

THE PROBLEM WITH METZINGER

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ABSTRACT: This article provides a critical treatment of the ontology underlying Thomas Metzinger's *Being No One*. Metzinger asserts that interdisciplinary empirical work must replace 'arm-chair' a priori intuitions into the nature of reality; nonetheless, his own position is riddled with unquestioned a priori assumptions. His central claim that 'no one has or has ever had a self' is meant to have an ominous and futuristic ring, but merely repeats a familiar philosophical approach to individuals, which are undermined by reducing them downward to their material underpinnings, and 'overmined' by reducing them upward to their functional effects. Ultimately, Metzinger blends a rigid form of traditional materialism with an ontology of processes and events that is too reminiscent of late 1990's continental philosophy. In both directions, the novelty and fertility of Metzinger's position can be called into question.

KEYWORDS: Thomas Metzinger; Selfhood; Scientism; Naturalism

1. INTRODUCTION

Respect for his opponents is not among the chief virtues of Thomas Metzinger. With minimal prodding from his interviewers at the journal *Collapse*,¹ Metzinger bluntly dismisses a host of near and distant foes. His first target is the 'philosophical conservatism' of 'the folk and the philosophers', who are apparently leagued in union against the truth.² He takes a simultaneous shot at both analytic philosophy and its enemies, since the now 'conservative' analytic school (for it disdains empirical work) was once 'a beautiful rebellion against academic pretentiousness and narcissistic obscurantism'.³ Even neuroscientists are not exempt from Metzinger's global critique, since he finds that some are guilty of the 'corniness' of seeking 'media attention'.⁴ In his view such corniness is not limited to modern media hounds, but extends back into primeval humanity and its pre-human forefathers: as when he speaks of the 'unargued conservatism and corniness

1. Thomas Metzinger, 'Enlightenment 2.0: Interview with Thomas Metzinger', in *Collapse* Vol. V, 2009. Note: All page references in parentheses refer to Thomas Metzinger, *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. All other works by Metzinger and other authors are footnoted normally on a case-by-case basis.)

2. 'Enlightenment 2.0', 189.

3. 'Enlightenment 2.0', 190.

4. 'Enlightenment 2.0', 190.

[that were] successful strategies in primate societies and the world of our ancestors.⁵ If ‘primate corniness’ sounds like an implausible philosophical target, we can turn instead to Metzinger’s grim verdict on more recent society: ‘The overall situation on our planet reminds me of one big ocean of irrationality, suffering, and confusion...’⁶ Those who oppose Metzinger’s version of naturalism are described as people who ‘desperately seek emotional security.’⁷ He dreams aloud of a new phenomenology that, unlike the current one, would not be ‘driven solely by anti-reductionist resentment.’⁸ He even closes his doors to readers who *endorse* his theory of self-as-process, since they ‘perhaps only do so because it has a trendy, “narrative” ring to it.’⁹ Even the *Collapse* interviewers who cheer him on receive a sharp slap on the wrist: ‘let us not commit a psychologistic fallacy or indulge in paranoia...’¹⁰ And finally, Metzinger’s own students are critiqued no less than the doctrines they attack on his behalf, as when Metzinger disdains ‘what my excellent British PhD student (*who is a bit chaotic, but from whom I learn a lot*) has recently termed ‘Continental Jazz.’¹¹

The problem here is not one of bad manners, as if Metzinger needed a social reprimand for insensitivity to the feelings of his colleagues. For there are times when a touch of polemic is useful for expanding the fortunes of a philosophical position that one feels has been unjustly treated. In Metzinger’s eyes, such classic figures as Descartes, Kant, and Husserl defend views of subjectivity that are simply *falsified* by recent empirical discoveries in neuroscience, and he seems both frustrated and contemptuous that these discoveries have left little trace on philosophy. He accusingly (and somewhat bizarrely) contends that even Descartes and Kant ‘could have known [what modern neuropsychiatry shows] had they listened more closely to the schizophrenics of their own time’, (446) and insinuates that there is no remaining excuse for the philosophers of 2011. Fair enough. If you agree with Metzinger that up-to-date empirical work should replace a priori intuitions into the nature of the human subject, then you too will feel surrounded by widespread reactionary resentment on topics pertaining to the mind. Nor will I say that Metzinger is a hypocrite for calling his opponents resisters and ideologues despite his own intense emotional investment in one particular theory: an eliminativist form of scientific naturalism for which he displays markedly aggressive animal passion. After all, the psychologizing of one’s opponents is not *always* beyond the pale, but sometimes has valuable rhetorical power and even a grain of truth.

Instead, my complaint is that Metzinger’s hasty assumption of the worst possible motives on the part of his opponents betrays the same failure of imagination of which he is so quick to accuse some of the greatest philosophers of the past. It is not just a matter of throwing the baby out with the bathwater: some *half-dozen* babies are extinguished in

5. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 191.

6. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 206.

7. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 206.

8. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 196.

9. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 196.

10. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 211.

11. ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 196. Emphasis added.

the dungeon of Metzinger's mammoth work, *Being No One*. As he puts it on the book's first page: 'No one ever *was* or *had* a self. All that ever existed were conscious self-models that could not be recognized *as* models. The phenomenal self is not a thing, but a *process...*' (1) And though we have already seen that Metzinger sneers even at those who *support* his own self-as-process model,¹² the notion of 'process' does significant work for his theory, and thus cannot claim immunity from philosophical criticism. This is especially true given that his book simply adopts realism as a 'background assumption', (21) even though realism ought to be one of the foundational problems for any serious philosophy. In what follows, I will not imitate Metzinger by adopting my object-oriented ontology (OOO) as a 'background assumption'. Instead, I will show that it deals with reality in a more adequate manner than Metzinger's own theory. Whatever Metzinger's arsenal of empirical data, his theory culminates in an ontology of processes and events that shares much in common with the mainstream 'Continental Jazz' he openly despises. Appeals to the majesty of Science are not enough to dissociate Metzinger from these 'corny' jazz musicians, whose weaknesses he shares even while he fails to assimilate their strengths.

