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PROBLEMS WITH STRICT EMPIRICISM: PUBLICLY OBSERVABILITY AND EXPERIENTIAL EMPIRICISM AS SEEN THROUGH ALEX ROSENBERG AND GALEN STRAWSON

PROBLEMAS CON EL EMPIRISMO ESTRICTO: LO PÚBLICAMENTE OBSERVABLE Y EL EMPIRISMO EXPERIENCIAL' INTERPRETADO POR ALEX ROSENBERG Y GALEN STRAWSON

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Abstract: The use of the word 'empirical' in the sciences has created an area of confusion in which it is taken to mean 'publicly observable'. Although it is understandable, given the success of the sciences, that the use and thought behind the word 'empirical' should be used in this manner, this mistake runs into the risk of overstating the reach of scientific enquiry and of denying personal experience altogether. By comparing the philosophies of Alex Rosenberg and Galen Strawson, it will be argued that private experience is an essential component of life that hints at the limitations of public observability._

Key Words: Empirical, Experiential, Rosenberg, Strawson

Resumen: El uso de la palabra 'empírico' en la ciencia ha creado una cierta confusión, dado que se suele entender como 'observable públicamente'. Por mucho que esta concepción de lo empírico haya sido útil en la ciencia, conlleva el riesgo de conferir demasiado poder explicativo a la investigación científica y de incluso negar el valor de la experiencia privada. Mediante una comparación entre las posiciones filosóficas de Alex Rosenberg y Galen Strawson argumentaremos que la experiencia privada constituye un componente esencial de la realidad

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que pone de relieve las limitaciones de lo públicamente observable

Palabras Claves: Empírico, Experiencial, Rosenberg, Strawson

'A long tradition of use in which the words 'empirical' and 'publicly observable' have been coextensively applied has led to their confusion.' – Galen Strawson

Posing the Problem

The word 'empirical' is commonly used in the sciences to refer to external data, usually within the framework of an explanatory theory. Normally, there would be no problem with the use of a specific word in the sciences, but in the case of the use of the word 'empirical' in relation to sentient beings, there is an important distinction which the philosopher Galen Strawson points out. The word 'empirical' does not *necessitate* ostention to external things, objects or phenomena. Although it is often the case that empirical evidence is accompanied by facts of the world to be available for public inspection, the word empirical does not *entail or necessitate* something to be 'publicly observable' at all. Furthermore, even if something is observable for publication inspection, looking at the external factors of sentient creature or phenomena more generally can be very misleading, inasmuch a degree as possible, it is best to find out what is going on internally in the creature involved, especially if we are talking about human beings. So long as the word "empirical' carries the necessary connotation of 'public observability', confusion will continue to arise when speaking about inner sensations and mental states, and worse still, taking empirical to mean anything which is subject to public inspection can drastically distort the scope of science, as is the case with the philosophy of Alex Rosenberg.

What then, is the definition of the word 'empirical'? The Meriam-Webster dictionary offers the following definitions: "*originating in or based on observation or experience* <empirical data>", *relying on experience or observation alone often without due regard for system and theory* <an empirical basis for the theory>" *and capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment* <empirical laws>".[1] Although this definition acknowledges experience as a requisite for empirical research, it is easy to overlook what experience entails, which is not limited to external observation, but to a rich inner mental life. So long as this rich mental life is ignored, problems concerning the status of subjective reports and private experience will continue to linger, especially in cases of strong sensations

such as being in pain, or seeing a loved one, among other types of personal experiences.

One is left with then, essentially, that that which is open to observation, experiment and experience is that which is called 'empirical'. This, initially, would seem to be uncontroversial, for, what else would make sense in trying to construct a reliable and scientific picture of the world? One takes what one sees, and within an explanatory framework, one analyzes the relevant data and puts forth a hypothesis which will then be either duplicated successfully, or not, by other people who go through the same process to see if this hypothesis is consistent with observation, and once this is done numerous times, in most cases, this data can be called 'scientific'. In the case of the use of the word 'empirical', talking about 'observation' and, to an extent that is less clear, 'verification', makes sense. However, to talk about 'experience' fitting into that which is called 'empirical' (as publicly observable) *alone* is rather obscure and would require some clarification.

