LOW CLAIM ASSERTIONS

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1. ADELAIDE 1954

Charlie Martin and I were colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Adelaide for a period of less than twelve months from the time of Charlie's arrival early in 1954 until I left to return to the U.K. in the following January. In February 1954 around the time of Charlie's arrival, I had submitted a paper entitled ‘The concept of heed’ to the editor of *The British Journal of Psychology* in the concluding sentence of which I signalled my intention to defend the thesis:

> ... that the logical objections to the statement ‘consciousness is a process in the brain’ are no greater than the logical objections which might be raised to the statement ‘lightning is a motion of electric charges’. (Place 1954, 155)

As soon as he became aware of this project, Charlie was determined to make sure that I did not get away with anything in the pursuit of this objective. However the discussions which eventually led to my submission of the text of the follow-up paper (Place 1956) ‘Is consciousness a brain process?’ (and to which I expressed my indebtedness in the concluding paragraph of that paper when it eventually appeared) were the principal focus of philosophical debate within the department during the final six months or so of my period at Adelaide.

2. THE INCORRIGIBILITY OF SENSATION DESCRIPTIONS

During the first few months after his arrival, Charlie was pursuing a variety of philosophical interests some which he had brought with him from his studies under John Wisdom at Cambridge, others, his passionate atheism for example, from his Baptist theological background, and yet others which were stimulated by the interests of his colleagues at Adelaide, both within the Philosophy Department and further afield. Prominent amongst these interests was a pre-occupation with the alleged incorrigibility of the individual's reports of his or, as we have since learned to say, her own sensory experiences. At this time, in my capacity as lecturer in charge of the teaching of Psychology in the University, I was building up an experimental psychology laboratory; and I can well remember Charlie coming along to an open day which I held to publicise this new facility and being intrigued by some of the perceptual illusions that were on display. It was on this occasion, as I recall, that he vouchsafed the important insight that although sensation reports may be private in the sense that only the possessor can report and describe them, they are not incorrigible. For the owner of a sensation can indeed make a mistake in his description of it, even though only he is in position to recognise the mistake and correct it.

3. MARTIN AND FEYERABEND ON LOW CLAIM ASSERTIONS

It must have been about this time that Charlie produced a paper entitled ‘Low Claim Assertions’. I came across a copy of this document among my papers when I was preparing my submission for the degree of Doctor of Letters at the University of Adelaide in 1969. Typically it contained no indication of authorship other than Charlie's characteristic style. Since it was immediately apparent that the theory of introspection which I developed in ‘Is consciousness a brain process?’ was inspired by this paper, I wanted to acknowledge my indebtedness to its author in the Introduction which I was writing to the collection of papers which were to be submitted for the degree. Accordingly I wrote to Charlie in Sydney asking him to confirm that he was indeed the author of this piece which he duly did. I have recently discovered a copy of my letter to Charlie amongst my papers, but, despite repeated searches, I can now find no trace of the paper itself, and I can only conclude that it was inadvertently destroyed when I vacated my office in the Department of Philosophy at Leeds in 1986.

The paper, as I recall it, was quite brief. The point which Charlie was making in this unpublished paper was made subsequently and, as far as far as I know, independently by Paul Feyerabend in his paper ‘Materialism and the mind-body problem’ which appeared in 1963. There Feyerabend raises a question as to:

> ... the *source* of this certainty of statements concerning mental processes. The answer is very simple: it is their *lack of content* which is the source of their certainty. Statements about physical objects possess a very rich content. They are vulnerable because of the existence of this content. Thus, the statement "there is a table in front of me" leads to predictions concerning my tactual sensations; the behaviour of other material objects (a glass of brandy put in a certain position will remain in this position and will not fall to the ground; a ball thrown in a certain direction will be deflected); the behavior of other people (they will walk around the table; point out objects on its surface); etc. Failure of any one of these predictions may force me to withdraw the statement. This is not the case with statements concerning thoughts, sensations, feelings; or at least there is the impression that the same kind of vulnerability does not obtain here. The reason is that their content is so much poorer. No prediction, no retrodiction can be inferred from them, and the need to withdraw them can therefore not arise. (Feyerabend 1963, 56-57)

As I remember it, Charlie's statement of the point differs from Feyerabend's in two respects. On the one hand Charlie did not, I think, emphasise, as Feyerabend does, the falsifiable predictions which are entailed by the public statement and not entailed by the private statement. On the other hand, Feyerabend does not draw attention, as Charlie's paper did, to the way in which expressions like ‘It appears, looks, sounds, smells, tastes, feels to me like an O’ or ‘as if *p* were the case’ have the effect of withdrawing the claim that it actually *is* an O or that *p* is true.

In both versions the thesis falls into two parts: (a) the claim that an individual's descriptions of his private sensations typically (I would say invariably) take the form of a simile ‘It's as if so and so were the case’; (b) the claim that the reason why it is difficult if not impossible to be mistaken in giving such a description is that the effect of the simile is to withdraw any claim that things actually *are* as they appear to be.