The fact that *Being No One* runs to 634 pages suggests greater conceptual diversity than the book actually contains. This is not meant as a critique: books of philosophy are often much simpler in argument than they are in expression. But it does entail that Metzinger is easier to summarize in a brief article like this one than his defenders will wish to admit. The inevitable limitations of this article stem not from the fact that Metzinger's book is far too rich to summarize briefly, but because I like any reviewer bring my own interests to the table. Metzinger sees himself as part of an ongoing dialogue between neuroscience, cognitive science, and the philosophy of mind. But this is not my own intellectual world, and in what follows I will not attempt to situate him amidst his various partners and rivals in those disciplines. My interest in Metzinger is limited to his influence on recent continental philosophy, which I frankly regard as a *bad* influence. If continental philosophy has been remarkably dismissive of natural science since the days of Husserl and Heidegger, the scientific wing of recent continental thought takes the opposite tack: 'Science was once *nothing*; henceforth, let it be *everything*'. As a corollary, those who deny that science is everything are found guilty of claiming that it is nothing. The role of philosophy is to provide supplemental commentary on the natural sciences: in other words, philosophy must once more accept the role of a handmaid, centuries after it finally shook off this role. Attempts to escape one's place as a handmaid can lead only to 'armchair' philosophizing.

For my purposes, Metzinger's argument can be summarized roughly as follows. The time for pure philosophy has passed; we need an interdisciplinary approach to consciousness, in which the hard empirical sciences will have a stronger place than before. There is no such thing as a 'self', nor has there ever been. What we think of as a self is simply the content of a 'transparent self-model' (TSM), and to think of this model as a genuine self is mere confusion. We do not have direct access to the real, since the workings of the brain entail 'autoepistemic closure', an inability to know what we do

12. 'Enlightenment 2.0', 196.

not know. Hence Plato's beautiful myth of the cave was right to think that we only see shadows on a cave wall, but wrong to think that there is a true enchained self that can be liberated from the cave, since even Plato's prisoner does not exist. What we think of as a unified, enduring self is really a process, made up of subpersonal components to which we cannot possibly have access. What we think of as 'objects' are just as nonexistent as the self, since objects too are the result of subpersonal processing that occurs at a rudimentary level forever closed to consciousness. There are no transtemporal identity criteria that would enable us to identify anything in consciousness as the 'same' thing. Therefore consciousness is not only a process, but also a holistic landscape where nothing has identity outside of its relations with other elements of consciousness. Moreover, consciousness itself is not even as simple and unified as one usually believes. Instead, it is made up of a crowd of distinct capacities that can be isolated by considering case studies drawn from psychiatry and neuropathology. Finally, despite the autoepistemic closure of consciousness, not all conscious experience is equally illusory. Much of the time consciousness is a *representation* of the world. We do in fact have *intentional* relations with the world, and for Metzinger (unlike for Brentano and Husserl) intentionality means contact with objects *outside* consciousness. This occurs through a 'pulsation' that crosses the capsule of consciousness and touches the outside world directly, though how this ontological miracle occurs is barely addressed in Metzinger's book. The phenomenological notion of 'immanent objectivity' (which is precisely what intentionality *does* mean for Brentano and Husserl) is a fiction. And finally, reductionism makes for good philosophy. Since consciousness must locally supervene on brain states (though no argument for this is given), we should be able to find 'minimally sufficient neural correlates' for everything that happens in consciousness, even though Metzinger repeatedly admits that we have hardly found *any* so far.

As the reader will soon discover, my reaction to this philosophy is mixed rather than purely negative. On the positive side, Metzinger is right to attack the still common dualism that isolates thought from the wider world. He is often very interesting in his manner of using pathological cases to divvy up consciousness and suggest that many different levels are in play in our seemingly unified conscious experience. This not only complicates our picture of human beings, but also opens up the possibility of shedding light on animals, and of possible technological mutations of existing earth life. Instead of taking the human *cogito* to be a permanent and simple ontological pole making up half of the universe, Metzinger portrays it as just one interesting entity among many others, and thereby does good work in shaking up the residual and unavowed idealism of continental philosophy. All of this is perfectly stimulating.

But the negative is there as well. Like many philosophers of a scientific persuasion, Metzinger is too quick to use the latest scientific results to justify an ontology that was in large part already *presupposed* in his interpretation of the scientific data.¹³ His theory of

13. In this respect he resembles, among others, his fellow *Collapse* heroes James Ladyman and Don Ross. For a critical treatment of their book *Every Thing Must Go*, see my article 'I Am Also of the Opinion that Materialism Must Be Destroyed'.

events and processes in no way follows from his sizing up of the brain, and neither does his assertion that there is no such thing as a self. Too frequently, Metzinger uses appeals to Science to push and shove his way out of legitimate philosophical disputes that he prefers to avoid. Most surprisingly of all, he does this *despite* his candid admission that neuroscience remains in ‘a pre-paradigm state’, and his nearly masochistic confessions throughout the book that we still have no idea what the neural correlates for any aspect of consciousness might be. Above all, it is a book showing deep *faith* in the ultimate triumph of reductionism and naturalism.

The following discussion consists of six further sections, some more critical than others. Section 2 considers Metzinger’s claim that both consciousness and the objects it encounters are mere surface products of underlying subpersonal processes. Section 3 discusses his view that phenomenology is impossible except in the form of ‘neurophenomenology’. While endorsing this claim wholeheartedly, I reject the ‘process’ model of the world that Metzinger derives from it. In Section 4 I consider his often fascinating claims about the different strands at work in a conscious human life that is anything but simple. In Section 5, I summarize and reject his ultimate doctrine that the self does not exist. In Section 6, I try to make sense of his insufficiently developed theory of intentionality and show its limitations. Section 7 brings the article to a close with some miscellaneous concluding remarks.

2. SUBPERSONAL COMPONENTS

The emerging scientific wing of continental philosophy often displays darkness and anger in its overreaction to the formerly low status of science in the continental tradition. Nonetheless, there is something refreshing in this new refusal to let the human subject exist in magical fashion outside the natural world. The continental tradition was never home to any full-blown realists until the early twenty-first century,¹⁴ and even displayed a markedly *anti*-realist attitude:¹⁵ occasionally in the form of outright idealism (cf. the later Husserl), but more often as what Quentin Meillassoux has called ‘correlationism’,¹⁶ in which human and world always come as a pair. In either case, human consciousness is treated as a special ontological realm different in kind from all others. The recent surge of continental interest in scientific positions has done good work in combating this lamentable tendency. And here Metzinger has something to offer, given his clear vision of a conscious realm that arises from hidden subpersonal components.

Early in his colossal book, Metzinger raises one of its dominant themes by complaining about a distinction made by analytic philosophers between ‘content’ and ‘vehicle’, which leads them to treat consciousness ‘not [as a] dynamical self-organization in the

14. It is likely that the 2002 publication of Manuel DeLanda’s *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* and my own *Tool-Being* was the first openly realist moment in recent continental philosophy.

