

WHAT'S SUBJECTIVE ABOUT BEING OBJECTIVE? – MAX VELMANS

Abstract: In this paper I argue that our conventional ways of distinguishing subjectivity from objectivity are not soundly based. The problems arise from deeply rooted presuppositions that we have about (a) how observers relate to the things that they observe, and (b) about how “observations” (in science) are thought to relate to “experiences”. While dualists and reductionists disagree about the ontology of conscious experiences (about what they really *are*), they largely agree about how they *appear* (about their phenomenology). They also agree that “physical phenomena” in the world are completely *distinct* from “conscious percepts of those phenomena” in the subject’s mind or brain—underpinning the view that “physical phenomena” are public and objective while “conscious phenomena” are private and subjective. In truth, however, there is no *phenomenal* difference between physical phenomena and our experiences *of* them. When we observe the world, physical phenomena just *are* what we experience—which makes them, in this sense, private and subjective just like the other things we experience. However such phenomena may also be public in the sense that other observers, under similar conditions can have similar experiences. To understand the conditions under which this can happen one has to clarify the nature of public versus private *access*, and the relation of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and objectivity. This in turn provides a different way of viewing the relation of psychology to physics. While inner experiences require different investigative methodologies to events in the external world, the basics of the *empirical method* remain the same.