4. SUBJECTIVISM, PHENOMENALISM AND ANTI-REALISM

The philosophical import of this two-pronged thesis is far reaching. It has to be seen, I would suggest, in the context of a revolution in philosophical thinking which began around the middle of this century, but appears to have suffered something of a reverse in recent years, which involved a radical critique of six related doctrines that have dominated philosophical thinking since the 17th and 18th centuries:

> *Cartesian subjectivism*, which holds that questions about what is and is not known, and about what is true and what is false, are to be decided by a single isolated individual in the privacy of his own soul,

Cartesian foundationalism, which holds that the existence of the individual's own thoughts is more certain than the existence of the three-dimensionally extended spatial environment we all think we inhabit,

Cartesian foundationalism applied to sense perception, which holds that although we can be mistaken in supposing that our immediate environment is as it appears to us to be, we *cannot* be mistaken in supposing that that is how it appears to us[1], leading to

Berkeleyan subjectivist empiricism, which holds that the observation sentences which provide the ultimate foundations of empirical knowledge are incorrigible ‘introspective protocols’ describing the way things appear to a particular individual, and

Phenomenalism, which holds that to assert the existence of an extended material body which is not part of the individual's current sensory experience involves specifying or being able to specify conditions under which such a body would or could conceivably become part of that experience, a variety of

Anti-realism, which holds that the way a statement is verified or falsified is part of its meaning.

Of these Cartesian scepticism and Berkeleyan subjectivist epistemology are undermined by Wittgenstein's ‘private language argument’ as developed in §§ 242 ff. of the *Philosophical Investigations* (Wittgenstein [1953] 1968). Cartesian foundationalism (in both its forms but especially as applied to sense perception), together with phenomenalism, are undermined by John Austin's critique of the argument from illusion in his *Sense and Sensibilia* lectures which I heard when they were first delivered in 1947 and were the immediate cause of my own emancipation from this family of doctrines (see Austin 1962). In connection with the refutation of anti-realism one thinks particularly of Hilary Putnam's refutation of Malcolm in his ‘Dreaming and "Depth Grammar"’ (Putnam 1962) and of Charlie's critique of Michael Dummett's more recent defence of the anti-realist standpoint (Martin 1984). Charlie's ‘Low Claim Assertions’ paper was conceived as a head-on attack on what I am calling Cartesian foundationalism as applied to sense perception. In this respect, thanks to John Austin, Charlie was in my case preaching to the already converted. What excited me about Charlie's paper was that it appeared to offer a way of explaining how the ability to provide incorrigible reports of private sensory experiences might be supposed to have developed as a by-product of the development of the ability to describe the individual's current stimulus environment. Thus, having learned to describe a certain stimulus situation in one's visual environment as "being confronted by a red patch" one is able to describe the experience of having a red after-image by issuing the same description; but, by adding the qualification ‘it is as if’, one succeeds simultaneously in converting a description of the public environment into a description of one's private experience, and at the same in rendering the assertion incorrigible by withdrawing the existential claim that there actually is red patch in one's environment.

5. MATERIALISM AND THE CONCEPT OF PRIVATE LOGIC

Although I have not been able to rediscover my copy of ‘Low Claim Assertions’, while searching for it among my papers, I came across a copy of a manuscript which I prepared sometime during 1954 in the course of the series of debates between Charlie, Jack Smart and myself which resulted in the publication two years later of ‘Is consciousness a brain process?’ This document which is reproduced in full below

[1] "It is I who have sensations, or who perceive corporeal objects as it were by the senses. Thus, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. These objects are unreal, for I am asleep; but at least I seem to see, to hear, to be warmed. This cannot be unreal; and this is what is properly called my sensation; further, sensation, precisely so regarded, is nothing but an act of consciousness (cogitare)." (Descartes [1641]1971)

and which I shall refer to hereafter as ‘The Adelaide 1954 discussion document’ is remarkable for two reasons: (a) it shows how completely I had taken on board and adapted to my own purposes the theme of Charlie's ‘Low Claim Assertions’ paper; (b) it shows, in the use we were both apparently making of the distinction between sentences with ‘private logic’ and sentences with ‘public logic’, that we were both still ensnared by the anti-realist assumptions which underlie that distinction.

Thirty five years on the distinction between sentences with private and public logic seems decidedly dated for two reasons. On the one hand it involves what, by today's standards is a sloppy use of the terms ‘logic’ and ‘logical’ which was current at the time, particularly at Oxford. In fact the difference between a sentence with private logic and one with public logic is not a matter either of its truth conditions or of the inferences that can or cannot drawn from it. It is a matter of the way the sentences in question are verified. A sentence has private logic if its truth is established by appeal to the authority of the private experience of a single individual. It has public logic, if its truth can be checked, at least in principle, by the observations of more than one observer.