It may well be replied that 'experience' fitting observation, is needed, is in fact crucial, to remember previous circumstances which can then be used to measure the results of the current experiment. It can also be claimed, trivially, that experience is necessary to make sense of certain regularities within a given experiment. But the following question arises: "how much is one really considering the role of the experiential in our picture of that which we call 'empirical'?" It is one thing for a person to look through a microscope, or to look at mathematical formulations of such and such a theory, after all, it's open to observation by all, and hence can be judged or opined upon by any other normal human being. It's a whole other issue to argue that this is *all* that experience is or should be when trying to give a comprehensive account of 'empirical' (as publicly observable) evidence. In fact, a vast array of human life is forever shut off from public observations of this kind. One could even argue that perhaps the most important aspects of human life, namely inner mental life and mentality is not touched using this criterion. To elucidate this topic further, it will be useful to consider what world view arises if one refuses to acknowledge the existence of rich inner mental states, which can be called 'scientism' in Alex Rosenberg's view and contrast it with a philosophy that acknowledges complex mental life, as is the case with Galen Strawson. After comparing both views, one will be forced to conclude that, a rich mental life is an essential component of human beings that is not properly grasped by

publicly observable methods as they are commonly employed in the hard sciences – particularly physics.

Rosenberg's Observations: Empirical Scienticism

If one assumes that the only valuable evidence one has recourse to is found in empirical, publicly observable science - particularly the most successful of the sciences, physics - then one would be quite close to Alex Rosenberg's view of what counts as an accurate description of reality, which consists of what physics says about it. What makes Rosenberg so sure of physics? He begins by stating that "Everything in the universe is made up of fermions and bosons. That's it." One of the reasons he gives for such a statement is that "Because physics predictions are so accurate, the methods of physics that produced the description must be equally reliable… We have the best of reasons to believe that the methods of physics – combining controlled experiments and *careful observation* with mainly mathematical requirements… are the right ones for acquiring *all* knowledge." (Rosenberg, 2011: 24) If one begins looking at the world carefully, what one finds are trees, and scents and colors and much else of rich phenomenological character, one does not publicly observe atoms in ordinary life – although clearly they can be detected by technology and their effects can be observed. In any case, it would not be unfair to categorize Rosenberg as a type of 'scientistic materialist'.

One may (and should) concede that physics is the most accurate science, but surely things become more obscure if one considers more complex sciences, like biology. While Rosenberg acknowledges that there is more complexity in biology, he is rather succinct when he says that "Physics explains chemistry. And chemistry explains biology. Respiration, reproduction, muscle movement, the nervous system, heredity…all of these components of our biology are now well understood as chemical processes, and these in turn are explained as physical processes." While it is true that some aspects of biology are available for public observability such as reproduction, respiration and other phenotypical aspects, it does not follow that atoms *explain* the inner workings of these very organisms. However, Rosenberg is enthusiastic when he states that "the phenomenal accuracy of its [physics] predictions, the unimaginable power of its technological explications, and the breathtaking extent and detail of its explanations are powerful reasons to believe that physics is the whole truth about reality." There is *much* that falls under the rubric of reality that is not in any obvious and causal manner explained by referencing particles or fields even if they were immediately available for public observation. This, however, is not convincing for Rosenberg as he continues to state that "As for the

rest of reality above the subatomic, all we need to know is what things are composed of and how the parts are arranged in order to explain and predict their behavior to equal detail and precision. That goes for humans too. (Rosenberg, 2011: 25) Notice that what matters for Rosenberg, so far as observation goes in relation to physics and reality more broadly construed is concerned with referencing the (necessarily) publicly observable behavior of things -atoms, chemicals, biological creatures – and not the intrinsic properties that could be found in these various domains of reality.

