

## 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.** Adam Toon, Tamás Demeter, and I are the world's foremost proponents of *mental fictionalism*, the view that mentalistic discourse is best seen as a kind of storytelling that is ontologically non-committal, re: attitudes like beliefs, desires, etc. (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. The response I prefer 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 our common psychological folklore, actions are caused by desires’. I have developed the view in several papers and edited a volume on the topic (Routledge 2022). A 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 am a leading defender of *infallibilism* about (many) self-ascriptions of mental states. This dovetails with mental fictionalism, as my type of infallibilism is seen as a consequence 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 Carnapian “external” 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 in order to settle the question of ontology, the interpretations themselves would need to be interpreted, and thus a 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*.