories to find themselves talking about what their rats believe, desire, remember, or think. There is no inconsistency or hypocrisy in this. It is merely a practical necessity. Everyone would like a new car, but one uses the car one has.

Of course, we must be prepared for the possibility—some will say the likelihood—that our workaday mental categories will eventually turn out to be as crude and unsatisfactory as the physics of earth, air, fire, and water. In Moore's apt phrase, these intentional concepts may just be theoretical fictions, invented to fill current gaps in our knowledge. Also, the logical and empirical defects of intentional concepts are such that they may never be made scientifically respectable. They may eventually have to go the way of explanations invoking the gods.<sup>7</sup> That is why, as Skinner warned and Burgos reiterates, wholesale postulations of mental processes and states by cognitive psychologists must continue to be regarded with suspicion.

### Conclusion

There are covert events but no metaphysically and epistemologically private ones. By taking the former for the latter, followers of B. F. Skinner have mistaken a temporary inconvenience for a permanent necessity. Also, they have fallen prey to the Cartesian delusion that a person has special, if mysterious, ways of observing her inner states and gaining privileged information about them. But close examination of that idea reveals it to be methodologically and metaphysically incoherent. The idea of epistemologically privileged reality violates the reality and efficacy principles, basic canons of common sense and empirical science. Furthermore, it leads to needless postulation of unreal entities in order to explain real events, a backwards procedure.

Since the days when Skinner worked out his own methods for doing behavior analysis under the strictures of Ernst Mach's positivism, means and methods for investigating the interior workings of the behaving organism have become available and are sure to improve as time goes along. That Skinner had no choice but to work without these new instruments does not mean that the behavior analyst should continue to ignore the information they afford us, or even that she can afford to do so. Differences in behavior are necessarily rooted in differences in anatomy and bodily function. So, although physiological description of inner states cannot substitute for behavioral analysis, it can not but help psychologists to understand how changes in circumstances cause changes in behavior.

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<sup>7</sup> This is a large topic that I may not here take the space to discuss adequately, but I have said something about it in Hocutt (2007).

## PRIVATE EVENTS

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