In Touch

Why We Aren't, and Couldn't Be, Brains-in-Vats

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External world skepticism gets off the ground because philosophers are quick to grant that classic skeptical scenarios (such as brain-in-vat or evil demon scenarios) present us with perfectly coherent possibilities, that is, with logically possible worlds. In what follows, I will argue that we should view skeptical scenarios as conceptually dubious, on the grounds that all such scenarios rest on a problematic ontology of mental phenomena, on a bankrupt metaphysics of mind.

To clarify, I do not think skeptical scenarios involve *blatant* contradictions. My claim that such scenarios are conceptually dubious can be compared to Hilary Putnam's recent claim that the "Automatic Sweetheart scenario" (or to use a more familiar term, a 'philosophical zombie') is not "fully intelligible."[1] Just as we can, in some sense, imagine a person who resembles a thinking subject in all outward respects, but who lacks consciousness, so too can we imagine a brain in a vat, having all sorts of experiences that feel like those of a person in the world that we seem to inhabit. There is nothing overtly contradictory or absurd about skeptical scenarios; they are not mountains without valleys or squares without right angles.

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[1] Hilary Putnam, "I Thought of What I Called an 'Automatic Sweetheart'" in *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 73-92.

The concept of a being who has certain kinds of experiences doesn't seem to bear tight conceptual linkages, or bridges, to the concept of a human body, imbedded in a world like ours. For this reason, we can, without much intellectual difficulty, imagine these experiences existing in all sorts of mediums, including brains in vats.

And yet, I think we ought to consider more carefully exactly what it is we seem to be able to imagine so easily. According to Putnam, the fact that we can *imagine* an automatic sweetheart doesn't entail that such a being's existence represents a "fully intelligible" state of affairs. Similarly, the fact that we can conjure a mental picture of beings with experiences like ours, but in an environment wholly unlike ours, doesn't entail that the existence of such beings is *fully intelligible*, or conceptually innocent. Indeed, as I will try to make clear in what follows, the conceptual backdrop against which skeptical scenarios seem easily or fully intelligible, is one that we can reasonably question, and indeed, one that we ought to view with suspicion. This backdrop, which lends skeptical scenarios much of their ostensible conceptual clarity, can be described as an 'insulationist' picture of the mental. I think that such a picture of the mental is impoverished and ought to be resisted. Hence, the broader conclusion for which I will offer some support in this paper is that external-world skepticism arises from a commitment to a problematic model of the mental.

Establishing that an insulationist model of the mind undergirds external-world skepticism will pave the way for my positive suggestion that trading in such a model for a relational ontology of the mental helps us out of the vat and back into the real world.

Philosophers tend to motivate the problem of external-world skepticism by way of a skeptical scenario—a thought experiment that asks you to imagine that there is something manipulating your

thoughts such that the overwhelming majority of your basic perceptual beliefs about the world around you are false. The component of skeptical scenarios I want to focus on first is the 'deceiver.' To worry that there is in fact such a deceiver, fiddling with your own cognition, is to condone as sensible the assumption that another intelligent being could construct you—at least the conscious side of your existence—without seeing you *as a you*, as a fellow subject.

To appreciate this point, consider the obvious difference between the way in which we commonly *ascribe* mental states to one another, and the way in which a deceiver is supposed to *inscribe* mental states into the deceived subject's mind. Suppose I say of a friend that she believes that kids these days spend too much time on the internet. Now, if my ascription is a reasonable one, it will be based on my having learned, either directly by observation, or indirectly by testimony, that my friend has exhibited certain behaviors that one would associate with the aforementioned belief. For instance, I might have heard her say, on several occasions, that kids are online entirely too often. Or, I might have seen her shake her head ruefully in response to catching her son surfing the web instead of doing the dishes. The point is, when I ascribe such a belief to my friend, it will be on the grounds that she has behaved in certain ways, ways that involve her body, interacting with an environment. I don't peek inside of her and observe something discrete and static, a belief hanging out in her "belief box"—I experience her mind as something embodied and temporally extended. But this is all old hat.

What about a powerful deceiver from a skeptical scenario? How does such a being establish that the subject whom it's deceiving has such and such mental states? This question is somewhat misleading, given that skeptical scenarios are usually described in a

way that suggests that the deceiver doesn't so much establish *that* the deceived subject has such and such mental states, as it does establish such and such mental states directly—that is, implant them in the deceived subject's consciousness. In other words, the deceiver is somehow able to put thoughts (feelings, desires, etcetera) in the mind of the deceived subject, as one would place apples in a basket. In light of this, it seems that the deceiver is able to "see" a mental state as a particular kind of mental state, even when the state is not integrated with, or manifest in, the behavior of an embodied and embedded subject, whom one can face *as* a subject, as a fellow *finite and fallible* being. If I am the victim of a skeptical scenario and my deceiver—some neuroscientist named Wilfred—wants me to have the experience of desiring a cupcake, he will simply give me the experience of desiring a cupcake. In other words, the experience of desiring a cupcake is not something *inextricably* bound up with the sorts of behaviors that such a desire would lead to (in conjunction with other mental states); rather, the experience is something that exists apart from my behavior—it is something that can be inserted into my mind, and hence, something that exists "metaphysically prior" to any enactment of cupcake-desiring behavior.

Even if the experience isn't literally a "thing" that Wilfred can be in possession of before literally placing it in my brain—indeed it sounds more sensible to say that Wilfred induces the experience by stimulating my brain, as opposed to creating the experience and then transmitting it, transporting it to my brain—it is nevertheless the case that my experience of desiring a cupcake is something that can exist in a way that doesn't *directly* involve my being embedded in a world with cupcakes or my being prone to behave in ways that a cupcake-desirer is likely to behave (given his other beliefs, desires, etcetera). That such an experience could exist "in" something other than a person who is embedded and embodied such that we could be

reasonably expected to recognize it as a cupcake-desirer is presupposed by the basic structure of the skeptical hypothesis; the threat posed by skeptical scenarios lies precisely in the fact that they describe situations in which your experiences aren't housed in something that resembles, to a significant degree, a human being situated in the world in a way that is recognizably human. The skeptic wants us to consider the possibility that a mental life that is indiscernible from your own, at least 'from the inside', might be trapped in an entity that is not lodged in the world the way a living, breathing, thinking human body is.