15. For a more favorable account of continental anti-realism than I myself would give, see Lee Braver’s excellent book *A Thing of this World*.

16. Meillassoux introduces the concept of ‘correlationism’ on page 5 of his influential debut work, *After Finitude*.

brain, but [as] a disembodied system of rule-based information processing.’ (4) In other words, they assume that the content of the mind can be understood ‘without knowing anything about “vehicle properties”, about properties of the actual physical carriers of conscious content.’ (4) In a way this error is understandable, since consciousness itself erases its own vehicle. As he puts it later, ‘we are not able to represent the causal and temporal genesis of the presentatum (the ‘vehicle of presentation’); because the system, as it were, erases these aspects of the overall process and swallows them up in the course of elementary integration processes, the sensory content of our experience gains a fascinating property, which is often characterized as immediate givenness.’ (99) The content of presentations must ‘inevitably appear as real, because it is homogeneous.’ (99) But this only means that the ‘graininess’ of the vehicle has been smoothed out into a final purée, which most philosophers take to be an autonomous realm of the given that can be studied in isolation. For Metzinger this is unacceptable. What we most need is ‘a better understanding of the *vehicles*, the concrete internal *instruments*, with the help of which a continuously changing phenomenal representation of the world and the self within it is being generated.’ (110) Here we have a philosophical justification for Metzinger’s turn to the mechanics of the brain. To be ignorant of the workings of the brain is to let oneself be enchanted by the mere homogenized end product of a complex subpersonal drama.

It is worth dwelling a bit on Metzinger’s vision of an obscure subpersonal world closed to all access. He notes that ‘a large portion of the fundamental processuality is... as it were, “swallowed up” by the system.’ (23) Inevitably, ‘a conscious model of reality will set global *macroconstraints* influencing the development of microinteractions, as if “enslaving” them through its overall dynamics.’ (138) Deep beneath the glistening arena of conscious access, ‘there exists an unknown mechanism, entirely inaccessible from the first-person perspective, by which, on a preconceptual and preattentive level, consciously experienced part-whole relationships are continuously and automatically constituted.’ (145) The transparency of consciousness requires ‘full attentional unavailability of earlier processing stages.’ (165) Phenomenal vehicles ‘are created by a functional architecture, which makes it generally impossible for attentional top-down mechanisms to access their causal history.’ (177) Brushing against the theme of objects, Metzinger adds that things are real for us ‘if and only if earlier processing stages of this representation are attentionally unavailable to us.’ (460) Yet even our mental health depends on these subpersonal levels, rather than on anything accessible to psychotherapy. For instance, ‘strong cognitive subjectivity is something that can completely disappear as a result of subpersonal disintegration in the brain.’ (445) And as for identity disorders, while they are ‘diagnosed on the *personal* level of description, [they] result from subpersonal disintegration...’ (528) The human cogito, of which we are so proud, stands at the mercy of a dark and inaccessible causal realm inherently closed to all access.

One of the most typical features of consciousness is its temporal nature. We seem to feel the passage of time directly, but Metzinger challenges this assumption as well. Here again, conscious experience is cut off from the subpersonal reality of time. It merely ‘creates elementary event representations by defining *windows of simultaneity* on a fun-

damental level'. (129) Returning to one of his favorite metaphors, Metzinger states that consciousness "swallows up" the continuous flow of physical time at a very fundamental level of its internal model of the world'. (130) The everyday 'now' familiar to humans has a merely phenomenal reality: 'the "nowness" of the book in your hands is itself an internally constructed kind of representational content; it is not actuality *simpliciter*, but actuality *as represented*'. (25) The now is simply a 'virtual window of presence', (42) and 'a simulational fiction [when viewed] from the third-person perspective'. (128) Yet Metzinger also praises it as a 'successful' fiction ratified by means of natural selection, since consciousness would be overwhelmed by swarms of screaming subpersonal data if not for its crude but necessary oversimplifications of the world. (62)

But Metzinger does not hold that *every* layer of reality is dependent in turn on sublayers inaccessible to it. There is indeed a privileged layer in his model of the mind, and not surprisingly it is a *physical* layer. He admits that for him it is a 'background assumption' that 'what the system consciously experiences locally supervenes on its physical properties with nomological necessity'. (30) Or as he puts it in greater detail: 'phenomenal representation is... completely determined by the spatially internal and synchronous properties of the respective organism, because they supervene on a critical subset of these states. If all properties of my central nervous system are fixed, the contents of my subjective experience are fixed as well'. (112) This physical system can even *hallucinate* a self, (462) a dystopic event with a science-fiction flavor that Metzinger thinks is normal rather than rare. Indeed, he takes evident pleasure in observing that the glimmer of love we see in the eyes of another could just as easily be a simulation experienced by a brain in a vat. (602) Yet despite his apparently vehement commitment to the supervenience of the phenomenal on the physical, Metzinger confesses that this tells us very little: 'Local supervenience is just a (rather weak) *metaphysical* claim, one that in various ways assumes an asymmetrical bottom-up dependency without reducibility. One of the weaknesses of supervenience is that it is not an *explanatory* relation'. (602) Obviously, Metzinger's objection is not that supervenience gives the meaningful world of human experience *too little* autonomy, but that it gives it *too much*, thereby failing to reduce the world to the subpersonal to a sufficient degree.

This article on Metzinger is of course not written in a vacuum. Any reader even loosely familiar with my publications knows that I defend a position called 'object-oriented ontology' (OOO).¹⁷ As the article proceeds, it will be interesting to assess how Metzinger looks from an OOO standpoint. The answer so far is that he does not look bad at all. Against the idealism of Husserlian phenomenology, OOO argues that reality is withdrawn from direct conscious access, which gives us nothing but loose translations of a world extending deep beneath our awareness.¹⁸ We can even agree with Metzinger about the derivative status of the human experience of time. In fact, OOO goes a step further, and holds that the flow of time exists *only* for some observer¹⁹

17. For a general introduction to my philosophical standpoint see Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object*.

18. See Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics*, 21-32.

19. See Graham Harman, 'Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos'.

(though this includes *inanimate* observers in a way that Metzinger would surely never accept). In short, Metzinger and OOO are in total agreement that there is no direct access to the real, which forever lurks at a layer of the world that consciousness cannot possibly unlock. On this point, the obscurity of Metzinger's cosmos resembles the obscurity of our own.