The fact that the distinction is drawn in terms of two different ways in which different sentences are verified aligns the distinction between private and public logic sentences with anti-realism rather than realism, even if it does not go as far in that direction as Bernard Williams' ‘epistemological concept’ of the proposition the first principle of which holds that ‘a given proposition is tied to a grammatical person: "I am in pain" is a different proposition from "he is in pain"’ (Williams 1978, 305).

Evidently this principle is intended to apply in cases where, to use Charlie's phrase, both sentences have the same ‘truthmaker’, in other words where the *I* in the one sentence has the same referent as the *he* in the other and where the predicate *am/is in pain* refers to the same occasion in both cases. Needless to say the only justification for holding such a view is that *I am in pain* is verified by reference to the speaker's private experience; whereas *he is in pain* is verified by reference to what the *he* in question publicly says and does. The position which Williams is here attributing to Descartes is a more extreme form of anti-realism than that implied by the distinction between sentences with private and public logic as discussed in the document as reproduced below. For in that document the sentence *x is a pain* is given as an example of a sentence which has private logic. Clearly *x is a pain* does not stipulate that the pain in question belongs to the speaker. It follows that on this usage both *I am in pain* and *he is in pain* have private logic, and that the reason why *he is in pain* is said to have private logic is that, although it is verified by hearing and seeing what the *he* in question publicly says and does, that individual's private experience is still the ultimate authority on which the third person statement is indirectly based. But although the anti-realism is not as conspicuous as it is in the case of Williams' epistemological concept of the proposition, with hindsight it is obvious enough to be anathema to the crusader against verificationism that Charlie was subsequently to become.

The document reads as follows:

THE ADELAIDE 1954 DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

> Let me recapitulate the argument so far as I see it. Martin has claimed that when we talk about our sensations we are reporting an event, and that event cannot be a brain process because sensation statements have a private logic; whereas brain process statements have a public logic. Professor Smart tried to meet that objection by contending that sensation statements do not really report events, and that their private logic derives from their performatory character. This argument will not work unless we give up the notion that sensations are events in favour of the view that sensations are dispositions of which sensation statements are one of the exercises; and this would imply that sensations are not brain processes simply because they are not any sort of process.

I have accepted the view that sensation statements report events and have tried to show that the private logic of sensation statements is not inconsistent with their being statements about something which is in fact a brain process. I first tried to suggest that the only reason why sensation statements have private logic is that they do not say enough about the process to which they refer to be knocked down, because they are always vague and analogical. Martin has, I think, rebutted this contention. I then tried to argue that when we characterise our sensations we do so in terms of the dispositions these processes arouse in us and sensation statements are incorrigible partly because they are exercises of the disposition in question and partly because nothing is said about the process except that it is the process which brings these dispositions into play. If we then go on to characterise the process in question as a brain process the statement loses its private logic, but only to the extent that it now becomes possible to discredit it by showing that it was not a brain process which brought the dispositions in question into play. This account got into difficulties over the description of the dispositions involved, although these difficulties do no appear to me to be insuperable.

However it became apparent in the course of the argument that I had misconceived the issue. I had unwittingly supposed that the case against the brain process view lay in the alleged impossibility of reconciling the private logic of sensation statements with the view that these statements refer to brain processes, and that my job was to explain this fact without invoking the assumption that the individual has immediate certain knowledge about his sensations of a kind which he could not be expected to have about such things as processes in his brain. It seemed to me and it still seems to me that, although I may not have provided a satisfactory account along these lines as yet, there is no reason to assume that it cannot be done. It would seem however, that I have misconceived the real issue at stake. Martin seems to be claiming not so much that the private logic of sensation talk cannot be reconciled with the view that these statements refer to brain processes, although he would no doubt want to say this too, as that there is some logical inconsistency between the statements ‘X is a pain’ and ‘X is a process in someone's brain’, i.e., that the two predicates ‘sensations’ and ‘brain process’ are logically incompatible in the way that the predicates ‘round’ and ‘square’ are logically incompatible. The alleged reason for this supposed logical incompatibility seems to be that the statement ‘X is a pain’ has a private logic whilst the statement ‘X is a process in someone's brain’ has a public logic.

Now it seems quite clear to me that this is not a sufficient reason for saying that the two statements are logically incompatible, since it is not difficult to give examples of predicates one having a public logic and the other a private logic which we would not want to exclude as logically inconsistent. Thus ‘X is a pain’ has private logic but is not inconsistent with ‘X was caused by a sticking a pin into the skin’ or ‘X is associated with a marked deflection of the needle of the galvanometer’, ‘X appears to be similar to the sensations reported by the previous subject’, ‘X is the sensation reported by people when pins are stuck into them’, all of which have public logic.