The reader might object at this point that I seem to be getting overly hung up on the details of skeptical scenarios, that I am missing the forest for the trees. Although skeptical scenarios generally describe the deceived subject as situated in a physical landscape radically unlike the one that all of us seem to inhabit, it doesn't seem to be an *essential* feature of these scenarios that the deceived subject's physical constitution, and physical surroundings, differ markedly from those of human beings in the actual world. That is to say, the threat of external-world skepticism doesn't rely on the idea that a deceiver could recreate my mental life in something that is not embodied and embedded in a recognizably human way. Suppose, for instance, that I am in fact a person with a body, surrounded by other people with bodies, and that I carry out the sorts of interactions that conscious, cognitively competent people, tend to carry out. Now, what if there is a powerful demon who fiddles with my mental life such that none of my experiences mirror my actual interactions with other people and my physical environment, but rather, the interactions of someone else, say, George W. Bush? If this were the case, I would be radically and systematically deceived about the character of the external world.

So, my claim that skeptical scenarios presuppose a radical disconnect between the mind and behavior seems somewhat trumped up. Skeptical scenarios needn't posit the existence of a recognizably human mental life in an entity whose behavioral repertoire is totally unlike that of a human; rather, they simply need to describe a mental life that is radically *out of sync* with the behavioral repertoire of the entity in which it is located.

But, I don't think we ought to let the defender of the conceptual clarity of skeptical scenarios off the hook so easily. I will happily grant that skeptical scenarios aren't essentially tied to the implication that a mind, and more specifically, certain mental states, could exist in something whose causal-behavioral profile is markedly different from that of a human being who is embodied and embedded in a "normal" way. For, the aspect of skeptical scenarios that strikes me as conceptually confused, or at the very least, conceptually dubious, is not the idea that I or anyone else might be a brain in a vat (or something else that doesn't present itself to the world as a minded being) but the idea that there could be a *systematic mismatch* between the character of one's mental states and the character of one's causal presence in the world.

In what follows, I will elaborate on what it is that arouses my intellectual suspicion about the supposition that the 'subjective' side of my existence could be entirely disjoint from the 'objective' side of my existence (I am placing scare-quotes around the terms "subjective" and "objective" because I want us to begin viewing the dichotomy they present with suspicion). More precisely, I want to draw attention to the way in which the radical rift between mind and world that external-world skepticism posits as a clear conceptual possibility relies on a Cartesian current of thought that runs largely unnoticed through contemporary epistemological discourse. I call this current of thought insulationism about the mind.

So, the suggestion at the core of external-world skepticism is that your mind could be lodged in a body (human or otherwise) such that *what goes on in the mind has virtually nothing to do with what happens to and around the body, including those events that take place in the 'social space' that the body occupies.* This assumption posits not only an *epistemic* disconnect between mind and world, but also, a basic *ontological independence* of mind from world; it treats the mental as something whose 'contents' are not the direct results of the world bleeding into the mind, and the mind into the world; the contents represent the world, but in a radically inaccurate way, and thus, can be said to succeed in remaining insulated from the world—in filtering out the world. The nature of my mental life in skeptical scenarios (that is, what my thoughts are about, what my perceptual seemings seem like, etcetera) remains uncolored by vast portions of information about the surrounding environment. To put this point another way, the insistence behind external-world skepticism that the there could be *widespread* or *systematic* epistemic failure, that is, an across-the-board disconnect between mind and world, reflects a commitment to the idea that the world and mind aren't connected to an extent that makes it incoherent to speak about a mind that thinks without thereby 'thinking the world into itself.' In more general terms, external-world skepticism arises from what I will refer to as an insulationist view of the mind. At the very least, an insulationist model of the mind seems to loom in the background of external-world skepticism, providing the general picture of the mind against which the particular details of skeptical scenarios can appear like perfectly sensible possibilities.

I will explain in more precise terms why I think insulationism and external-world skepticism are part of the same general conceptual package in a moment. Before doing so, however, it will be helpful to say a little more about what I mean by "insulationism"

about the mind.   First, I should confess that what I mean by "insulationist" is quite similar to what many philosophers mean, in many contexts, by "Cartesian." That being said, I think "insulationism" is a useful term, because it identifies a few strands of Cartesianism which might be ignored, or seen as a single strand, if we think about Cartesian thinking as some sort of monolith.

I. Insulationism

Insulationism, as I understand it, refers less to a body of claims, than it does to a family of theoretical tendencies (including the tendency to endorse certain claims and not others) which are loosely organized around the general sense that the mind enjoys a significant degree of ontological independence from the world. Ontological independence can be afforded in various ways, as the ensuing discussion should make clear. For this reason, the question of whether a particular theory (concept, problem, etcetera) draws on insulationist thinking isn't a particularly straightforward one. Insulationism isn't a single thesis, which a philosopher may either reject or accept. It is closer to a Kuhnian paradigm. And, like a good paradigm, it keeps us busy by providing specific problems to ponder, and if we're lucky, the resources to solve them. In fact, insulationist thinking has been so effective at generating philosophical puzzles, that we have become largely unaware of its presence as a particular force to be engaged and perhaps resisted.

We should expect, then, to have some trouble successfully stepping away from insulationism and achieving some healthy 'critical distance' because it is just about everywhere—in our vocabulary, concepts, theories, choice of problems on which to focus, metaphors, etcetera. That being said, the past half century has seen various thinkers challenge insulationist thinking in ways that strike

me as genuinely radical. It is from these critical perspectives that we can start seeing insulationism, as opposed to merely seeing *from* insulationism. Let us, then, approach the task of clarifying what insulationism is by taking a look at a few theorists who have pushed critically on the insulationist paradigm (John Haugeland, Naomi Scheman, Ludwig Wittgenstein).

To reiterate, an insulationist conception of mental phenomena can be loosely characterized as Cartesian, due to the emphasis it places on the mind's *ontological independence*. This ontological independence can of course be seen in the inspiring and yet also terrifying conclusion of Descartes' *Meditations*, namely, that one can know one's mind before knowing the world (the "before" here can be taken to indicate both temporal and logical priority).

In his widely read paper, "Mind Embodied and Embedded," John Haugeland identifies the notion of the mind as an "independent ontological domain" as Descartes' most lasting and influential contribution to our modern understanding of cognition.[2] According to Haugeland, the idea of the mind as its own substance generates a swarm of conceptual contrasts, which inform and shape much of our theorizing. These contrasts are aligned with the more general contrast between the mental and the corporeal and include "semantics versus syntax, the space of reasons versus the space of causes, or the intentional versus the physical vocabulary."[3] Furthermore, he thinks that recent "interrelationist" approaches to characterizing the mental realm, which treat some essential feature of mindedness (for example, intentionality) as only possible through a subject's participation in "some supra-individual network of

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[2] John Haugeland, "Mind Embodied and Embedded," in *Having Thought: Essays in the Metaphysics of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 207.
[3] Ibid*.,* 208.