However, there is an important difference of tone that soon becomes a difference of explicit doctrine. For whereas OOO proclaims a world of countless levels, for Metzinger there are really just two: the personal and the subpersonal. We can see this by looking both upward and downward from human consciousness. For while it is true that much subpersonal process is filtered out before reaching the level of individual human consciousness, Metzinger overlooks that the same is equally true if we move upward to still larger entities. A person does not remain a free-floating terminal consciousness, but enters into larger associations, none of which make use of all of that person's individual features. As Levi Bryant puts it: 'Most of the things that occupy the personal life of individual citizens are completely invisible to an object such as the United States and are treated as mere noise. The United States, for example, is completely oblivious to what I cooked for dinner last night or the fact that I am now sitting on the floor before my computer.'²⁰ Metzinger's failure even to address such larger entities as the United States suggests that he does not view the interaction of subpersonal process and personal frame-of-virtual-reality as one that occurs repeatedly at each layer of the cosmos. Instead, he locates these two domains at fixed, specific sites in the universe: subpersonal process exists in the physical realm, while the personal is identified with what is normally called the mental. In other words, for Metzinger the idea of deeper realities being oversimplified is uniquely a feature of the kingdom of sentient entities. The physical world has all the reality, and the mental world has all the illusion: a fairly bland, traditional division of labor based on a dualistic modern split between humans and non-humans.²¹

An analogous problem becomes visible if we look downward, beneath the human realm. For if it is true that humans have no access to the subpersonal components at work in their brain cells, it is equally true that neurons and peptides have no causal access to the twirling of quarks and electrons in their own tiniest, innermost physical recesses. Metzinger's theory of 'autoepistemic closure' could have been a bold theory about how *every* level of entity is cut off from the structure of its own composition. Instead, he simply gives us yet another philosophy containing the same two basic characters as ever: physical stuff in direct contact with all of its neighboring physical stuff, and a phenomenal sentient sphere cut off from everything. Worse yet, he does not even leave these two in an equal relationship, but dissolves the second into the first, failing to consider that to be generated by something does not always mean to be ontologically dependent upon it.

20. Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*.

21. The most devastating critique of this model can be found in Bruno Latour's classic treatise *We Have Never Been Modern*.

3. NEUROPHENOMENOLOGY VS. PHENOMENOLOGY

Metzinger tells us bluntly that ‘phenomenology is not enough for a modern theory of mind’. (34) Later, he sounds a similar note: ‘Neurophenomenology is possible; phenomenology is impossible’. (83) He expands on the latter point as follows: ‘Conceptual progress by a combination of philosophy and empirical research programs is possible; conceptual progress by introspection alone is impossible in principle’. (83) In fact this passage offers a false alternative between introspection and empirical research programs, since introspection counts as an adequate source of knowledge only for idealist forms of metaphysics in which internal knowledge is automatically accurate. One can agree with Metzinger that phenomenology remains trapped in an idealist standpoint while still rejecting any naïve faith in the value of ‘empirical’ research programs soaked through with Metzinger’s unquestioned ontological bias. More importantly, one can also abhor idealism while still rejecting much of Metzinger’s critique of phenomenology. For even if the idealism of phenomenology must be challenged, its account of intentional objects in the immanent sphere of consciousness remains a daring step forward in philosophy. But for Metzinger and his followers, there are neither objects nor qualities in the mind or anywhere else—only holistic processes with no more than a functional identity over time. In this section I will focus on Metzinger’s critique of objects in the phenomenal sphere, since his attempted refutation of qualia would take us too far afield. Besides this, phenomenology is focused on phenomenal *objects*, not on whether a specific shade of turquoise can be correctly identified after a lengthy pause.

It is well known that Brentano revived the medieval concept of ‘intentionality’, and that Husserl adopted and transformed this concept. It is impossible to follow Metzinger’s critique of phenomenology unless it is seen that he means something completely different by intentionality. For Brentano, intentionality is a special property of mental acts whereby they refer to *immanent* objects. Intentionality does not point to anything outside the mind for Brentano, whereas for Metzinger that is precisely what it must do. Brentano’s ambiguity about references to the world outside the mind led to efforts by his students to clarify the problem. Perhaps the best of these was a minor classic by his important Polish disciple Kasimir Twardowski, dating to 1894, with the title *On the Content and Object of Presentations*. In this sparkling little work, Twardowski tries to clarify the relations between an ‘object’ *outside* the mind and a ‘content’ *inside* it. Although Husserl was seven years older than Twardowski, he developed more slowly, and reached philosophical maturity only *after* wrestling with Twardowski’s ideas throughout much of the 1890’s. The results of this struggle can be seen in a never finalized essay by Husserl entitled ‘Intentional Objects’. There Husserl rejected the notion that there could be a distinction between outer objects and inner contents: the Berlin I perceive and talk about is the same as the real Berlin. But while this might sound like a realist doctrine in which the epistemic gap between mind and world is collapsed, it is actually an idealist move in which the intentional sphere (regarded by Brentano as purely immanent) is identified with reality as a whole. That is to say, the reason Husserl denies a gap between outer objects and inner contents is not because he thinks one links up easily with another, but

because he collapses *both* object and content into Brentano's intentional sphere, even while ardently insisting on a difference between the two.

In fact, this is the founding gesture of Husserlian phenomenology as opposed to Brentano's philosophy. Brentano owed much to the British empiricists, and it never occurred to him that objects in the mental sphere might be different from the content through which they are presented: after all, what else could a mental object be if not content? But for Husserl, the difference between immanent object and immanent content is the very core of phenomenology. Imagine that you closely observe an apple on a table one winter's day. As time passes, different degrees of shadow pass over the fruit, changing its appearance in small or moderate ways. Now and then you change seats in the room, viewing the apple from different angles and distances whenever you move. Every time you touch the skin of the apple, the temperature has changed: from cold apple at dawn, to warm apple in the afternoon, to cold apple again at midnight. All this time your level of hunger fluctuates as well, subtly shifting the apple's desirability in your mind. These constant shifts in the properties of the apple, in its presentational *content*, are what Husserl calls its *Abschattungen* or 'adumbrations'. These can change in all sorts of ways without making us think that the apple is no longer the same *object*. And here Husserl's vision of the difference between object and content becomes clear: both are accessible to consciousness, yet the object remains the same for as long as I regard it as the same apple, while the content shifts through countless accidental variations throughout the day without making the apple something different. The task of phenomenological description is to perform an 'eidetic reduction', freely varying the apple's properties by experience or (more likely) imagination, trying to arrive at the essential features that the apple needs in order to be what it is.