It is true, of course, that you cannot say the same thing in the public logic as you say in the private logic, but this does not mean that you cannot say *something else* in the public logic about the event you have described in private logic. No statement about brain processes could ever mean the same as a sensation statement, for the simple reason that a brain process statement identifies the subject under discussion as a brain process, which the sensation statement does not do; and since the very existence of such a thing as a brain process is a matter for decision by ordinary methods of observation, a brain process statement must have a public logic at least to that extent. But I see no grounds for the claim that in moving from the private into the public logic you are changing the subject matter.

My conclusion therefore is that no considerations have yet been produced which would lead us to suppose that it is logically impossible for something to be both the having of a sensation and a process in

> someone's brain. Certainly this does not follow from the fact that statements describing sensations have private logic whereas brain process statements have public logic. The most that can be claimed, I would suggest, is that it is difficult to *explain* why sensation statements should have a private logic if the processes to which they refer are processes in someone's brain. While this is no doubt true, it does not prove that such an explanation cannot be given. Moreover the argument that it is difficult to explain a phenomenon on a given assumption only counts against that assumption, if the phenomenon can be more readily explained on some alternative assumption. In this case, however, it is not at all clear that the alternative assumption *does* provide a more satisfactory explanation of the phenomenon. The alternative assumption in this case, presumably, is the assumption that sensations are events which have no location in physical space. But why should the descriptions we give of events of this kind have a private logic? The only reason that can be given is that we have no means of determining the properties of events which we cannot locate, and that therefore there is no reason for not attributing this property to them. But neither is there any reason for supposing that such events *would* have this property.

6. LOW CLAIM ASSERTIONS AND THE THEORY OF INTROSPECTION

Not surprisingly, in the light of the evidence provided by the Adelaide 1954 discussion document, when I composed the text of 'Is consciousness a brain process?' later in the same year, I made extensive use of the theory of introspective observation which I had culled from Charlie's 'Low claim assertions' paper. This is clearly shown in following passages from my refutation of what I called 'the phenomenological fallacy' towards the end of the paper:

> We begin by learning to recognize the real properties of things in our environment. We learn to recognize them, of course, by their look, sound, smell, taste, and feel; but this does not mean that we have to learn to describe the look, sound, smell, taste, and feel of things before we can describe the things themselves. Indeed, it is only after we have learned to describe the things in our environment that we can learn to describe our consciousness of them. We describe our conscious experience not in terms of the mythological 'phenomenal properties' which are supposed to inhere in the mythological 'objects' in the mythological 'phenomenal field', but by reference to the actual physical properties of the concrete physical objects, events, and processes which normally, though not perhaps in the present instance, give rise to the sort of conscious experience which we are trying to describe. In other words when we describe the after-image as green, we are not saying that there is something, the after-image, which is green; we are saying that we are having the sort of experience which we normally have when, and which we have learned to describe as, looking at a green patch of light. (Place 1956, 49)

> When the subject describes his experience by saying that a light which is in fact stationary, appears to move, all the physiologist or physiological psychologist has to do in order to explain the subject's introspective observations, is to show that the brain process which is causing the subject to describe his experience in this way, is the sort of process which normally occurs when he is observing an actual moving object and which therefore normally causes him to report the movement of an object in his environment. Once the mechanism whereby the individual describes what is going on in his environment has been worked out, all that is required to explain the individual's capacity to make introspective observations is an explanation of his ability to discriminate between those cases where his normal habits of verbal description are appropriate to the stimulus situation and those cases where they are not and an explanation of how and why, in those cases where the appropriateness of his normal descriptive habits is in doubt, he learns to issue his ordinary descriptive protocols preceded by a qualificatory phrase like 'it appears', 'seems', 'looks', 'feels', etc. (Place 1956, 50)

7. TOPIC NEUTRALITY

Many readers will recognize in this passage the source of Jack Smart's doctrine of the 'topic neutrality' of sensation reports as described in the following passage from his 1959 paper 'Sensations and brain processes':

> When a person says, 'I see a yellowish-orange after-image', he is saying something like this: '*There is something going on which is like what is going on when* I have my eyes open, am awake, and there is an orange illuminated in good light in front of me, that is, when I really see an orange'. (And there is no reason why a person should not say the same thing when he is having a veridical sense-datum, so long as we construe 'like' in the last sentence in such a sense that something can be like itself.) Notice that the italicized words, namely 'there is something going on which is like what is going on when', are all quasilogical or topic-neutral words. This explains why the ancient Greek peasant's reports about his sensations can be neutral between dualistic metaphysics or my materialistic metaphysics. It explains how sensations can be brain-processes and yet how a man who reports them need know nothing about brain-processes. For he reports them only very abstractly as 'something going on which is like what is going on when ...' (p. 149)

8. TOPIC NEUTRALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF COLOUR

There is thus a direct line of descent from Charlie's 'Low Claim Assertions' paper, through my own discussion of 'the phenomenological fallacy' in 'Is Consciousness a Brain Process?', to Smart's doctrine of 'topic neutrality'. However, as so often happens, the doctrine of 'topic neutrality' has acquired a life of its own which bears only a tenuous relationship to its original intellectual foundation. Thus, neither Charlie nor I would have condoned the use which Smart makes of the topic neutrality formula to write colour words out of the sensation description on the grounds that colours are 'secondary qualities'.