relations"[4] (or more simply, some *context*), fall short of truly challenging the legitimacy of these contrasts or the legitimacy of the basic separation of mind and body that directly undergirds each of these contrasts. As Haugeland defines them, interrelationist approaches to describing the mind "are holistic in the specific sense that they take cognitive phenomena to be members of some class of phenomena, each of which has its relevant character only by virtue of its determinate relations to the others" (notice how well contemporary functionalist accounts of mental states fit this description).[5] Haugeland wants us to see that interrelationist approaches, though "important and compelling," do not call into question the most pervasive and perhaps the most pernicious feature of Cartesian thinking, namely, the tendency to *insulate* the mental realm by treating mind, body, and world as distinct pieces of a puzzle, the assembly of which requires serious theoretical work. In order to break free from this picture, we must, according to Haugeland, embrace the

> intimacy of the mind's embodiment and embeddedness in the world. The term 'intimacy' is meant to suggest more than just necessary interrelation or interconnection but a kind of commingling or integralness of mind, body, and world—that is, to undermine their very distinctness.[6]

As Andy Clark has recently pointed out, the concept of intimacy "is a . . . slippery beast" in the context of discussions about the mind's embodiment.[7] Even after we have finished hammering out the details, it simply isn't clear what the claim that the mind is *intimately* embodied and embedded is supposed to amount to. In this paper, I will work with a primarily negative conception of

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[4] Ibid., 207.

[5] Ibid., 208.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Andy Clark, "Pressing the Flesh: A Tension in the Study of the Embodied, Embedded Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 76, no. 1, 37.

intimate embodiment and embeddedness. For our present purposes, we may think of the idea that the mind is *intimately* embodied and embedded as more of a deep sense of discomfort with insulationist/Cartesian model of the mental, than a self-standing positive thesis.

Let's examine a particular instance of insulationist thinking in contemporary philosophy of mind. In his engaging and wonderfully clear book, *Cartesian Psychology and Physical Minds*, Robert Wilson asserts that mental states are (1), *locatable*, or more specifically, located *in* individuals, and (2), *particular* bodily states. This view presents us with a concrete example of one way in which insulationist thinking can feed into contemporary theorizing, notably, contemporary theorizing that fits comfortably within the seemingly anti-Cartesian framework of materialism. Wilson thinks it obvious that mental states are unambiguously *located in* an individual; a belief is a state of an individual, Wilson says, because "it is that individual *in* whom that state is instantiated."[8] That beliefs are ultimately located in people prompts Wilson to compare beliefs to sunburns. Being a sunburn has the important relational property of being caused by the sun, but, as Wilson points out, this doesn't change the fact that a sunburn is essentially a locatable state, a state that supervenes on intrinsic features of the agent—on spatiotemporal configurations of the body. On Wilson's view beliefs share with sunburns not only locatability, but particularity. He calls beliefs "*particular* bodily states." I think that Wilson's claims about the locatability and particularity of mental states are mutually reinforcing, as well as conceptually intertwined. Allow me to clarify.

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[8] Robert Wilson, *Cartesian Psychology and Physical Minds: Individualism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 253 (my italics).

The idea that mental states are literally located encourages us to think about these states as discretely bounded entities—things that allow us to draw a clean line between in-the-thing/part-of-the-thing and not-in-the-thing/not-part-of-the-thing. For, objects with unambiguous boundaries are those which we may most easily and clearly locate. They can be pinned down, because they are, in a significant way, already trapped by their boundaries. Thus, making something locatable automatically makes it seem much more discrete and bounded. And, it strikes me that this quality of boundedness is what makes a particular state of the body *particular*, as opposed to not-so-particular. It may be that Wilson means something entirely different by "particular bodily state," but I cannot think of what else this phrase could be intended to call to mind other than the idea of a state that a person instantiates in virtue of *certain* features of his body, and not others, being such-and-such ways. In other words, what makes a bodily state particular seems to be the extent to which its existence supervenes on features of the body that one could conceivably delineate, *locate* as a discrete something, rather than a diffuse nothing (a "no-thing").

Wilson's view that mental states are locatable and particular states of the body isn't, on the face of it, obviously similar to Descartes' own view about the nature of the mind. For one, it treats mental states as material in composition. It is, however, markedly Cartesian in the respect that matters most for our discussion: Wilson seeks to protect the ontological independence that Descartes saw in the mind, albeit in ways that fit into a materialist worldview more comfortably than Descartes' own metaphysics ever could. Specifically, Wilson makes the mind 'its own thing' by taking the states into which it may enter and hiding, or locating, these states inside of us, where they can be insulated from the causal messiness that exists in the surrounding world, and secondly, by drawing clear

borders around these states, or 'particularizing' them, and thereby accentuating the separation between mind and not-mind even further.

Haugeland's critique of Cartesianism targets, primarily, the basic impetus behind Wilson's treatment of the mind as locatable and particular: the need to make the mind a bounded entity, separated from the surrounding world by clear borders. Note that the monistic materialism that currently reigns supreme in philosophy departments cannot accommodate the notion of a mental *substance*; it can, however, accommodate the less metaphysically messy notion of the mind as discrete from the world at the level of its spatiotemporal borders. Wilson's conception of mental states as essentially locatable and particular states of the body strikes a balance between the demand of materialism—that we don't treat the mind as made of special "stuff"—and the Cartesian intuition that the mind is robustly independent from the world.

This brings us to an important point to make about insulationism, as I intend to understand it: although insulationism takes the form of substance dualism in Descartes' work (or perhaps it is more accurate to say that it finds an outlet in substance dualism), it reappears in contemporary theories of mind as the starkly materialist thesis that mental states are, as Wilson writes, "particular bodily states." As we saw, Haugeland considers the rejection of substance dualism to be an incomplete critique of Cartesianism. If we are to break, rather than merely loosen, the shackles of Cartesian thinking, we must call into question the insulationist impulse that drove Descartes to view the mind as its own substance. We must, Haugeland argues, call into question not only the notion that the mind is its own kind of thing, but the more basic and seemingly less problematic idea that the mind is any kind of "thing" at all.

Next, I discuss the work of the later Wittgenstein and the contemporary feminist philosopher, Naomi Scheman. Both philosophers put forth critiques of Cartesianism that achieve this more radical goal; they seek to undermine the mind's "very distinctness," as Haugeland says.[9]

Let us first consider Wittgenstein. Colin McGinn, in his famous exegesis of the *Philosophical Investigations*, argues that the sorts of considerations that Wittgenstein puts forth in the *Investigations* tell against the dualistic idea that understanding the meaning of a word consists in something "coming before the mind" but not against the materialist view that mental states are physically instantiated dispositions (internal physiological states of some sort) to act in certain ways.[10] My own sense is that McGinn underestimates the scope of Wittgenstein's attack on Cartesianism. This attack threatens not only dualistic conceptions of our mental life, but any ontology of the mind that characterizes mental states such as understanding, believing, wishing, etcetera, as internal states or processes whose essential characteristics don't directly and richly involve the embodied subject's temporally extended interactions with the world, and with other subjects. As I read him, the later Wittgenstein objected to the proposal that mental states can be reduced to the appearance of some mental object before the mind's eye not because this proposal describes mental states in a dualistic way, but because it presents the mind as insulated from a subject's ongoing efforts to cope with his surroundings. Moreover, I think that the mind is presented in just this way by the kind of dispositionalist account that McGinn takes to be safe from Wittgenstein's critical onslaught.