It would be hard to deny the success of physics and it would be futile to even attempt to minimize how much it has progressed in the 20th century alone. Yet there seems to be a clear problem in Rosenberg's account of all of reality. If physics so far observed is the most accurate account of the nature of total reality, what can be said about the mind? After all, if one lacks a mind, it would not be possible to come up with equations that could predict the observable behavior of particles. If there is one thing that should be even more certain that publicly observable experiments, it should be immediate private experience, the qualitative feel of one's own conscious mental state. This much should not be doubted given elementary experiential facts about lived reality. Rosenberg however, would disagree. Rosenberg essentially equates experience, the qualitative feel of consciousness as 'introspection' and considers it to be illusory and of little use in discovering the nature of the reality. In these respects, Rosenberg is somewhat cautious when he states that "Of course we think. No one denies that. It's just that thinking is nothing like what conscious introspection tells us it is." When people have thoughts, about trees or cities, the situation should be straightforward, one is thinking about a particular city such as Paris. One has Paris in one's mind and the thought is related, is referring to some aspects of the city, this is what empirical experience (as opposed to publicly observable experience) feels like.

The opposite view, a view which denies experiential empiricism goes like this: "We believe that Paris is the capital of France. So somewhere in our brain is stored the proposition, the statement, the sentence, idea, notion, thought, or whatever, that Paris is the capital of France." The thought of Paris, then is stored in one's brain and not in one's mind, but it so happens that, according to this view, people's brains are not thinking *about* Paris at all. After all, the observable evidence is that "…in my brain there [are] dozens or hundreds or thousands or millions of neurons wired together to store the thought that Paris is the capital of France." So instead of taking thoughts, the most immediate aspect of experience to be about things in the world, Rosenberg chooses to focus on the observable neurons in one's brain to talk about a set of neurons trying to refer to things in the world. "How can… the Paris neurons in my brain- be about, denote, refer

to, name, represent, or otherwise point to… the agglomeration of Paris?... How can one clump of stuff anywhere in the universe be about some other clump of stuff anywhere else in the universe- right next to it or 100 million light years away?" Simply posed, the question asks how can configurations of neurons in the brain be about some experiential object in the world? In ordinary live, there is no problem thinking *about* Paris or any other city, regardless of where one is in the world. In mental life, all kinds of thoughts refer to all kinds of things and people have no trouble talking about these experiential-empirical matters. Things become complicated however, if one assumes that thoughts just are neural networks "The Paris neurons aren't *about* Paris in the same way, for example, that a picture postcard… is *about* Paris. They don't in any way look like the Arc de Triomphe or the Eiffel Tower or the Place de la Concorde." (Rosenberg, 2011:174-175) This much is obvious, though he rhetorically asks "They [neural patterns] don't have to look like Paris to be *about* Paris. Right?"

Rosenberg proceeds to argue that it makes no sense for a set of neural patterns to be about Paris by claiming that these very Paris neurons refer to another set of neural patterns which "…is both about the Paris neurons and about Paris." But this type of argument leads to a regress in which neurons about Paris refer to another set of neurons which are about the first set of neurons and about Paris, which leads to another set of neurons which is about both sets of neurons which are about each other and Paris, and so on down an infinite line. The ideal solution, under this publicly observable lens would be for "…a clump of matter, in this case the Paris neurons, that by the very arrangements of its synapses points at… another clump of matter outside the brain." The problem with this is that "…there is no such physical stuff. Physics has ruled out clumps of matter of the required sort. There are just fermions and bosons and combinations of them. None of this stuff is just, all by itself, *about* any other stuff." (Rosenberg, 2011: 179) Besides being confusing and hard to follow, there are simply no good reasons to think that the world of experience need be constrained by that which is publicly observable. What options are left if one is to examine what counts as evidence for anything? One route is to claim, alongside Rosenberg, using publicly observable behaviorist lines that "…knowing… that Paris is the capital of France is just having a set of neurons wired up into an input/output circuit." (Rosenberg, 2011:185) Putting aside the questionable hypothesis that the brain is a computer[2],