In espousing the doctrine that colours are secondary qualities, Smart is not claiming, as some have done, that colours are properties, not of external objects, but of the sensations that those objects produce in the mind of the observer. Nevertheless, because the divisions between one colour and another do not correspond to any actual boundary or discontinuity within the wave length of light emitted, reflected or transmitted by the object to which the colour is ascribed, he concludes that colours are dispositional properties of objects whereby they produce, not so much sensations, as Locke held, but visual discriminatory behaviour on the part of the observer.

The problem with the theory that colours are dispositions on the part of objects, whether to produce visual sensations or visual discriminatory behaviour, is that, although it appears at first sight to avoid treating colours as properties of the sensations themselves, the only distinction which it recognizes between one colour and another is that different colours produce different visual sensations or discriminatory behaviour when inspected by a normal sighted percipient under standard conditions of illumination; but this means that it provides no way, short of circularity, of specifying how one colour differs from another. For to say that one object is red, whereas another is green, on this view, is to say nothing more than that they induce the observer to discriminate between them on the basis of their visual appearance. To say that it is their respective redness and greenness which distinguishes a red object from a green one thus becomes an empty tautology, unless, that is, we can allow that the redness and greenness are properties not of the objects, but of their visual appearances, i.e., of the visual sensations they produce in the observer.

But to concede *that* is immediately fatal to the mind-brain identity theory in the form in which it is advocated by Smart and myself. For, if visual sensations are coloured, it follows that they have a property which no brain process could conceivably have[2]; and from that it follows, by Leibniz's Law, that a

[2] There is some recent evidence suggesting that brain activity may indeed emit light radiation which varies in wave length (colour) from one

sensation of red, green or any other colour cannot be identical with the brain process with which it is correlated. In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Smart should have succumbed to the temptation to use the topic neutrality formula to eliminate these troublesome colour words altogether.

I have two objections to this use of the topic neutrality formula as a device for eliminating colour words from the materialist's vocabulary. The first objection is that it involves an unnecessary distortion of our ordinary use of colour words. Although it is true that our allocation of different light wave lengths to the different colour descriptions has more to do with our common retinal physiology than has with the physics of light radiation, study of the way we use colour words in ordinary language shows quite conclusively that they are predicated of environmental objects and *not* of the experiences which are generated by the light emitted, transmitted or reflected by or from them; the red patch remains red, even in darkness when it *looks* black. It is true that the fire glows red only so long as it looks or would look red to a normal percipient, if one were around; but fires glowed red long before there were any percipients around to perceive them.

It seems to me, as it now also seems to Smart[3], that the only solution to the problem of colour is to accept the brute fact that colour words stand for a straightforward physical property of light sources, light transmitting media and light reflecting surfaces, whereby they selectively emit, transmit or reflect light of certain broadly specifiable wave lengths, in the case of reflective surfaces, when they are illuminated by light comprising the full range of spectral wave lengths (white light). It is true that the formula required to specify the property of being, say, red or green in terms of the wave lengths of the light emitted, transmitted or reflected by the objects possessing those properties is very complicated and makes no kind of sense in terms of the physics of light radiation. But this way of classifying objects according to the wave length of the light they emit or reflect does make excellent biological sense. Not only does our classification of objects according to their colour correspond to the differential sensitivity of the various receptors of which the human retina is composed, it also corresponds, as far as we know, to the differential sensitivity of the colour receptors of all living organisms on this planet whose eyes are sensitive to differences in the wave length of light. This, moreover, presumably reflects the biological utility of being able to discriminate the bands of light wave length regularly emitted or reflected by such objects as (a) vegetable matter which is actively photosynthesizing (green), (b) vegetable matter in which photosynthesis has ceased (yellow and brown), (c) haemoglobin (red - reflected), (d) fire (red - emitted), and (e) sky and deep water (blue).

9. WITTGENSTEIN'S PRIVATE LANGUAGE ARGUMENT

My second objection to Smart's use of the topic neutrality formula to write out colour words is that, although he assures me (personal communication) that this was never his intention, by using the topic neutrality formula in this way, Smart inadvertently creates the impression that topic neutrality is an artificial device which is being imposed on phenomenal descriptions of sensory experience in order to eliminate features of our ordinary ways of talking which are inconvenient from the materialist standpoint. He thus opens the door to what I regard as the abominable heresy of "eliminative materialism" (Rorty 1965) which accepts the existence of contradictions between our ordinary phenomenal descriptions and the scientific account of the corresponding brain processes, and treats these supposed contradictions as evidence of a pre-scientific misconception embodied in ordinary language.