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[9] Haugeland, "Mind Embodied and Embedded," 208.
[10] Colin McGinn, *Wittgenstein on Meaning* (Oxford: Basil-Blackwell, 1984).

To defend these claims, I turn to Wittgenstein's actual writings. In the *Brown Book*, he laments that "There is a general disease of thinking which always looks for (and finds) what would be called a mental state from which all our actions spring as from a reservoir."[11] What he found objectionable about this way of thinking about mental causation was the idea, implicit in the metaphor of a reservoir, that the intentionality of intentional action is "stored up" in something inside of us, in a discrete state or process, which counts as the mental state that is prior to any behavior it may produce. Dispositionalist accounts of mental states may not transgress against materialism, but they certainly are guilty of 'storing up' the mind in an inner state. Such accounts generally treat dispositions as rooted in a causal basis, some spatiotemporal structure or set of physico-causal properties. And it is generally thought that something with a disposition "normally has it in virtue of some property that is not itself just a condition upon its behavior in hypothetical circumstances, but an actual feature of the object."[12] In other words, a dispositionalist account of mental states that identifies mental states with 'inner' dispositions that are separate from, and the causes of, 'outer' behavior, falls well within the scope of Wittgenstein's critical remarks concerning the way we philosophers tend to think about the familiar acts of the mind—believing, wondering, reading, understanding, etcetera; it locates mental states *in* us, by turning them into discrete *sources* of behavior, rather than treating mental states as realized *through* us, through our embodied and embedded dealings with the world and with each other.

The idea of a mental state as a discrete source of behavior seems to find a home in functionalist theories of mind. Putnam, in

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[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), 143.
[12] Arif Ahmed, *Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 78.

his discussion of Jaegwon Kim's argument for functionalism, highlights the functionalist's commitment to there being, within every psychological state, an "internal core state."[13] So, for instance, if I am in the state of believing that *my bathroom is located behind me, about 15 yards away*, Kim will happily grant semantic externalists (like Putnam) that I am in a state with that exact content (content that involves the concept "bathroom", "yard", and the like) in virtue of my being placed in an environment with certain features. However, he will insist that there is a discrete, internal, physical/physiological state, which serves as the proximate cause of those behaviors which can be correctly characterized as the effects of my belief about the location of my bathroom, and more importantly, that this internal core state, to use Kim's own term, is to be identified with my belief.

Now, it strikes me that what Wittgenstein found objectionable about the metaphor of a reservoir as a model of the mind is precisely what functionalists find theoretically attractive. What Wittgenstein rejects, and functionalists endorse, is the basic idea that the expressions of intelligence that we see in people's behavior are the purely outer signs of something hidden inside of us, something discrete, which hangs together as a whole in a way that is metaphysically independent of the intricate causal sequences that obtain between the subject, other subjects, and the rest of the world. Functionalists think that mental states count as the mental states they are in virtue of playing a particular causal role; however, they insist that these states *are*, in some deeper metaphysical sense, to be identified with states whose ontological integrity doesn't derive from this causal role. Functionalist states are sources of behavior (that is, separate from the behavior); they are not realized *in and through* behavior.

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[13] Putnam, *The Threefold Cord*, 105.

In contrast, for the later Wittgenstein, the operation of the mind "lies open to view."[14] Throughout the *Investigations* he exhorts us to stop searching for the essence of language and thought "beneath the surface": "Don't think, but look!"[15] This command is most clearly connected to Wittgenstein's critique of positivist approaches to investigating language, among which he included the strategy pursued in his earlier work, such as the *Tractatus*. However, I think it can be interpreted more broadly as an expression of Wittgenstein's frustration with a general style of philosophy, which shows up in more than positivist accounts of language. This style is fundamentally tied to a sense of the philosopher as the uncoverer of essences. Positivists operate with this self-image in an obvious way: they pursue a "final analysis of our forms of language," and in doing so, reveal their commitment to the notion that our "usual forms of expression" are, as Wittgenstein put it in the *Investigations*, "essentially, unanalysed; as if there were something *hidden* in them that had to be brought to light."[16] And, although Wittgenstein's focus in the *Investigations* seems to be on language, many of his remarks suggest that he viewed the search for essences to cloud our vision of not only language, but thought itself. He warns us that pursuing the "complete exactness" that we want in a "final analysis" of language leads us to ask the wrong question—"the question of the essence of language, or propositions, of *thought*."[17]

Whether we are philosophically investigating the meaning of words, or mental states themselves, it seems that Wittgenstein thinks it is a mistake to approach our analysandum as "Something

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[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans G.E.M. Anscombe, ed. G.E.M. Anscombe and Rush Rhees, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), §126.
[15] Ibid., §66.
[16] Ibid., §91 (my emphasis).
[17] Ibid., §92.

that lies within, which we see when we look into the thing, and which an analysis digs out."[18] This exegesis conveniently explains why Wittgenstein rejects the following two views, which some philosophers take to be insufficiently similar to fall within the scope of the critical project of the *Investigations*: (1) understanding the meaning of a word consists in something coming before the mind, and (2) understanding the meaning of a word consists in an internal, physically instantiated state with certain causal-dispositional properties.

In his famous book, *Wittgenstein and Meaning*, Colin McGinn argues that the sorts of considerations that Wittgenstein brings to bear against (1) do not tell against (2), and that Wittgenstein's opposition to (2) is therefore unfounded, an unreasonable extension of his critique of (1).   But, McGinn underestimates the critical scope of the *Investigations*. Wittgenstein's attack on (1) at times homes in on the specific character of this dualistic conception of the nature of understanding; however, his critical remarks often take on a much more general tone. For instance, we just saw that Wittgenstein saw the search for essences in philosophical investigations of not only language, but thought too. Recall that he speaks of the tendency to treat mental causation on the model of a reservoir as a "general disease of thinking." I think that the general disease of thinking of which Wittgenstein here speaks is the tenacious tendency to view the mind as *insulated*. (1) and (2) are both symptoms of this general disease; where (1) insulates the mind by giving mental states a specific "mental shape", (2) does so by giving the mind a spatiotemporal shape.

