

**BERKELEY, REALISM, AND DUALISM: REPLY TO HOCUTT'S
"GEORGE BERKELEY RESURRECTED: A COMMENTARY ON
BAUM'S "ONTOLOGY FOR BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS"**

William M. Baum
University of California, Davis

Abstract: Using Hocutt's vocabulary, I repeat that realism leads inevitably to an unacceptable dualism, because realism distinguishes two categories: real things (material) and perceived things (immaterial). This dichotomy is unacceptable because it creates an unsolvable mystery: we have no way to understand how a thing in one category could affect a thing in the other category. By dividing the subject matter, dualism renders the science incoherent. Someone who asserts that only material things exist (Hobbes, according to Hocutt) is not espousing realism, but monism, and in monism, which assumes only one type of stuff or world, the terms material and immaterial have no meaning. Behavior analysis can advance as the study of behavior in relation to environment, past and present, without having to wait for advances in neurophysiology. Neurophysiology has not yet advanced to the point where behavior analysis can benefit from what it says about the nervous system. Someday neurophysiology may help to understand how the brain participates in behavior, and behavior analysis will be able to tell neurophysiologists what phenomena need to be explained.

Key words: realism, dualism, perception, monism, George Berkeley

Sometimes a scientist, a behavior analyst, can learn something from philosophers. Reading philosophy is sometimes rewarding. I learned something from Max Hocutt's (2018) comments on my paper. First, I learned that in speaking of dualism, one does better to substitute "distinct categories" for "separate worlds." I stand corrected. So, dualism consists of distinguishing two categories: material and immaterial. or physical and mental. Secondly, I learned that the history of the term "realism" is a muddle, and one must be careful using the word.

I will be brief, because I have discussed these matters elsewhere: in the original article that Hocutt criticizes (Baum, 2017b), in another article on

perception (Baum, in press), and in a book, *Understanding Behaviorism* (Baum, 2017a).

The important issue that Hocutt fails to address about dualism is how the things in these disparate categories could possibly affect one another. Dualism, however one defines it, creates a mystery that is inimical to science, because no known means exists for the mental or immaterial things to affect the physical or material things—or the other way around.

In discourse with philosophers, I often find that, when discussing a problem, different philosophers propose different solutions. For example, if you look at what has been written about free will, you will find that philosophers distinguish several kinds of free will and several kinds of determinism. Dennett (1984), in his book, *Elbow Room*, for example, defines free choice as choice preceded by deliberation. Maybe, but that is not what non-philosophers mean; indeed, it is not even close, because deliberation is behavior that may be determined. If you try to discuss what everybody else believes about free will and determinism, philosophers, having defined all these varieties, criticize you for not distinguishing all the meanings they have attached to the terms. Clearly, philosophers variously define dualism and realism in the same way.

Realism is the strange belief, as Berkeley put it, that the objects we perceive have a real existence apart from their being perceived. It is a belief with no basis, however passionately one may believe it. Try an experiment. Pick an object—say, an apple—you can see it, feel its hardness and roundness, smell it, and bite it and taste it. Can anyone prove that a real apple is really there apart from these perceptions? The answer is categorically “no.” That is what I meant when I said that perception is all we have.

What about Hocutt’s “unperceived objects”? In discussing the problem of error, he asserts that certain theories are true “beyond reasonable doubt.” Atoms, for example, would seem to fall in this category of “unperceived objects.” Atomic theory, however, is not so established as Hocutt might think. The recent super collider experiment produced some puzzling results, which physicists are still struggling to reconcile with atomic theory. Atoms are not “unperceived objects.” They are theoretical constructs, heuristics that allow us to integrate and make sense of many phenomena in our experience with relative ease. They are useful, but they are not objects and probably are unperceivable, not just unperceived.

The phrase “beyond reasonable doubt” applies in a courtroom, where a jury must make a determination of guilt, but the phrase has no place in science. Hocutt’s usage amounts just to name calling, saying that anyone who disagrees is unreasonable. Society and the scientific community have

historically believed in theories that we today reject; think of essences, phrenology, and inheritance of acquired characteristics. Search on the internet for “flat earth,” and you will find a substantial community exists that believes the earth is flat. The reason Hocutt would find their views unreasonable is just that we have a model—the solar system—that, like atomic theory, allows us to make better sense of more of our experience than the flat-earth model. If we had no alternative with which to compare, we would have to say that the flat-earth model is the best we have at this time. Presumably, Ptolemy would have said, assuming the earth is the center of the universe, his theory was the best that could be had at that time.