We could say that for Husserl the intentional object is an autonomous unit walled off from three other domains, though all three differences would be rejected by Metzinger. First, the apple has a phenomenal integrity quite apart from any chemical or horticultural theories of how it was formed, and from any psychological or neurological theories of how my mind represents it; the apple is immediately present in experience, whereas all these theories must be grounded in immediate experience. Clearly, Metzinger's extreme naturalism leads him to grant no autonomy to the apple in consciousness at all, since it can be represented only due to hidden subpersonal processes that must be studied by empirical research. Second, we have already noted that Husserl's apple-object remains the same across numerous variations in its presentational content. We will see that Metzinger rejects this concept of objects altogether, favoring 'holism' and 'process' over any notion of identical objects persisting across time even in the purely phenomenal sphere. And third, Husserl's objects must also be distinguished from their *essential* features, for even if I could identify all the properties this apple needs in order to remain an apple, it is not simply a bundle of all these features put together, but a unit that links them in a fashion belonging to this apple alone. Metzinger would reject this point for reasons connected with his contempt for *qualia*, as is typical of hardcore naturalist philosophers of mind, but we will leave this point for another occasion.

For now we begin with Husserl's intentional objects, which Metzinger does not call by that name due to his very different usage of 'intentional' to mean leading *outside* the phenomenal sphere. While for phenomenology objects are at the heart of philosophy, for Metzinger they are the very incarnation of error. During introspection about our mental contents, 'we almost always forget about or abstract from the temporal dynamics... and treat individual time slices as *objects*—particularly if their content properties show some invariance over time'. (22) He immediately gives this supposed blunder a name: 'I call this the "error of phenomenological reification". There exists a corresponding and notorious grammatical mistake inherent to folk psychology, which, as a *logical* error, possesses a long philosophical tradition'. (22) Metzinger continues this theme in the pages that follow. What underlies conscious experience is a 'dynamics of information processing'. (23) But in general, 'we reify the experiential content of a continuous representational process. In this way the process becomes an object; we automatically generate a phenomenal individual and are in danger of repeating the classic phenomenological fallacy'. (23) He concludes these reflections with a concrete example:

If I look into a red flash, close my eyes, and then experience a green afterimage, this does not mean that a nonphysical object possessing the property of 'greenness' has emerged. *If one talks like this, one very soon will not be able to understand what the relationship between such phenomenal individuals and physical individuals could have been in the first place...* As a matter of fact, such descriptions do not refer to a phenomenal individual, but only to an introspectively accessible time slice of the actual process of representation, that is, to a content property of this process at *t*. (23-24; emphasis added)

But all this haughty talk of 'fallacy' is based not on the empirical work that Metzinger forever celebrates, but on a series of barely argued metaphysical assumptions. First, Metzinger asserts against phenomenology that the phenomenal realm is generated by inaccessible subpersonal process; fair enough, we can agree with him there. He then asserts further that if something is generated by dynamical processes, then it itself must be an illusory reification, which is far from convincing: the fact that China is made up of countless dynamic individuals does not prove that China is a mere collective fiction with a merely functional unity, and the same is at least as obvious in the case of objects in the mind. Finally, in the passage I made sure to italicize, he appears to claim that allowing *both* dynamic subpersonal processes and individuals in the mind to exist makes it impossible to describe 'their relationship'; what he really means, however, is that the individuals simply do not exist, and thus there is no question of a 'relationship' anyway, except to show how the second is generated as an erroneous appearance by the first.

Be that as it may, Metzinger knows full well that the phenomenal sphere *seems* to be made up of individual objects: 'In a certain sense, perceptual objects really are the fundamental components of phenomenal experience... [P]resentata... and properties... never exist in isolation and... can always only be experienced *as that of objects*'. (155) And furthermore, 'it is also true that genuine cognitive availability only seems to start at the object level'. (104) Unsurprisingly, and perhaps accurately, Metzinger finds Darwinian

roots for our tendency to perceive objects as identical units persisting over time. For it could actually be harmful for living beings to perceive too much processual detail: ‘biologically successful representata must never lead a system operating with limited neurocomputational resources into infinite regressions, endless internal loops, and so on, if they do not want to endanger the survival of the system.’ (35n19) (As someone who is often exhausted by the ‘infinite regressions [and] endless internal loops’ of postmodern philosophical prose, I gladly take Metzinger’s point.) His Darwinian reading of objects resumes later: ‘The internal causal structure, the topology of our phenomenal space, has been adapted to the nomological space of possibilities governing middle-sized objects on the surface of this planet over millions of years. Points within this space represent what was relevant... to the maximization of our genetic fitness.’ (59) But however praiseworthy these errors may have been in preserving our ancestors from ruin, Metzinger calls them errors nonetheless. Darwin is now mated with another frequent hero of scientism, David Hume: ‘just as in visual perception different global stimulus properties—for instance, colors, shapes, and surface textures—are bound into a subjectively experienced object of perception... something like object formation takes place in which isolated events are integrated into a Now.’ (127) Along with evolution and customary conjunction, *language* is another root of erroneous belief in objects: ‘the way we refer to the phenomenal content of self-consciousness using linguistic tools frequently ignores the dynamics of information processing... [P]rocess is now frozen into an object... We automatically generate a phenomenological individual...’ (272) Here Metzinger is speaking about treating *ourselves* as individuals, but the error for him is the same as when speaking of phenomenal objects. What is real is not substance but *process*, and objects can do no better than represent that process: ‘an object will be a coherent, preattentively integrated set of perceived features. The experience of this object is a representation of the perceptual *process*...’ (318)

Metzinger sets a very high bar for anything like substance to be able to exist, and of course nothing can ever clear that bar: ‘The ontological intuition associated with the philosophical concept of a “substance” is that it is something that could continue to exist by itself even if all other existing entities were to vanish.’ (100) Strictly speaking, this is *never* what substance has meant. Aristotle would not have agreed that a substance such as a horse could exist if grass, dirt, food, and the entire earth were to vanish, or if its ancestor horses had never existed. Leibniz, whose substances are defined by their relations despite being windowless, would have agreed with the proposed criterion even less. Here as throughout the book, Metzinger conflates ontological dependence with causal dependence, holding that *because* phenomenal content is generated by subpersonal processes, *therefore* it cannot be filled with autonomous individuals. As applied to the mental sphere, this can be seen in his strange claim that ‘if this philosophical intuition about the substantial, intrinsic nature of first-order phenomenal properties [qualia] were true, then such properties would, in the mind of an individual being, have to be capable of coming into existence all by themselves...’, (100) which is no more true than saying that a horse cannot be a substance unless it is able to appear on earth without a father or

mother. As it applies to the self, Metzinger holds that ‘what we have been calling “the” self... is not a substance, an unchangeable essence, or a thing (i.e., an individual in the sense of philosophical metaphysics)...’ (563). Certainly not, if being a substance means being able to appear *ex nihilo* without any background history.