In her insightful paper, "Feeling Our Way toward Moral Objectivity," Naomi Scheman bolsters a Wittgensteinian critique of

[18] Ibid.

the idea that mental states lie underneath behavior, apart from the temporal messiness of human life, by arguing for the thesis that emotions (among other mental states) are not "complex states" of individuals. She defines a complex state as follows: "S is a (complex) state of an individual I only if the elements of S are related to each other in causal or other ways that make of S a complex entity independently of I's social context."[19] This definition calls one's attention to the crucial difference between Wittgenstein's conception of mental states, and the cluster of views he attacks in *Philosophical Investigations*, with which contemporary functionalist theories of mind can be grouped. This difference concerns the source of mental states' "ontological integrity"—or, as Scheman puts it, what makes a mental state "hang together as a complex object rather than being a jumble or a heap."[20] Wittgenstein tried to get us to see that mental states cannot hang together in a way that doesn't *directly* involve a human subject's participation in the broader physical and social context that surrounds all of us. Scheman drives this point home by providing detailed descriptions of how particular emotions get socially constructed (her accounts of anger and love are particularly illuminating).

Recall that our goal was to examine insulationism through the lens provided by its strongest critics. I think our discussion has untangled a few important strands in insulationist thought; the critical views we discussed (Haugeland, Wittgenstein, and Scheman's) called our attention to the way in which mainstream, insulationist views about the ontological character of the mind emphasize the mind's distinctness, particularity, and locatability. My sense is that these three aspects of insulationism cannot be

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[19] Naomi Scheman, "Feeling Our Way Toward Moral Objectivity," in *Mind and Morals: Essays on Ethics and Cognitive Science*, ed. Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Andy Clark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 221.
[20] Ibid.

neatly separated. Indeed, as I suggested earlier, it strikes me that insulationist-minded philosophers have come to define the mind's distinctness in terms of its particularity and locatability. I do not, however, wish to get hung up on the question of how these different dimensions of insulationism fit together. My goal was simply to provide a quick and functional sketch of insulationism.

II. Insulationism and External-World Skepticism

Now, I want to explore the relationship between external-world skepticism and insulationism. It is my suspicion that external-world skepticism (henceforth 'EWS') relies on an insulationist ontology of the mind. This means that if we can do away with insulationism, then we can avoid falling into the trap of EWS. Thus, a crucial question to address at this stage in our discussion is whether we *can* do away with insulationism. Establishing that EWS presupposes an insulationist ontology of the mental realm does no damage to EWS. In order to make this point count against EWS, we need to show that insulationism isn't the only game in town.

To that end, the following discussion will seek to illuminate not only the way in which EWS relies on an insulationist picture of the mind, but also, the fact that we can abandon this picture for an importantly different view about the ontological status of mindedness. I refer to this alternative picture of the mind as the Living Mind Approach. The basic thrust behind the Living Mind Approach is that *we are all of us, as living organisms, essentially embodied and environmentally embedded*, and this fact should provide something of a starting point for theorizing about the nature of the mind and knowledge. The Living Mind Approach is partly negative, in that it comes with the contention that insulationist conceptions of the mind downplay or outright ignore our

embodiment and embeddedness. However, it is also a positive view, in that it seeks to articulate and clarify the consequences of embracing our embodiment and embeddedness for our philosophical understanding of mind and knowledge. Some of these consequences should emerge from the ensuing discussion; as I illuminate the way in which insulationism saddles us with EWS, I also hope to shine a light on how the Living Mind Approach provides us with a way of thinking about our cognitive lives that is resistant to EWS.

So, our basic question is this: in what sense does EWS rely on insulationist thinking? Earlier, I suggested that the notion that there could be a systematic or widespread epistemic disconnect between mind and world derives from insulationist thinking. I will now unpack this claim in more detail. It might seem as though the *epistemic* gap that skeptical scenarios insert between the subject and the world, no matter how large, implies nothing about the *ontological* character of the mind. But, as I hope to show, this isn't the case. Statements about the mind's epistemic relationship to the world *do* bring in their train certain ontological commitments. In the case of external-world skepticism, the claim that a subject's basic perceptual beliefs could systematically miss the mark is plausible only if we think about the mind as some sort of "container," the contents of which needn't reflect, in real time, the interactions between the subject whose mind it is, and the surrounding environment. In other words, the basic thrust of skeptical scenarios presupposes what looks a lot like an insulationist view of the mind.

One might think that the skeptical scenarios commonly used to motivate the problem of external-world skepticism insulate the mind by positing that a human mind—at least the experiential side of a human mental life—could be situated in a body that is profoundly different from that of a human, or in something that

doesn't even resemble a body whatsoever. Although it is true that skeptical scenarios often do describe the human mind as capable of existing in nonhumanlike entities (for example, brains in vats), the conclusion that these scenarios are intended to establish, namely, that the majority of (or even all of) our basic beliefs about the nature of our physical surroundings might be false, isn't tied to the possibility of there being such a radical rift between mind and embodiment. The scenario involving George W. Bush from earlier illustrates this point. The skeptical conclusion does, however, rest on the possibility of there being a *systematic* mismatch between mind and embodiment; it requires that a large class of beliefs— beliefs about one's immediate environment—could consistently represent the world in a way that doesn't draw directly on the subject's position in the world. It is in this way that skeptical scenarios presuppose an insulationist view of mind. Or so I will argue.

It would be absurd to challenge the idea that our beliefs about the external world can widely miss the mark *from time to time*, or even a lot of the time. So, it may not be clear why I take the notion of *systematic epistemic failure* to warrant critical inspection. Isn't such failure merely an extension of the kind of failure we experience regularly, especially when we're asleep? I think that matters aren't so simple. Widespread epistemic failure isn't simply the result of multiplying the particular epistemic failures we experience on a regular basis; one cannot make the move from occasional or even frequent failure to systematic failure without smuggling in a thoroughly insulationist ontology of the mental. Reflecting on a particular skeptical scenario should help bring this to light.

Let's suppose that I am actually a brain in a vat (a 'BIV'—I will henceforward refer to the BIV version of me as my BIV-self). As a BIV, my current belief that I am typing away on my laptop draws

upon my actual situation minimally. Even if the super-duper neuroscientists orchestrating my deception chose to place a laptop in front of me, and even if they cleverly figured out how to make my experience of typing such-and-such words result in those very words appearing on the screen of the laptop, it would not be the case that my belief that I am typing on a laptop arises directly from the details of my physical involvement with my surroundings. In my actual situation, I have no limbs, and the words that are entered into the word document on the laptop in front of me are the result of the *intervention* of the super-duper neuroscientists. My belief that I am typing on a laptop does not therefore emerge from my embodiment in an *intimate* way; if it did, my belief would reflect the fact that my 'typing' involves the neuroscientists' intervention, as opposed to a direct causal feedback loop between my brain, limbs, and a keyboard.