2. Raymond Tallis points out one elementary mistake made by those who think brains are a computer is due, in large part to sloppy language and epithet use: "…machines are described anthropomorphically and, at the same time, the anthropic terms in which they are described undergo a machine-ward shift. These same terms, modified by their life amongst the machines, can then be re-applied to minds and the impression is then created that minds

which is far from being self-evident, all this talk relating to neurons not being about Paris (or anything else) boils down to "[w]hat's really being "learned" is the exquisite coordination of so many packages of neural connections that the behavior it produces looks like it's the result of thoughts being about things in the world. That is especially how it looks like to introspection [experience]." (Rosenberg, 2001: 185) In this view, all there is, is behavior that *looks* like aboutness when in reality any aboutness is illusion: "…it's got to be an illusion since nothing physical can be about anything. That goes for you conscious thoughts as well." (Rosenberg, 2011: 193) Neuroscience has radically advanced in the 20th century[3], and much about the brain is now known that was previously shrouded in mystery. However, it is one thing to claim that neurons in your brain form a necessary part in any experience about anything in the world, to claiming that all that happens when one publicly observes anything is simple behavior reacting to Paris or dogs or trees. After all, how is it possible to claim any scientific discovery whatsoever to be true if the instruments people use to arrive at such theories rely on the very experiential aspects of consciousness that are claimed to be illusory? In other words, how is it possible to reach reality through illusion? This view is only tenable if one subscribes to the view that the only true and real aspects of the world are those which are open to public observation as well as experimental treatment. The other option to this publicly observable scientistic view is one which takes first person accounts as the most definite certain aspects of existence and can be termed 'experiential empiricism'. It will be explored through the philosophy of Galen Strawson and will be contrasted with Rosenberg's claims.

Realistic Reality: Galen Strawson

Contra Rosenberg's assertion that physics fixes all the facts, and is thus the most secure of our knowledge, Galen Strawson states that, in the case of 'experience' (introspection in Rosenberg's terms) "It is part of reality. It is as real as a rock. The experience of an experiencing being is everything about what it is like to be that being, experientially speaking, from moment to moment as it lives its life." (Strawson, 2010:3) Experience

and machines are one." Furthermore, Tallis points out that "To cross the machine/mind barrier, it is not sufficient to make the mind machine-like; one must do so using terms that have already unobtrusively mentalized machines." (Tallis, 2004: 35.) For more information on the topic see *Why the Mind in not a Computer* by Raymond Tallis.

3. In fact, over the last decades neuroscientific research has tried to find ways to objectively studying subjective experience, see Blanco (2017: 96), for a broad overview of the significant advances made in this field.

in this case is taken to be everything available to the mind at any moment, ranging from hearing a song, to reading a sentence or tasting an apple. Not only is experience as real as rock, according to Strawson, but he also states that "…As a real physicalist, I hold that the mental/experiential is physical" However "… when I say these words I mean something completely different from what many physicalists have apparently meant by them. I certainly don't mean that all the characteristics of what is going on, in the case of experience, can be described by physics and neurophysiology, or any non-revolutionary extension of them. That idea is crazy. (Strawson, 2008: 56). In the domain of emotions, thoughts, sensations and other such related mental phenomena, it is extremely difficult to think of a way in which public appeal to physics would explain essentially private phenomena. One can say that atoms and particles are involved in mental phenomena, but it is a far stretch to claim that these particles *explain* mental phenomena in any relevant and illuminating manner. Differing radically from Rosenberg, Strawson claims that "…experiential phenomena 'just are' physical, so that there is *a lot more* to neurons than physics and neurophysiology record (or can record). No one who disagrees with this is a real physicalist in my terms." (Strawson, 2008: 56) Experiences, as viewed by Strawson are private phenomena and private phenomena are not available for public observation. Those who think that physics will describe the brain completely are making a category error.