For Metzinger as for Merleau-Ponty, nothing in perception exists outside a context. Indeed, other than terminological differences the following passage of Metzinger might have been written by Merleau-Ponty himself:

There are no decontextualized atoms. The relationship between those aspects or subregions is a *mereological* [i.e., part-whole] relationship. On lower levels of phenomenal granularity different aspects may be bound into different low-level wholes (different colors or smells may belong to different perceptual objects), but ultimately all of them are parts of one and the same global whole. (145)

The phenomenological description here is quite fine. What is dubious is Metzinger’s refusal to allow individuals to be individual if they have even the slightest interaction with a context. Oddly enough, this occurs for the *opposite* reason from before. Initially Metzinger refused to let phenomenal objects exist because they are generated by invisible underlying processes in the brain: in that case, objects were *undermined* by dynamic physical processes. But now, phenomenal objects are invalidated for the opposite reason, since they have no reality apart from a holistic global context from which none can ever be removed. Here the phenomenal object is *overmined*, dissolved not into a physical underworld but into a holistic perceptual overworld.²² Objects lose twice for opposite reasons, as if receiving mixed messages from an emotionally abusive parent: ‘You are too shallow!... No, you are too deep!’ The double game played by Metzinger with his part-whole relations is that he lets the parts defeat objects when talking about neurophysiological underpinnings, and then lets the whole defeat objects when talking about what goes on in consciousness itself. And just as objects disappear in this way, so too will the *self*, which sometimes vanishes into subpersonal processes when it suits Metzinger’s purposes, but at other times dissolves into a dynamic and holistic kaleidoscope of elements without transtemporal identity. ‘The overall holism of the phenomenal self results from the fact that introspectively discriminable aspects of experience formed by it cannot adequately be described as isolated elements of a set. They are not individual components of a class, but constitute a mereological relationship of part and whole.’ (321) There would be nothing wrong with this characterization if not that, like a devious magician, Metzinger sometimes makes parts disappear and sometimes wholes, without recognizing that every entity is both part and whole simultaneously while not losing any reality in either case.

Along with the language of holism, we find Metzinger enlisting with the related terminology of events and processes in a manner fit to warm the hearts of many present-day continental thinkers. For instance, ‘representational content is neither an abstract individual nor a property anymore, but an *event*.’ (113) Later, we read without surprise

²² For an explanation of the conceptual pair overmining/undermining, see my essay ‘On the Undermining of Objects’ in the anthology *The Speculative Turn*.

that lived experience ‘is accompanied by a multitude of dynamic part-whole relationships.’ (133) At times Metzinger sounds more like a bohemian, lavalampy adherent of the Deleuzian underground than a brass-knuckled philosopher of mind: ‘Our phenomenal world is not an elementaristic world made out of building blocks, it is not a Lego universe, because it possesses an organic structure; it is more aptly characterized as a quasi-liquid network.’ (145) And again, ‘a more empirically plausible model of representational content will have to describe it as an aspect of an ongoing *process* and not as some kind of abstract object.’ (166) And even at the level of neurology, ‘from an empirical point of view the neural carriers very likely are not distinct states anymore, but are characterized by a part-whole relationship within a dynamical process.’ (402) By contrast, ‘naïve realism creeps in at the moment one forgets about... processuality...’ (584)

But when phenomenal individuals dissolve upward rather than downward, they do so not only into Woodstock-like ‘organic, quasi-liquid networks’. Sounding a much more typical note of analytic scientism, Metzinger tells us that things are treated as enduring individuals because they have a *functional* identity: ‘Indiscriminability may simply cause certain *functional* invariances. However, a transparent representation of functional invariance can result in the *phenomenology* of being identical through time, of transtemporal sameness.’ (438) While the language here is less pleasingly holistic, the object loses once again insofar as its reality is found *above* it: in some unvarying *effect* that it has on something else. The hammer is only the ‘same’ hammer across time because it has similar hammer-effects on different things at different moments. Combine the holistic and functional overmining of objects with their subpersonal undermining by neurophysiological processes, and there is no room at all left for objects. Instead, objects become the refuse of ‘folk psychology’, which for Metzinger is synonymous with all that is horrible in present-day philosophy. As he puts it late in the book: ‘we can clearly see how individuality (in terms of simplicity and indivisibility), substantiality (in terms of ontological autonomy), and essentiality (in terms of transtemporal sameness) are not properties of selves [or of objects—g.h.]... At best, they are folk-phenomenological constructs, inadequately described conscious *simulations* of individuality.’ (626) But remember that Metzinger’s supposed demolition of this roster of traditional concepts is based not on detailed empirical work, but on the metaphysical assumption that nothing can be real if it is decomposable into subpersonal parts or if it belongs to a holistic context or is definable by its functional effects on other things. Given these highly dubious *a priori* assumptions, one wishes that Metzinger had spent a bit more time in the ‘armchair’ he disdains. In the next section we will discover a sense in which Metzinger’s empirical points *do* have value, but we have not yet arrived at such a point: the notion that objects are a ‘folk-psychological concepts’ is not one that requires empirical evidence at all. It results instead from the aforementioned *a priori* decision by Metzinger: if objects have a generative history then they cannot be unified and autonomous, and if objects always occur in a holistic context then they also cannot be unified and autonomous.

But this assumption is gratuitous. While it is true that classical phenomenology is too idealist in orientation, too ready to close off the outside world as a genuine background

history for phenomenal objects, it does not follow that opening a window onto the real world destroys the unity and autonomy of phenomenal objects. Let us grant that everything has a generative backstory, including the objects of the phenomenal sphere. This does not deprive them of independence any more than the generative backstory of children allows them to be ‘eliminated’ in favor of a description of their parents. An object is something *over and above* its causal history, for it fails to preserve much of the information of that causal history, and since it also have been generated by alternative histories. By the same token, a phenomenal object is something *under and beneath* its current position in the holistic network of lived experience. Yes, a mailbox always appears under specific holistic conditions, with varying levels of shadow and with shifting perceptual neighbors. But nonetheless, we continue to recognize it as *the same* mailbox, and in this sphere it is we alone who are the judges. To call this ‘folk psychology’ misses the point, since the phenomenal realm is one in which ‘folk psychology’ serves as judge, jury, and certainly as executioner. Here we are not dealing with realities that could be modified by better scientific theories, but with purely immanent objects that at times we might mis-describe, but whose existence is determined only by the one who encounters it. Such objects cannot be dissolved into physical underpinnings any more than they can be evaporated into a wider holistic environment. To think otherwise is to fall prey to a ‘folk physics’ which holds that the tinier something is the more real it must be, so that quarks would be more real than the United Nations.