Ptolemy probably assumed and at least some flat-earthers assume that the Bible is the literal truth. They reject the theory that the Bible was written and edited by humans, a theory espoused by many biblical scholars. True believers are apt to reject the theory of evolution by natural selection for similar reasons. According to surveys, they make up a substantial minority of Americans. Hocutt, apparently, would say they are unreasonable, but they start with different assumptions from Hocutt, and his name calling won't persuade anyone. Only exposure to the sense-making effects of evolutionary theory will persuade someone who might be willing to examine basic assumptions.

Hocutt's basic assumption is that the world is real, but reasoning from this assumption doesn't help integrate experience as does atomic theory or evolutionary theory. Assuming an idea to be false and then reasoning to the conclusion that the idea is false constitutes a logical error. When Johnson claimed to refute Berkeley by kicking a stone, he committed this logical error. The circularity was Johnson's, not Berkeley's.

Instead of clarity, realism creates unsolvable mysteries like the mind-body problem. This is a pseudo-question, a question that entails a nonsensical assumption. “How many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” is a famous pseudo-question, because it assumes that angels are such things as could dance on the head of a pin. “What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object?” is another, because the simultaneous existence of irresistible forces and immovable objects is a logical impossibility. Similarly, “How does the mind affect the body?” is a pseudo-question, because we have no way to understand how things in the immaterial category could possibly affect things in the material category. Like angels on a pin, the mind is not such a thing as could affect behavior. Yet, dualism and realism raise this pseudo-question and create other confusions too, splitting up phenomena into those involving the mind and those involving the body, with the result that the science cannot cohere.

Hocutt objects to my assertion that realism leads inevitably to metaphysical dualism. He cites Hobbes as someone who held to realism but was not a dualist. If someone asserts that only the material is real, the statement has no meaning except in contrast to the immaterial. If Hobbes believed as Hocutt says, then Hobbes held to monism. In monism, only one world or one type of stuff exists, but no warrant exists to call it material or immaterial. It just is.

If we embrace monism, then what should we say about the brain and behavior? Hocutt seems to think that neurophysiology has advanced to the point where it has something significant to say about behavior. I disagree, because as far as I can tell, fMRI studies have only confirmed that when a person behaves one way in one situation and another way in another situation, a difference exists in the brain. Just the other day, I listened on the radio to a prominent neurophysiologist talking about creativity and saying that the brain invents ideas, stores them, evaluates them in the frontal cortex, and puts them into action. This seems to me no different from what would have been said 50 years ago. Such talk is both nonsensical and misleading, because only the whole person can do things like invent, remember, evaluate, and act (Baum, 2018). How the brain participates in behavior remains to be seen.

If, as Hocutt says, materialists hold that mental activity is a “function” of events in a material brain, then he is describing an incoherent view. The word “function” papers over the question of how brain activity could possibly cause mental activity. If mental activity is immaterial, we find ourselves back in the mire of dualistic nonsense. Rachlin (2014), in his book, *Escape of the Mind*, offers a coherent alternative: mental activity is publicly observable behavior extended in time. One thing is sure: consciousness will never be found in the brain. Whatever consciousness is, it cannot be identical to neuronal activity in the brain. A view more like Berkeley’s, and compatible with Eastern mysticism is that consciousness *is*, and what we need to understand is what all *this* is about. Put another way, our experiences are a given, and science aims to see what sense we can make of them.

I do not say the brain is irrelevant. A complete understanding of behavior requires us to know how the brain participates—what are the mechanisms of action. Until neurophysiologists have something helpful to say about those mechanisms, however, making stuff up about the workings of the brain is worse than useless, because it gives a phony sense of understanding that discourages the search for valid understanding. I only ignore the brain because we understand so little about how it participates. Behavior analysis need not wait for neurophysiology to proceed, no more

than Darwin needed genetics to invent the theory of evolution by natural selection. Knowing genetics is helpful to evolutionary theory now, and someday knowing about the brain will be helpful to behavioral theory, but the study of behavior in relation to the environment will show neurophysiologists just what phenomena they should be trying to explain.

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Author's Note

Address Correspondence to:
William M. Baum
611 Mason Street, Apt. 504
San Francisco, CA 94108
Email: billybaum94108@gmail.com