As Strawson points out "When aspiring materialists consider the living brain… they often slide into supposing that the word "brain" somehow refers only to the brain-as-described-by-current physics. But this is a mistake, for it refers… [to] the living brain as a whole, the brain in its total physical existence and activity." But this view misses (at least) half the picture because "Realistic – real – materialists must agree that the total physical existence and activity of the brain of an ordinary, living person, considered over time, is constituted by Experiential phenomena ['introspection'] (if only in part) in every sense in which it is constituted (in part) by non-Experiential phenomena characterized by physics." (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003. 52). Thus, to get a full understanding of the brain, the publicly observable aspects of the brain with neurons, synapses and interlocking brain regions is simply not enough to understand everything the brain does, on the contrary the brain-as-described-by-physics leaves out experience from this picture altogether. One can say that consciousness is an illusion, or is wrong about what it represents, but to leave out experience at this level of analysis is missing out on most of reality. Strawson suggests an intuitive manner that may help in thinking about experience "[a] good way to convey what it is to be a real realist about experience is to say that it's to continue to take colour experience or taste experien-

ce… or experience of pain, or of an itch, to be what one took it to be wholly unreflectively – what one knew it to be in having it – before one did any philosophy, e.g. when one was five." (Bayne & Montague, 2014: 288) People clearly communicate private experiences, and people understand each other when someone says "I felt pain" or "I saw a red car". However, communicating through language should not be confused with the actual first-person experience, which remains essentially private.

In Strawson's view, the whole of reality, including (but not limited to) things that can be publicly observed, must include 'experience' – but experience is not something that is open to publicly observability the way the behavior of particles or even of people are available for public inspection. In fact, it can be stated that the most essential aspects of experience do not require any reference to public observation at all. But how can this be possible? People routinely judge other people's emotions and mental states based on observable behavior. Clearly then, observable behavior is essential for an account of mental experience. Although it may initially seem counter-intuitive, Strawson provides a thought experiment that shows that reference to public observability is not essential to understand experience. This thought experiment could also, at the same time, hint at the limits to which science may not explain. It may not be possible to get a quantitative account of qualitative mental states. But before developing this conclusion, it is time to examine Strawson's hypothetical alien race the "Sirians."

Strawson's Sirians

To take one example – which could be multiplied many times over attaching different sensations – Strawson asks people to consider the hypothetical alien race the Sirians. "The Sirians are a red-skinned alien race who turn white once a year when their moon is full. This phenomenon, call it X, is a taboo subject for them, and it is talked about as little as possible. Even to think about X is held to be wrong, and no one would admit to doing it. And yet they all do it." For purposes of illustration one is presented with an alien species completely compatible with known physical laws as well as natural selection, which just so happens to have one particular subject matter 'X sensation' – which is considered a forbidden topic. It is either rude or disgusting to talk about X in a public situation. So far, this situation presents no problems to the notion of public observability. Once a year, empirical observation could demonstrate a causal connection between a full moon, and the Sirians turning white and there are no further complexities so far. However, this X phenomenon "has a price: whenever the Sirians think about X, they subsequently experience

very severe pains in the head. And this happens only after they have thoughts about X, for they are not subject to any other sort of pain sensation." Furthermore, "they have no word[s] for them [X sensations]." (Strawson, 2010:226) Because, as mentioned before, this is not an appropriate topic for conversation. Now that a private experience is taken into account, X sensation, which is roughly equivalent to 'pain' for human beings, the view of empirical as being 'publicly observable' becomes problematic. One can see a change in colour, but one cannot necessarily see effects from changes in particular thought patterns. "…S sensations have no other-observable typical *cause* and no other-observable behavioral *effects*. As for the cause, thinking about X is a *purely mental performance*, a matter of dwelling on something in imagination, and there is nothing is particular that sets it off." (last italics mine.) Purely mental performances and associated acts of mental activity are dismissed by Rosenberg: "there is no mind distinct from the brain." (Rosenberg, 2011: 147) But appeals to the errors of conscious thought in perception does not deny the reality of these experiences. Particularly problematic from an empirical-as-publicly-observable framework is that, in the case of the Sirians "As for the effects, the Sirians never talk about S sensations [Part of X feeling] , nor do they behave in any characteristic nonverbal way on experiencing S sensation. No instinct prompt them to move in any way." Similar to a human being as "[w]e tend to be less inclined to move our heads when we have a headache". But people may move their heads when they have a headache, and there is no necessary publicly observable characteristic that can be pointed to when one had a painful headache.