4. CONSCIOUSNESS IS MANY

While reading *Being No One* it becomes clear that Metzinger’s true passion is for empirical research into the mind. If his discussions of metaphysics often result in sour-faced dismissals of his opponents for the shakiest of reasons, his survey of cases in neuropathology displays a childlike wonder in the author that is very appealing both intellectually and in human terms. With these case studies Metzinger becomes an excellent teacher for the first time. If we forget his nihilistic efforts to *eliminate* metaphysics in favor of his own preferred domain of neuropathological reflections he becomes a more useful author, and suddenly finds his niche in the shared human quest for enlightenment. There is much to be learned from the cases he surveys, and in fact they do inflict damage on the idealist model of the *cogito* as a fixed ontological pole of the world. By surveying the ways in which apparently eternal features of human thought are tampered with through purely neurological failures, Metzinger shows that human cognition is structurally complicated, not causally independent of subpersonal malfunctions. This is Metzinger at his best.

Nothing could seem clearer to most of us than the unity of the self, yet this unity conceals a vast diversity, as Metzinger shows. He first admits that ‘I am not able to deliberately split or dissolve my phenomenal self. Have you ever tried it? On the other hand... by guiding introspective attention I can highlight the most different aspects of my current self-consciousness. Its content can be modulated, enhanced, or repressed. I

can also deliberately add new content to it, that is, by running phenomenal self-simulations of different sorts'. (322) What we call consciousness in the singular may turn out to be merely a 'cluster concept' (107) for a number of different things, and Metzinger will offer a list of ten separate features of consciousness that 'can serve to break down the naïve folk-psychological notion of "consciousness" into more specific concepts' (207). For 'ascribing phenomenality never is the same as ascribing one *single*, and primitive, property' (561) and instead takes place 'on *multiple levels of description*' (562). In any case, 'the notion of a "subject of experience" is not logically primitive' (577) and 'the phenomenal sense of ownership is *not* one simple property, a rigid characteristic of our inner life. For example, it has a subtle temporal profile; it is context-sensitive and it *unfolds* over time' (607-608). Metzinger's fascinating discussions of pathological case studies help demonstrate these facts.

Yet even before he gets to pathology, Metzinger tries to complicate the usual assumption that consciousness is a simple, unified, and obvious sphere. For example, he distinguishes no fewer than *four* different types of introspection (36) resulting from two key dualisms: a first difference between the attention paid to the represented world and the attention paid to our *selves* as the internal representers of such a world, and a second difference between subsymbolic metarepresentation and an explicit conceptual or quasi-conceptual kind. Metzinger puts these various types of introspection to work throughout the book in calling for subtle distinctions between them. And whereas Bernard Baars and David Chalmers cite 'global availability' as an important constraint on what counts for phenomenal consciousness in humans (31), Metzinger argues that this criterion is not simple, but covers at least three separate things: 'availability for *guided attention* (i.e. availability for [nonconceptual] introspection...); availability for *cognitive processing* (i.e. availability for [conceptual] thought...); availability for behavioral control (i.e., availability for motor selection...)'. (31)

Yet Metzinger's most ambitious attempt to complicate our model of phenomenal experience comes in the 92-page Section 3.2 of the book, in which phenomenality is split up into a variety of 'constraints', most of which we can easily imagine as augmented, removed, or modified with the aid of some future technology. Not to mention that 'there could be *other* sets of constraints as well, in extraterrestrial beings, in conscious machines, or possibly even in some animals on our planet... The space of possible phenomenal minds is vast'. (630-631)

But sticking for the moment with the *human* phenomenal mind, we find the following constraints. 1. There is *global availability*, meaning that 'phenomenally represented information is... *globally available* for deliberately guided attention, cognitive reference, and control of action...' (117-118). 2. Phenomenal experience is activated within a window of presence, 'because whatever I experience, I always experience it *now*'. (126) 3. Integration into a coherent global state, which means that 'conscious human beings are always *phenomenally situated* beings... Individual conscious states... are always part of a conscious world-model'. (131) 4. Convolved holism, which refers to the fact that 'phenomenal wholes do not coexist as isolated entities, but appear as flexible, *nested* patterns

or multilayered experiential gestalts'. (143) 5. Dynamicity, since 'phenomenal states only rarely carry static or highly invariant forms of mental content, and they do not result from a passive, nonrecursive representational process'. (151) 6. Perspectivalness: 'The dominant structural feature of phenomenal space lies in the fact that it is tied to an individual perspective'. (156) 7. Transparency, since we generally focus only on the contents of our experience and ignore 'that something particular is not accessible to subjective experience, namely, the *representational* character of the contents of conscious experience'. (169; emphasis added.) 8. Offline activation, a special human constraint, referring to 'phenomenal *simulations* [which] are generated in a way that is largely independent of current sensory input'. (179) 9. Representation of intensities, because all 'sensory experience comes in different intensities'. (185) 10. Ultrasmoothness, which refers to 'the homogeneity of phenomenal properties' (189). 11. Adaptivity, meaning that phenomenal experience has a Darwinian explanation (198).

One of the remarkable things about this list is Metzinger's admission that we have *failed* to understand its elements in purely physical terms. Throughout the book, Metzinger is adamant that we will eventually discover 'minimally sufficient neural correlates' for all aspects of consciousness, by which he really means underpinnings rather than correlates: he does not intend equal status between the phenomenal taste of cotton candy and the neurological description of this experience, but wants to locate ultimate reality in the latter. Nonetheless, Metzinger dutifully records a long record of futility in this arena, one that is tempered only by his inexplicable optimism. For the first seven constraints, he openly admits that we have no idea what the neural correlates of these constraints might be: on pages 122, 130, 139, 150, 156, 162, and 178, in what amounts to an almost comical display of intellectual masochism. This reader [g.h.] literally laughed aloud each time he read sentences such as 'At present hardly anything is known about the neurobiological realization of the function just sketched'. (122) In the case of Constraint 10, ultrasmoothness, Metzinger does not admit outright failure, but does not sound as self-confident as usual (196). In the cases of Constraints 8 and 9 he behaves a bit more cockily, though only in the case of 9 (intensity) is his cockiness remotely convincing. Naturally, Constraint 11 is not subject to the test of minimally sufficient neural correlates, since it deals with large evolving populations over time rather than with the current state of any given individual. This leads us to one of the most remarkable features of Metzinger as an author: a poor self-understanding of his real talents. He thinks that decomposing the self into numerous complicated dimensions makes the self *less real*, when in fact it makes the self so much *more* real than before. By showing how much complexity is underway in our supposedly simple selves, Metzinger leads us to conclude not 'well then, the self is just a sham in the end', but 'think of how many different and bizarre selves we might create, or which might already exist among animals or on other planets!'