Now, if I'm not a BIV, but what I take myself to be—an embodied human being—and I dream that I'm typing on my laptop, without ever realizing that it's a dream, I also seem to form a belief—that I'm typing on my laptop—which fails to draw richly on my immediate physical situation, on my embodiment and embeddedness. However, I think we can draw a distinction between the sort of disconnect that exists between my dream-beliefs and my embodiment/embeddedness, and the sort of disconnect that would exist between my BIV-beliefs and my BIV-embodiment/embeddedness. The former gulf is less vast, I want to suggest. When I dream about something, there are, presumably, events which take place in my body that resemble, in significant respects, the events that take place when I have experiences similar to those of the dream. Thomas Hobbes had this insight centuries ago:

> And seeing dreames are caused by the distemper of some of the inward parts of the Body; divers distempers must needs cause different Dreams. And hence it is, that lying cold breedeth Dreams of Feare, and raiseth the thought and Image of some fearfull object (the motion from the brain to the inner parts, and from the inner parts to the Brain being reciprocall:) and that as Anger causeth heat in some parts of the Body, when we are awake; so when we sleep, the over heating of the same parts causeth Anger, and raiseth up in the brain the Imagination of an Enemy. In the same manner; as naturall kindness, when we are awake causeth desire; and desire makes heat in certain other parts of the body; so also, too much heat in those parts, while wee sleep, raiseth in the brain an imagination of some kindness shewn. In summe, our Dreams are the reverse of our waking Imaginations; The motion when we are awake, beginning at one end; and when we Dream, at another.[21]

I think we can put Hobbes' point about dreams this way: when we dream, our mental life doesn't become wholly unmoored from our body, and its relationship to the world; rather, the processes by which we form basic perceptual beliefs while asleep are incomplete instances, or more poetically, *shadows* of the processes by which we form such beliefs while awake. They are attenuated or incomplete instantiations of those processes which allow us to make robust cognitive contact with our surroundings in our waking lives. In other words, the so-called epistemic failures that occur in dreams exist only against a background of general epistemic competence. Like deleterious mutations in the biological realm, the cognitive quirks of dreams are slight deviations from generally effective processes. For this reason, they are not actually epistemic misfires, in that they retain some of the veridicality of the processes that they imperfectly or incompletely recapitulate.

       For instance, when I dream that I'm typing on my laptop, neurophysiological sequences are initiated which, in the absence of the glycine clutch mechanism (a feature of the brain stem which interrupts signals from the brain to neuromuscular junctions), would cause me to move my fingers as I do when I actually type. So,

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[21] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (London: Routledge, 1886), 18.

my dream-belief that I am typing may not be true, in a particularly rich sense, but it is not wholly divorced from reality. Although I believe that I am typing when I am not in fact typing, my belief manages to latch on to features of my bodily situation that are closely related to the act of typing, namely, features that obtain when I do in fact type, including those features which allow me to correctly believe that I am typing when I am in fact typing. The latter sort of features are simply those which allow me to sustain a close awareness of my typing actions as typing actions, while I am engaged in the act of typing—they are members of the set of basic cognitive capacities that allow us to know what we're doing while we're doing it—proprioceptive capacities. To put this point another way, my belief represents my embodiment, but less richly and completely than a similar belief that I form while awake.

What about my BIV-self's belief with the content, *I am typing*? Does the way in which that glaringly false belief engages with my BIV-self's embodiment present us with an attenuated, incomplete, or imperfect recapitulation of a process that generally places my BIV-self in robustly veridical contact with reality, and more specifically, of a process that allows my BIV-self to richly and truly represent its own embodiment? I don't think it does, as I will now try to show.

By hypothesis, my BIV-self is 'out of touch' with its surroundings. What skeptical scenarios have in common—what they *must* have in common—is this: they all describe subjects 'locked inside' of their own individual minds. Victims of skeptical scenarios are thus trapped in two ways. Firstly, their subjectivity doesn't bleed into the world through their actions, or more abstractly, through their metaphysical presence in the world as a causally significant entity; it is the tragic fate of victims of skeptical scenarios that their particular thoughts and experiences and more general features of

their mental lives (for example, 'personality traits' such a brooding temperament, a flighty disposition, the habit of earnestly listening to others) systematically fail to manifest themselves in the subject's actual dealings with the world and with others. If I am really a BIV, then important strands of my mental life, such as the numerous and constantly evolving thoughts I have about what's going on in my immediate environment, are not intimately woven into my actual presence in the world (the belief that I am typing exemplifies this failure to be fully present in the world; when my BIV-self believes that he is typing, he does not arrive at this belief by existing in the world as a creature that performs and is aware of performing typing actions). The second respect in which victims of skeptical scenarios are trapped in their own minds is essentially the converse of the first respect. It is not only the case that my BIV-self is destined to be absent from his own causal presence in the world, from his actions, interactions, and reactions to physical objects, social situations, other people, and so forth, but also, he must suffer from a pronounced insensitivity to the world. That is to say, my BIV-self is neither present to the world, nor the world to him. For, widespread epistemic failure is nothing more than a failure, on the part of a subject, to sustain adequately rich sensitivities to the goings-on of the external world. In skeptical scenarios where the deceived subject exists in a non-spatial universe, the lack of sensitivity may not be a diminished awareness of an *external* world, but it is something strongly analogous: if I am being deceived by a supernatural demon in a non-spatial universe, it is nonetheless the case that I lack an awareness of what's going on 'around' me, in the sense that I don't perceive the true nature of my situation and my role in the universe. I don't 'perceive' the demon, that is, successfully track its existence, what it's up to, and how it relates to me.

The crucial difference between my actual self and my BIV-self is this: the former is a *locus of subjectivity*, while the latter is not. The mental life of my actual self is continually constituted and reconstituted by my actual self's direct and active participation in the world—by its dialogic engagement with the physical and social features of the surrounding environment. My thoughts, I wish to suggest, depend directly on my being a creature who can competently cope and engage with its surroundings. Competent coping and engagement is a two-way street: a creature who competently copes and engages with its world not only controls what it does and what is done to it by that world, but also, it allows the world to control it by remaining cognitively 'open' to the environment. Such a creature engages in *dialogue* with the world. The mental life of my BIV-self, on the other hand, is constituted by an alien force—a neuroscientist, evil demon, etcetera—to such an extent that it would be a mistake to call my BIV-self a creature that copes and engages with its surroundings at all, let alone one that does so in the dialectical manner characteristic of genuine subjects. In skeptical scenarios, my subjectivity has been *displaced*; the story of my mental life—what should be my story—becomes the work of another being, a deceiver of some sort. Skills that seem like my own, patterns that seem like my own making, are in fact the creations of something that is, by hypothesis, not me. The locus of my subjectivity, in skeptical scenarios, does not coincide with me, considered from a 'metaphysical' perspective. What my BIV-self does, and what is done to it, are decided by factors that are far removed from the entity which *is* my BIV-self. For instance, when my BIV-self forms the belief, *I am typing*, at T1, we cannot in good faith call this belief an expression of my BIV-self's dealings with the world prior to T1. For, my BIV-self doesn't, in any clear sense, deal with the world; it doesn't act on the world, nor the world on it. Even

if we say that my BIV-self exerts a certain causal influence on its surrounding environment, and vice versa, this causal influence isn't intimately connected to my BIV-*self*, that is, to my BIV-self *qua* subject, *qua* creature with hopes, plans, intentions, habits, relationships, and the like.