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locus to another within the brain and in the same locus from moment to moment. However, it is tolerably certain that this radiation is determined by the amount of energy being consumed by the activity and bears no relation to the nature of the 'information' being processed.

[3] Smart's abandonment of the dispositional theory in favour of the view that colours, despite their "hellish disjunctive and idiosyncratic" character, are straightforward physical states is discussed in his paper 'On some criticisms of a physicalist theory of colours' (Smart [1972] 1987).

Topic neutrality, as perceived by others, if not by its author, thus becomes something very different both from what Charlie was doing in 'Low claim assertions' and from what I was trying to do in my refutation of the phenomenological fallacy. What we thought we were doing was drawing attention to a feature of our ordinary phenomenal descriptions of sensory experience, to the logical force of expressions describing how something 'appears', 'looks', 'sounds', 'smells', 'tastes' or 'feels', and of the phrases *as if* and *like* which follow them, as those expressions are used in ordinary language. Indeed I would go further than this and argue not only that this is the actual pattern of the descriptions of our private sensory experience which we give in everyday life, but that any description of private experience which can be understood by another person must characterize that experience in terms of what have been called its "publicly observable concomitants" in the standard case, either (a) those features of the public environment which typically give rise or would, if they occurred, give rise to an experience similar to that being described or (b) the kinds of thing which the experience or experiences like it tempt their possessor to publicly say or do.[4]

Though I suspect that Charlie might not be willing to follow me in this, I would cite Wittgenstein's so-called 'private language argument' in support of this claim. I expounded this view of the matter in a paper entitled 'Twenty years on-is consciousness still a brain process?' as follows:

> It now turns out in the light of Wittgenstein's private language argument that we cannot put into words what we know about our own private experience in such a way that what we say can be understood by another person *without* presupposing a whole body of knowledge on the part of both the speaker and his audience about the present and past states of the three-dimensionally extended public environment which is common to both of them and about the correlations between the states of that common environment and the private experiences of both speaker and audience. For if we consider what would be involved in putting into words what we know about our own private experience, without presupposing any knowledge about the present and past states of the external world and about the relationship between these states of the public world and our private experience, we are confronted with the situation which Wittgenstein envisages in section 243 of the *Investigations* in which we try to construct a language such that 'the individual words of this language are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate experience. So another person cannot understand the language.' (Place 1977, 8)
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> We cannot avoid drawing the following conclusions in the light of this argument.
>
> 1. Any language which is capable of being understood by more than one person must consist in the first instance of words and expressions whose primary semantic function is to pick out or to refer to recurrent features of the common public environment of speaker and audience.
>
> 2. The fundamental empirical propositions which provide, in some sense of that term, the foundations of all our empirical knowledge are, and in so far as they are available for public discussion necessarily must be, particular propositions about the current state of their common publicly observable environment, the truth of which can be agreed between speaker and audience, since without that agreement there can be no agreement between them as to how the words which serve to express those propositions are being used and hence no possibility of mutual understanding between them.
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> 3. The only way we have, or conceivable could have, of characterising a private experience of ours in such a way that what we say about it is intelligible to another, the only way in which we can, or conceivably

[4] I was persuaded to add this second clause covering publicly observable concomitants of experience on the output side by David Armstrong. See his 1968.

could, explain what a word like ‘pain’ means, where `pain' is one of that very small group of bodily sensation words which are the names of a particular kind of private experience, is by pointing to the standard publicly observable concomitants of the kind of private experience in question. In other words, we can only describe an experience or explain the meaning of a private sensation word like `pain' either by pointing to the publicly observable state of affairs in the environment which normally produces the experience in question and whose presence in our environment we normally recognise by virtue of that experience, or else by pointing to the kinds of publicly observable things which an experience of that kind characteristically inclines us to say or do.

It is this third conclusion from Wittgenstein's private language argument, as I interpret it, which is of crucial importance for the mind-brain identity theory. For if it is the case that all we ever say or conceivably could say in giving a description of a private experience is that it is the kind of experience we normally have when so-and-so is the case in our public environment, or which tends to make us behave in a particular publicly identifiable manner, it follows, as I put it in my critique of what I called the ‘phenomenological fallacy’ in ‘Is consiousness a brain process?’ that ‘there is nothing that the introspecting subject says about his conscious experiences which is inconsistent with anything the physiologist might want to say about the brain processes which cause him to describe the environment and his consciousness of that environment in the way he does.’ (p. 9)

