

## Research Statement

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My work includes several different projects in philosophy of mind (broadly construed) and ontology/metaontology. The main ones are as follows:

**Mental Fictionalism.** Mental fictionalism is the view that talk about beliefs, desires, and other mental states is best seen as a kind of storytelling that does not commit the speaker to the existence of these states. (Some mental fictionalists are eliminativists, yet my own view is more agnostic.) A glaring objection is that mental fictionalism is inconsistent—it speaks of “fiction,” which is characterized by an *attitude of make-believe*, a type of mental state. My preferred response is to regard talk of “fiction” as not entirely serious: It is rather a convenient way to indicate that a sentence like ‘Actions are caused by desires’ should be treated as elliptical for ‘According to folk psychology, actions are caused by desires’. I have developed the view in several papers and co-edited a volume on the topic (Routledge 2022). A co-authored monograph on mental fictionalism is also under contract at Cambridge University Press, as part of the *Elements* series in philosophy of mind.

**Infallibilism about Self-Knowledge.** I defend the view that (many) self-ascriptions of mental states are infallibly correct. This dovetails with mental fictionalism, as such infallibilism is seen as part of the folk-psychological fiction, and not necessarily anything further. At the same time, I argue that the scientific data on confabulation does not preclude the literal infallibility of a wide range of self-ascriptions. Even so, infallibility does not imply indubitability, and there is no Cartesian ambition to provide a “foundation” for empirical knowledge. My concern is rather to show how reflection as a rational activity is possible, even given the data about confabulation. This work originated in my Masters Thesis, a version of which appeared in *Philosophical Studies*, and it culminates in a book-length defense entitled *Self-Reflection for the Opaque Mind: An Essay in Neo-Sellarsian Philosophy* (Routledge 2017).

**Quietism and Metaontology.** As far as I know, I am the only contemporary defender of the quietist view that, while traditional ontological questions are perfectly meaningful, they are *unanswerable in principle*. This is not to say that there is no fact of the matter on, e.g., whether ‘chair’ denotes a composite object, a Berkeleyan idea, a bundle of tropes, or what have you. But I argue that, for ontological purposes, an interpretation cannot answer what a term of English denotes, if the interpretations are themselves in English. Briefly, that’s because the ontology of such interpretations would be in question as much as the terms they interpret. So, to settle the question of ontology, the interpretations themselves would need to be interpreted, and thus regress. This is seen as a new, metaontological application of Wittgenstein’s rule-following argument; my principal work on this appears in the *Journal of Philosophy*.