My BIV-self's belief that it is typing doesn't exist as part of a more general narrative, the center of which stands my BIV-self *itself*. Rather, it exists as part of something else's narrative, as an expression of a subjectivity that is not its own. In the case of my actual self, the belief, *I am typing*, does fit into a narrative that evolves around me. Even when I form this belief while dreaming, it is nevertheless the case that in doing so I draw richly on my actual self's previous dealings with the world. The belief and its formation are still parts of *my* story. For example, when I dream that I am typing, neurophysiological events occur which recapitulate the types of events that occur when *I* actually type. Moreover, the number of typing dreams I have seems to increase during those periods of time when I've actually been typing a lot. My typing dreams 'track' my typing behaviors. In addition, the fact that I have dreams about typing meshes with my general tendency to obsess over my work. I am the type to take work home, and this explains why something I do for a living shows up in my dreams.

In sum, the beliefs I form while asleep, though not true in a straightforward sense are nonetheless veridical; they tell me things about myself. My dream-belief that I'm typing may not correctly inform me that I'm typing, but it does allow me to detect pieces or 'shadows' of neurophysiological processes that in my waking life allow me to type and to take myself to be typing when I am in fact typing. A typing dream may not, by itself, tell me that I am stressed out about my work, but taken in a broader context, such a belief can alert me to this fact. There are many ways in which a typing dream

could relate to what goes on in my actual life. The bottom line, however, is simply that my dreams always draw on and reflect back on my actual life as a subject in *some* way, or as I am inclined to say, in a whole bunch of ways. My dreams are moments in a narrative that I largely shape. We might say that the beliefs I form while asleep, and any other glaringly false beliefs I may form about my bodily situation and the nature of my surroundings, can only exist as partial or attenuated instantiations of processes that, on the whole, allow me to cope with the world in the sophisticated ways that we associate with a fully developed subjectivity.

The battery of glaringly false beliefs that my BIV-self forms, however, are not rooted in a general cognitive competence; they are not the products of processes that allow a subject to remain in the kind of intimate contact with the world that I see as forming the core of subjectivity, of thought itself. By hypothesis, my BIV-self is not in cognitive contact with the world—it is unable to appreciate, to an epistemically satisfying degree, the nature of its surroundings, nor is it able to think *through* its body and thereby share itself with the world. In order to explain why my BIV-self forms a particular belief, we don't describe my BIV-self's particular relationships to the world; rather, we invoke a deceiver, to whom we attribute intentions that my BIV-self form such and such beliefs, abilities to bring about my BIV-self's believing such and such, etcetera. The idea of a BIV-self simply is the idea of a self, a subject, whose relationships to the world are impoverished, compared to those of an embodied and embedded human being. We saw that a BIV-self, or some other version of the victim of systematic deceit, is cut off from the world in two directions: (1) such a subject cannot think through its behavior, or perhaps more accurately, with its behavior—it cannot be fully present in its own actions; (2) such a subject lacks a rich sensitivity

to the world—its thoughts aren't intimately guided by the swirl of events that take place in its environment.

Andy Clark has recently described the body as the "locus of willed action." Citing work on telepresence, he suggests that our twin abilities to "enter into closed loop interactions, in which willed sensor motions yield new sensory inputs, and . . . to act upon at least some of the items thus falling within sensory range" underlie the phenomenological experience of inhabiting, rather than painstakingly controlling, our own bodies.[22] I think that an intimate connection between body and world, which Clark posits as a necessary (and perhaps sufficient) condition for the effortless experience of being situated in space and time, plays an even larger role in cognition. Indeed, a central aim of this paper has been to make a case for the idea that intimate embodiment and embeddedness, understood as a kind of dialogical intertwinement between an embodied subject and a world, is constitutive of thought itself. I will return to this idea in a moment, but first, allow me to clarify the link between the notion of widespread epistemic failure and insulationism about the mind.

I think the motivating thought behind EWS can be put this way: the mind's existence as a distinct thing is prior (in a logical sense) to its relationship to the world. We are driven to consider skeptical scenarios when we assume that we have minds, leaving completely open the question of how our minds relate us to the world. Skeptical scenarios make sense to us only because 'we' (that is, subjects born in the post-Cartesian era) have been conditioned to take for granted that it is perfectly sensible to talk about a mind that is related to the world in ways that are drastically less sensitive and

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[22] Andy Clark, *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 207.

intricate than the numerous connections that exist between a living, breathing, embodied human being and its surrounding environment. In this way, skeptical scenarios rely on the notion that the mind is the kind of thing whose existence depends minimally on its capacity to form rich relationships with its surroundings. These scenarios presuppose that minds belong to the same basic ontological category as rocks, chairs, pencils, and the like; they presuppose that minds, though perhaps capable of wonderfully rich interactions with the world, have the ontological contours of interactionally 'complacent' objects, that is, those which are simply there, hanging together as a thing, self-standing and generally aloof to the world.

I see this presupposition as strongly insulationist. To treat the mind's existence as a thing—its ontological integrity—as prior to its relationality, is to conceive of the mind as discrete, bounded, and locatable. For, the sorts of entities that are clearly discrete, bounded, and locatable are precisely those whose relationships to the world are of marginal significance to their thing-ness. Furthermore, trading in this insulationist view of the mind for an ontology of the mental that treats the mind's relationality as central to its very existence, allows us to obviate the problem of EWS altogether. For, on a relational ontology of cognition, the notion of a subject who is radically or systematically 'out of touch' with its world appears paradoxical. If mindedness simply is an intimate, dialogic intertwinement between a subject and a world, then we can reject the possibility that we are victims of skeptical scenarios on the grounds that were we such victims, we wouldn't be subjects. If there's one thing that the external-world skeptic and the defender of knowledge can agree on, it's that we are full-fledged subjects. So, if it can be shown that an intimate intermingling of subject and world

is a precondition for thought itself, then skeptical scenarios can be dismissed as conceptually confused.