So far in Strawson's account of the Sirians, there may be situations in which one may have an experience, X, to which there is no behavioral data available. If there can be inner accounts of experiences such as X or Y, how can there be thoughts about them, if matter cannot relate to matter, as Rosenberg claims? If what Rosenberg says is true, one would have to side with a variety of scienticism and claim that in aboutness "The process of illusion building finishes off when the neural circuits in the brain have been trained by operant conditioning to respond appropriately to noises other people make…" (Rosenberg, 2011: 203) Nevertheless, Strawson replies to such an argument by "…even if there were a necessary connection between being in pain and being disposed to engage in some sort of (avoidance) behavior, it would not follow that there was a necessary connection between being in pain and being disposed to engage in *publicly observable* behavior, so that the one thing could not exist with the other." Furthermore, he adds that "The way to avoid S sensations after thinking about X might not involve any publicly observable behavior. It might be discovered that the way to do it was to think about Y before thinking about

X." (Strawson, 2010: 236) And thought, of X or Y only entail mental activity and not empirical as publicly-available data.

Another option would be to side with Strawson and argue that "… I think it is obvious that the connection between pain [and other sensations] and (observable) behavior is, strictly speaking a contingent one, and that one can see this as soon as one puts aside one's philosophical training for a moment. The connection is contingent because pain can exist in the complete absence of any (observable) behavior… It does not have to have any observable causes or correlates or effects or expressions in order to be pain. It does not have to have any function in order to be pain." (Strawson, 2010: 240-241). Under this argument, matter can be about matter, and no deep mystery is involved. The problem of 'public observability' becomes transparent only when the scientific method over-reaches its epistemic domains, which admittedly, are not clearly delniated[4].

Views on the Brain

For Rosenberg the human brain is more complex than a rat's, but only by a matter of degrees "In the human hippocampus (and the rest of the cortex too), there are vastly more neurons to be changed, even more than in the rat hippocampus. But the basic process is the same." One should not be surprised to hear such statements, if one takes experience to be "a trick". It then only follows from empirical-defined as publicly observable that the brain is some type of computer, and that complex interactions can be explained within a relatively straight-forwards computational method: "Neuroscientists have already begun to discover how information is distributed within large sets of neuron circuits in the brain. These large set are composed of vast numbers of small sets of neurons with extremely specialized abilities. These small sets of neural activities have specific response patterns because they are very highly tuned input/output circuits." Since the mind (as opposed to the brain) is viewed empirically-as-publicly observable and assumed to be a computer, and since "introspection" (or Strawson's 'experience') tricks us almost all the time, it only follows that quite complex behavior such as recognizing one's mother can be explained in the

4. Susan Haack points out that "…the fact is the term "science" simply has no clear boundaries: the reference of the term is fuzzy, indeterminate, and, not least frequently contested." However Haack adds that "This is not to say that we can't, in a rough and ready, distinguish between the sciences and other human activities, including other human cognitive activities… at first approximation… science is best understood… as a kind of inquiry… [and we] need to acknowledge that the work we pick out by the word "science" is far from uniform or monolithic." (Haack, 2013: 112) It's also far from clear that there can ever be such a thing as a "science of experience", unless one denies experience an clings on to the idea that the mind is the brain, and that the science of the brain will reveal everything about the so called mental.