10. TWO THEORIES OF INTROSPECTION

Considered as a theory of introspection, the view which Charlie was expounding in ‘Low claim assertions’ and which I incorporated into my refutation of the phenomenological fallacy in ‘Is consciousness a brain process?’ may be described as "the linguistic by-product theory of introspection", the view according to which the ability to introspect and construct introspective reports on one's own private experiences develops as a by-product of the ability to "extraspect" and describe that aspect of the public world which is currently impinging on one's sense organs. It is the view expressed in the following passage from Wilhelm Wundt's *Outlines of Psychology* that the direction of "gaze" is the same in the two cases:

> It is, indeed, true that there are contents of experience which belong in the sphere of psychological investigation, but are not to be found among the objects and processes studied by natural science: such are our feelings, emotions, and decisions. On the other hand, there is not a single natural phenomenon that may not, from a different point of view, become an object of psychology. A stone, a plant, a tone, a ray of light, are, as natural phenomenon, objects of mineralogy, botany, physics, etc.; but in so far as they arouse in us *ideas*, they are at the same time objects of psychology. For psychology seeks to account for the genesis of these ideas, and for their relations both to other ideas and to those psychical processes not referred to external objects, such as feelings, volitions, etc. There is, then, no such thing as an "inner sense" which can be regarded as an organ of introspection, and thus distinct from the outer senses, or organs of objective perception. Ideas, whose attributes psychology seeks to investigate, arise through the outer senses no less than do the sense-perceptions on which natural science is based; while the subjective activities of feeling, emotion, and volition, which are neglected in natural science, are not known through special organs, but are directly and inseparably connected with the ideas referred to external objects.
> It follows, then, that the expressions outer and inner experience do not indicate different objects, but *different points of view* from which we start in the consideration and scientific treatment of a unitary experience. (Wundt 1897, 2)

Wundt's mention in this passage of "the subjective activities of feeling, emotion and volition" reminds us that both in Charlie's paper and in my own discussion in ‘Is consciousness a brain process?’ the linguistic by-product theory of introspection was developed solely in relation to the ability to report and describe experiences of sensory and para-sensory nature. The theory can, however, be extended so as to provide an account of the self-knowledge that we have of our own mental dispositions, both cognitive dispositions such as beliefs and volitional dispositions such as wants and desires. I outlined a theory of our knowledge of our own beliefs along these lines in a paper published in *Analysis* in 1971. The relevant passage in the paper reads as follows:

> It might be argued on this theory[5] that to believe that *p* is to be disposed to assert *p* on occasions when the truth of *p* is a relevant consideration. Now since I cannot assert that I believe *p* without *ipso facto* asserting *p*, it would follow that in asserting that I believe *p*, I have *ipso facto* exercised and thus displayed my disposition to assert *p*. On this view, I cannot be mistaken in asserting that I believe *p*, because the statement 'I believe *p*' is a self-verifying statement. It cannot be asserted without *ipso facto* demonstrating its own truth. (Place 1971, 197)

A similar theory can be developed to account for our knowledge of our own wants and desires by picking up on the suggestion first made, to my knowledge, in a paper by Stephen Toulmin (1961) in which he points out that sentences like *I want coffee* are commonly used as a way of asking for what is wanted and thus constitute what Ryle (1949) calls 'an exercise' of the disposition to take steps to secure what one wants in which wanting something, arguably, consists. This is another case where the sentence *I want coffee*, in its capacity as an indicative information-providing sentence, may be regarded as statement which, in its other capacity as an imperative, provides its own verification. In this case one is perhaps more hesitant in the light of Freudian considerations to embrace the infallibility that, as we have seen goes with knowledge based on self-verification; but what Freud is claiming, surely, is that we can be mistaken in *denying* that we want something, something that we would never think of asking for, not that we could be mistaken in thinking that we want what we have just asked for.

Although this self-verifying utterance theory of self-knowledge as it applies to mental dispositions is an extension of what I am calling "the linguistic by-product theory of introspection" which derives, as far as my own intellectual history is concerned, from Charlie's 'Low claim assertions' paper, this, I fear, is another case where Charlie would be reluctant to follow me. The reason for this is that he has long been suspicious of the Rylean notion that statements which ascribe a dispositional property to an entity are concealed hypotheticals of the form *If at any time the entity is subjected to an event of type C, it is liable to react in type E manner*. Charlie's objection, as I understand it, is that Ryle's account leaves out what he calls 'the truthmaker', the all important fact that the truth of the hypothetical depends on the existence of a state of the microstructure of the entity concerned which constitutes what has been called 'the categorical basis' of the disposition. It is true that Ryle often talks in a way that invites Peter Geach's retort in *Mental Acts*:

> A physicist would be merely impatient if somebody said to him: "Why look for, or postulate, any *actual* difference between a magnetized and an unmagnetized bit of iron? Why not just say that if certain things are done to a bit of iron certain hypotheticals become true of it?" He would be still more impatient at being told that his enquiries were vitiated by the logical mistake of treating "*x* is magnetized" as categorical, whereas it is really hypothetical or semi-hypothetical. (Geach 1957, 6)