But, if this cannot be decisively established, won't the proponent of EWS be in a position to simply reject a relational ontology of the mind as question-begging? Skeptical scenarios call into question the supposition that most of our beliefs about the external world are true. To insist that a thinking thing must be intimately intertwined with the world seems like a puffed up way of saying that the bulk of our beliefs about the external world are true.

I think that this objection can be met. To be sure, my solution to the problem of EWS presupposes that a thinking subject is, by definition, intimately intertwined with the world. I don't, however, think that this presupposition should be construed as a brute rejection of the skeptical conclusion, namely, that most or even all of our basic beliefs about the external world could very well be false. For, although I think it is appropriate to understand intimate intertwinement in epistemic terms, or more precisely, as a kind of *veridical* contact with the world, I don't wish to explain the notion *in terms of* true beliefs, but rather, the other way around. Unlike reliabilists, who define the notion of a reliable process in terms of true beliefs, I want to explain what it is to have true beliefs by reference to the reliable, or veridical, processes that constitute the intimate intertwinement characteristic of subjecthood. On my view, dialectical intertwinement is a broader and more fundamental phenomenon than true belief. It is my suspicion that defining veridical processes in terms of true beliefs encourages us to locate the epistemic value of such processes in their capacity to bring us into alignment with the world, into *correspondence*. A significant impetus behind my endorsement of a relational model of the mind and knowledge is the desire to get away from a preoccupation with correspondence. In thinking about the mind as a site of interaction,

we move away from the Cartesian model of the mind as a mirror of the world, and toward a notion of the mind as an interlocutor, placed in conversation with the world.

The notion of a true belief can only be understood against the background of the notion of a whole subject, embodied and embedded in a world with which it can competently interact. True beliefs may involve a notion of representational accuracy, but I don't think this should impel us to treat them as profoundly different from the non-linguistic/non-representational ways in which we get in touch with the world. Holding a true belief is less like being in possession of something, and more like being involved in something. It is like breathing, a trading of information between a body and a world. In this sense it is deeply temporal, deeply interactional. Ascribing true beliefs allows us to say something about specific areas of a vast web of interactional competencies. It doesn't allow us to say something about an inner realm, related to the world in a way that is fundamentally different from the *causal* relationship that a body bears to its external environment. Moreover, the causal processes that underlie a true belief are inextricably bound up with a subject's overall competence as an embodied and embedded organism. This point applies to false beliefs as well. Recall the earlier discussion of beliefs formed during dreams. There, I suggested that the so-called false beliefs I form in a dream can be appropriately understood as the products of processes that imperfectly or incompletely carry out patterns of embodied competence. In other words, beliefs, whether false or true, exist as moments in an ongoing conversation between an embodied subject and a world. A consequence of this view is that we cannot coherently speak of a subject who is *systematically* wrong about external goings-on (for example, a victim of a skeptical scenario). For, to be systematically wrong about things, is to be out of touch

with the world, and to be out of touch with the world, is to lack the rich dialectical capacities which enable us to engage in this whole believing business.

To sum up, my response to EWS is not question-begging because in positing that a subject is, by it very nature, dialectically intertwined with the world, I am not baldly presupposing that subjects must have generally veridical bodies of beliefs about the world. Dialectical intertwinement is not to be identified with merely having, for the most part, true beliefs. The notion is intended to describe the kinds of relationships that allow an embodied organism to cope with its surroundings in the sophisticated ways that we associate with the behavior of a truly minded being. This is admittedly hand-wavy, but it should be clear that such a notion cannot be cashed out purely in terms of true beliefs. Much of what I have said in this essay gestures toward how I think the notion of dialectical intertwinement is to be cashed out. To review, the notion is at once metaphysical and epistemological. It is metaphysical because it challenges insulationist views of the mental, which are themselves highly metaphysical. More specifically, a dialectical view of the mind contains a rejection of the insulationist idea that the mind is the kind of thing that has clear boundaries. In a word, this view encourages us to think of the mind not as a thing that resides in us, but as a way of being that exists through us. The epistemological upshot of a dialectical conception of the mental is related to this metaphysical thesis. To challenge the mind's "very distinctness," as Haugeland wrote, is to challenge the notion of systematic epistemic failure. For, if the mind emerges out of a dialectical interplay between brain, body, and world, then it becomes difficult to imagine how a thinking subject could be radically 'out of touch' with its world.

A defender of EWS could push back on this point, and claim that a subject could be enmeshed in a heap of dialectical relationships with the world, and still be systematically wrong about the nature of its surroundings. However, making this move begs the question against me. If, as I am claiming, we should opt for a dialectical conception of the mind, then we should view dialectical intertwinement as a more fundamental phenomenon than doxastic success and failure, and define the latter in terms of the former. So, to suggest that a subject's doxastic life might be cut off from the dialectical intertwinement which underlies that subject's capacity to think is to impose an insulationist model of the mind onto an entire realm of cognition. It presupposes that my dialectical model of mindedness doesn't apply to all areas of thought, including the formation of beliefs and experiences with truth-values.

Most of this paper has been devoted to highlighting the way in which a dialectical understanding of cognition helps us obviate the problem of EWS. The broader intention behind this project is of course to showcase the explanatory fecundity of a dialectical model of the mind. To conclude, I would like to briefly describe what I see as an ironical feature of skeptical scenarios. Although these scenarios are the products of insulationist thinking, they reveal, in subtle ways, the deep conceptual link that we see between thought and dialectical intertwinement: although these scenarios strip some unfortunate subject of the capacity to think through the body (indeed popular scenarios take away the body itself), they commonly involve a deceiver—that is, *someone to whom the victim of deception may be present*. In our fantasy, we imagine a deceiver who controls our mental life, and this allows us to continue thinking about our mental life as something that bleeds into the world through our actual (metaphysical?) presence in that world. It allows us to continue thinking about our mental life as something that is by

its nature evident to other subjects in our world. And, the capacity to think through one's presence, through one's body, is a core feature of the kind of dialectical interactions that on my view constitute subjectivity. The nature of the mind emerges at the level of witnessable behavior; it arises in a *second-personal* context. I am reminded here of Annette Baier's view that Descartes, in spite of his attempts to divorce himself from the world, and become a solitary "I", performed his epistemological project in the presence of someone else, namely, God. Baier expands on this point by asserting that *all* subjects are "second persons"—all of us exist *to* others.[23] The problem with scenarios commonly used to motivate EWS is that they all deny this powerful idea; they ask us to accept a view of subjectivity and mindedness in which our existence as the kind of thinking things we are relies very little on our *interaction* with the world and with other people.

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[23] Annette Baier, "Cartesian Persons," in *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 77.