following manner: "By the time your brain has fully developed, there are actually a set of neurons whose synapses have been wired together so that the only thing they do is respond to the visual input of your mother's face, with some neural output that leads to mother-recognizing behavior like saying "Hi, mom" when you see her face." (p.183). The conclusion to this line of thinking, is practically inevitable "The brain is a computer whose "microprocessors" – its initial assemblies of neural circuits – are hardwired by a developmental process that starts before birth and goes on after it. Long before that process is over, the brain has already started to modify its hardwired operating system and acquire data fed in through its sensory apparatus. What happens to it doesn't differ in any significant way from what happens to [IBM's] Watson." (Rosenberg, 2011: 189) In other words, the idea here is that one looks at a lump of matter like the brain and one *assumes* it does almost the same things a computer like IBM's Watson can also do. This may be plausible if one denies that first-person experience is a trick, as Rosenberg claims "Scienticsm shows that the first-person POV [point of view] is an illusion." (Rosenberg, 2011: 194)

Things look quite different if one approaches the brain assuming what is already given, that experience, the most obvious material fact of people's existence, is real. Consider Strawson's approach when looking at the brain from a *publicly-observable perspective* "For what, expressed in common-sense terms, does physics find in the volume of spacetime occupied by a brain? Not a sludgy mass [or concrete stuff], but an astonishingly (to us) insubstantial-seeming play of energy, an ethereally radiant vibrancy. It finds, in other words, a physical object, which, thus far examined is like any other." However, far from suggesting that "physics tells us everything we need to know about the nature of reality." (Rosenberg, 2011: 17) Strawson states that "All this being so, do we have any good reason to think we know anything about the non-mental physical… that licenses surprise – even the mildest surprise – at the thought that the Experiential [introspection] is physical?" I do not think so… the ghost in the machine is special, but it is certainly a machine, *and the machine, like the rest of the physical world, is already a bit of a ghost – as ghostly, in Russell's view, "as anything in a spiritualist séance*". (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003:70) (Italics mine). Not only is matter, deep down, far from resembling anything concrete, it has *ghostly properties*, some of which people are directly acquainted with in simply having thoughts the way they do when living ordinary life on a daily basis. There are no good reasons to believe that appeals to public observability of the brain shows that thoughts are "tricks" which are "illusion[s] that we actually have thoughts about the mind…" (Rosenberg, 2011:218). If there is no reason to be surprised that not only are thoughts real physical phenomena, but also that en non mental matter can give rise

to thought, what does Strawson say of philosophers like Rosenberg, who deny the reality of the mental? Strawson states that "It is an extraordinary suggestion, and what is most striking about it in the present context is that it constitutes the most perfect demonstration in the history of philosophy of the grip of the very thing that it seeks to reject: dualist thinking." (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003: 71) In other words, those who maintain a publicly observable perspective towards empirical research are engaged in dualism. But how can this be given that Rosenberg maintains that physics fixes all the facts? "The eliminitavists make the same initial mistake as Descartes – the mistake of assuming that they understand more about the nature of the physical than they do…" But things are even worse for these eliminitavists because "…their subjugation to dualist thinking is far deeper than Descartes's. They are so certain that the physical excludes the Experiential that they are prepared to deny the reality of the Experiential in some (admittedly unclear) way…" This for Strawson constitutes "the most ridiculous claim ever made in philosophy." (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003:71)

Appealing to matter as what is open to observation leads to the denial of the most obvious, and what should also be uncontroversial, fact of existence: the reality of experience. The problem, for Rosenberg and others who deny the reality of "introspection" or "experience" is not that they have any solid evidence for these claims, for the evidence given is weak and only obscures the reality of experience, but rather that the claim people don't have thought's "about" anything is that such ideas rest on the "*intuition* that the mental or the Experiential is utterly different in nature from matter. But this intuition lacks any remotely respectable theoretical support… The truth is that dualism has nothing in its favor… and it has Occam's razor… against it." (Anthony & Horstein, 2003: 75). Rosenberg would deny charges of dualism and would likely claim that Strawson is the one who is committing himself to dualism because Strawson believes that experience is the most obvious and indubitable fact of human existence. One is left pondering the question, is public observability the best criterion for what constitutes the realm and reach of the empirical? If one believes that physics, as it currently stands, "fixes all the facts", the answer would obviously be 'yes' and this is because physics has been so successful in explaining the laws of the universe that there is no reason to expect that it won't explain or reduce 'mental phenomena' some time in the future. Those who believe, with Strawson, that appeals to public observability leave out a whole vast array of emotions, sensations and rich mental life would say 'no', because personal experience is a *prerequisite* for public observability in the first place. They would also claim that "Physics is one thing, the physical is another." (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003: 49) These are different