But this, so it seems to me, represents nothing more than the deep-rooted prejudices of an Oxford Senior Common Room against anything that smacks of scientism, mechanism and the purely technological. In

[5] The theory referred to is "Ryle's dispositional theory of mental concepts." In fact the theory as described is closer to R. B. Braithwaite's dispositional theory of believing, as outlined in Braithwaite 1932.

fact Ryle could and should have replied that he is not denying either the legitimacy of the physicist's enterprise in trying to discover what it is about glass that makes it brittle, what is about rubber that makes it flexible, what is about the iron that gives it its magnetic properties, or Charlie's principle that there must be something about the entity concerned that makes the hypothetical true. All he is claiming or all he needs to claim is that the dispositional statement and its truthmaker constitute two distinct propositions such that the truthmaker entails the dispositional statement, but the dispositional statement does not entail the truthmaker. The disposition and its categorical basis in the microstructure are two distinct and causally related things, not one and the same thing. This is illustrated by the example of a dispositional property like the horse power of a car which depends upon, but is not identical with the features of its microstructure, such as the number and cubic capacity of its cylinders (in the case of a car driven by a reciprocating internal combustion engine). The cubic capacity of the cylinders helps to make it true that the car has the horsepower it does have, but to say that its cylinders have that cubic capacity is not to say the same thing as is said when its horsepower is quoted. The horsepower, the dispositional property, is simply a matter of how it performs when certain hypotheticals are fulfilled.

If, in the light of the truthmaker argument, you are led to reject Ryle's analysis of dispositional statements as concealed hypotheticals, you are no longer in a position to avail yourself of the self-verification theory of how we come to have infallible knowledge of some of our own mental dispositions. For it is only if you accept that having a disposition is simply a matter of what would happen if certain hypotheticals are fulfilled, that demonstrating what happens when the hypothetical is fulfilled (which is what you are doing when you assert your belief or ask for what you want) is a direct and complete verification of the claim that such a disposition exists. If you insist that having the disposition consists in the underlying categorical state of the microstructure of the entity concerned, it follows that the occurrence of an exercise of the disposition is only *indirect* evidence of the existence of that state. It is not surprising, therefore, that someone like David Armstrong who identifies the having of a disposition with its categorical basis will feel the need to look elsewhere for his theory of introspection, as indeed he does in the following passage from *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*:

> If mental processes are states of the person apt for the bringing about of certain sorts of behaviour, and if these states are in fact physical states of the brain, then introspection itself, which is a mental process, will have to be a physical process in the brain. It will have to be a self-scanning process in the brain. Now it is at once clear that it is always logically possible, at the very least, for such a self-scanning mechanism to yield the wrong result. For any mechanism can fail to operate properly. So if introspective knowledge is incorrigible, as is alleged, then Central-state Materialism is false. Nor is it possible to see how such a self-scanning process could yield a logically privileged access. Again, it is impossible to conceive of a mechanism which logically ensures that all states of the brain that are mental states are scanned. (Armstrong 1968, 102-103)

Commenting on this self-scanning theory of introspection in my ‘Burt on brain and consciousness’ (Place 1969), I wrongly attributed it to Hilary Putnam in his classical paper ‘Minds and machines’ (1960). It is true that in that paper Putnam describes a Turing machine which is given ‘electronic "sense organs" which enable it to scan itself and detect minor malfunctions’ (Putnam 1960, 147). But he uses this supposition in order to account for the brain's ability to detect malfunction in other parts of the body through bodily sensations of which pain is only one. His account of how the machine acquires introspective knowledge of its own (brain) states which he develops earlier on pages 142-6 is a mathematically elegant version of what I am calling ‘the linguistic by-product theory of introspection’. No doubt, David Armstrong's idea of a self-scanning mechanism by means of which the brain detects its own states was inspired by Putnam's suggestion; but the proposal to extend the idea from the case where the brain detects malfunctioning in other parts of the body through a system of interoceptive sense organs to a case where it detects it own states is entirely Armstrong's. Nevertheless, as the passage quoted earlier from Wundt reminds us, the notion of introspection as the mind sensing its own states has a precedent in Kant's doctrine of Inner Sense. Moreover, Armstrong's self-scanning mechanism encounters the same objection that Wundt urges against Kant when he asserts in the passage already quoted:

> There is, then, no such thing as an "inner sense" which can be regarded as an organ of introspection, and thus distinct from the outer senses, or organs of objective perception.

In other words, there are no sense organs in the brain.

I do not know where Charlie's sympathies lie in this debate. For, as Armstrong acknowledges in his preface to *A Materialist Theory of the Mind*, it was Charlie who

> ... made me aware of the central role played by the concept of *causality* in mental concepts. Previously I had assigned the central place to the notion of dispositions, conceived as Ryle conceives them in *The Concept of Mind*. (Armstrong 1968, xi)

For my part, I stay with Ryle and with ‘Low claim assertions.’

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