epistemic domains. In fact, Strawson, quotes Russell, who points out that "We know nothing about the intrinsic quality of physical events except when these are mental events that we directly experience." (Anthony & Hornstein, 2003: 56). Although Strawson think Russell puts the point too strongly, in that Strawson thinks that the structure physics describes are part of its intrinsic nature, Russell's main argument is undeniable and can even be reformulated in the following manner: People know nothing about public observability except insofar as it is experiential. Experience thus cannot be reduced to 'illusions' because then the publicly observable results attained would be equally illusory, if not more so.

Conclusion

Charges or discussions about who is a dualist and who is not a dualist, however, is not the main concern of this paper. What has been attempted here is to show how restricting the use of the word and concept of 'empirical' to mean 'public observation' leads to an impoverished view of the extent of human mental life. To claim that "physics fixes all the facts" or that thoughts aren't *about* anything is to fall into the mistake of thinking that the 'empirical as publicly observable' explains all the phenomena in the universe. The reality of the situation seems to be the exact opposite. If thoughts aren't *about* anything how can one then defend the view that observable physics, chemistry and biology are about anything either? Appeals to the explanatory success of physics, chemistry and biology in this case lack foundation because the initial aspect that brought these sciences into life, first person private experience isn't *about* physics, chemistry or biology. The empirical viewed as publicly observable also has to explain why thoughts are so often correct, instead of them occasionally being illusory. People talk about thoughts and talk about what these thoughts are *about* without any difficulty, if these are illusions or tricks, empirical-as-publicly-observable science must be able to account how people are able to talk about the Paris, or one's mother and refer to these specific entities. It would be difficult to believe that ordinary people have almost essentially the same hallucinations countless times a day. Finally, empirical viewed as publicly observable must be able to explain how private sensations like love, laughter or pain apparently arise as internal mental phenomena in behavioral, observable terms. The problem Strawson raises with the Sirians seems to indicate that private sensations need not have any external observable behavior at all. Public observability would have to find a way to explain how something that feels painful or unpleasant privately is not really *about* anything painful, because painful things must be cashed out by observable behavior.

All the demands listed for public observability and for thoughts being *about* things do not arise if one takes experience to be a fundamental fact of

human existence. If one should seek to avoid the arguments made by Rosenberg, all one has to do is to broaden one's view of what the empirical actually encompasses. The concept and word empirical is more clearly articulated by the term 'experiential-empiricism'. Under experiential empiricism, experience remains the fundamental epistemic anchor to both oneself as well as the world. Furthermore, experiential empiricism has no problems in adopting public observability and thus science can proceed without any impediments. As Strawson suggests, sometimes the best way to view reality is to ignore philosophy and to take what one sees and what one hears as what they are when one was a child. Of course, with the advent of science it is now known that reality, deep down, is different from the way it is represented in the mind, but this does not in any way imply that what is represented in the mind is false: it is only the way reality is viewed by human beings. Public observability and experience need not clash after all. In fact, when they are combined, as they are for every person in the world, scientists and philosophers are given the only two tools required to understand the world, private experience and observable (and repeatable) experiments. The latter allows for amazing discoveries in science, the former gives people an infinitely rich mental life which can help people contemplate science, and much, much more.

(Endnotes)

1 "Empirical." Def. 1, 2, 3 www.merriam-webster.com. Merriam Webster (n.d). January 30, 2017. Different dictionaries have virtually identical definitions. See the Cambridge and Oxford dictionaries definitions of the word 'empirical' online for more examples. None of these definitions take into account inner mental states, which should be the object of study for issues pertaining to the mind, and not merely based on public observability.

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