In short, rather than turning the self into a *fictional unreality* he turns it into a *science fictional reality*, in which the human is just another bizarre species whose experience is generated by specific constraints, just as reptiles, insects, and extraterrestrials might have

different lives from ours at this very moment. Rather than the parsimonious eliminator he wishes to be, Metzinger peoples the possible universe with a vast number of phenomenal species, and even borders on a science fictional version of what I have called ‘speculative psychology.’²³ But as we can see from his masochistic admissions of failure to find neural correlates (or rather, underpinnings) for experience, Metzinger’s efforts to eliminate phenomenal objects place him in the camp of what David Chalmers calls *Don’t-have-a-clue-materialism*. As Chalmers sarcastically describes this position: ‘I don’t have a clue about consciousness. It seems utterly mysterious to me. But it must be physical, as materialism must be true.’²⁴ On the whole, Metzinger is less impressive in his overt role as aggressive *Don’t-have-a-clue-materialist* than in his more understated role as an explorer of possible constraint modifications to human consciousness.

Let’s close this section with an all-too-brief survey of some of the neuropathological cases that Metzinger brings in from the literature. The whole point of everyday consciousness, of course, is that it is supposed to hide such experiences from our view: ‘we are not *supposed* to imagine pathological situations, because dissociative self-simulations endanger the functional integrity of the organism as a whole.’ (598) And it is for this very reason that ‘neither folk psychologies nor classical philosophical theories of mind can offer an adequate explanation’ for pathologies. (215) In some cases people cannot recognize faces, including their own. (216) At other times color experience is selectively lost: ‘In cerebral achromatopsia we find a selective vanishing of colors from the conscious model of the world’, (220) due to localized brain lesions and certainly not due to psychoanalytic repression. The sense of motion can even be lost through certain pathologies. (221) In the case of ‘hemineglect’, which occurs as a result to lesions or tumors, subjects lose awareness of information coming from the left: ‘many of them do not wash or dress the left side of their body; some of the male patients stop shaving the left side of their face.’ (222) Here Metzinger notes that all of us already do something similar with information coming from the rear: ‘Do you now, as you read this, consciously experience the dramatic incompleteness of your own visual model of the world? Do you consciously experience the expanse of nothingness behind your head?’ (224) In another, strange disorder, sufferers of Charles-Bonnet syndrome frequently see faces as reduced to cartoon-like caricatures. (238)

Along with these cases of degenerate phenomenal experience, there are also hypertrophic forms, such as hallucinations (237): a monkey on the neurologist’s lap (240), a floor covered with shoes when one seeks only two real shoes (20). In the famous case of phantom limb, ‘some amputees feel corns or wedding rings 30 years after surgical amputation of a limb.’ (382) And perhaps just as famously, ‘there are various types of phenomenal disintegration, as in schizophrenia, in depersonalization disorders, and in *dissociative identity disorders* (DID), accompanied by multiplications of the phenomenal self within one and the same physical system.’ (438) Just as it is impossible to imagine what it would be like to have a 360-degree visual field, it is also impossible for most of us to

23. Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks*, 213.

24. David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 162.

imagine what it feels like to have schizophrenia. (446) In schizophrenia, thoughts can be removed from our phenomenal self-model and no longer ‘owned’, as can also happen to physical body parts in the case of hemineglect. Here, the apparently *a priori* truth of *mineness* that ought to belong to all our mental and physical experience is shown to be not a simple truth about all human experience, but one feature out of many in a complexly layered experience arising from complications already found in the subpersonal realm. Metzinger takes great pains to interpret out-of-body experiences in the same way (488-505), hoping thereby to remove them from the arsenal of soul-loving dualism.

5. THERE IS NO SELF

The non-existence of the self is intended as the major theme of Metzinger’s book. ‘[This book’s] main thesis is that no such things as selves exist in the world: Nobody ever *was* or *had* a self’. (1) In place of the self, he offers a clear alternative: ‘The phenomenal self is not a thing, but a process—and the subjective experience of *being someone* emerges if a conscious information-processing system operates under a transparent self-model... You don’t see it. But you see *with* it’. (1) And in one of the standard tropes of scientific philosophy, the eternal hero Darwin is summoned into the room: ‘This is not your fault. Evolution has made you this way’. (1)

Playing on the Latin translation of the title *Being No One*, Metzinger advocates a ‘nemocentric’ position. ‘A nemocentric reality model is one that satisfies a sufficiently rich set of constraints for conscious experience... while at the same time not exemplifying phenomenal selfhood’. (336) Stated differently, ‘conceptual confusions can only be avoided if one stops making broad claims referring to the “self” in a naïve-realistic way’. (379) Instead of a self, ‘all that, in an ontological sense, does exist are certain classes of information-processing systems operating under transparent self-models’. (462) The radical conclusion Metzinger draws from this is that ‘*all* selves are either hallucinated (phenomenologically), or elements of inaccurate, reificatory phenomenological descriptions’. (462) The everyday notion of the self is merely folk-psychological (302), any personal-level self is merely metaphorical (393), and belief in the self is not epistemically justified (403). It is helpful to remember that Metzinger already made the same critique of phenomenological *objects*. The title *Being No One* could easily have been expanded to *Being Nothing*, covering objects of experience no less than the experiencing self. The only difference is that the self, as what underlies all of these shifting objects of experience, is upheld even more naively and desperately by folk psychologists. Where ‘the folk-psychology of self-consciousness naively, successfully, and [consistently] tells us that a self simply is whatever I subjectively *experience* myself as’, (268) the fact is that ‘what we often, naively, call “the self” in folk-psychological contexts is the *phenomenal* self, the content of self-consciousness, given in phenomenal experience’. (302-303) On one level this simply reflects the perfectly valid point that mental self-representation ‘is not a process by which we truly are “infinitely close” to ourselves’. (273) But from the fact that a pure, direct gaze at ourselves is impossible it does not follow that we ourselves do not exist. To

draw this conclusion requires the same unjustified claim made about objects: that something cannot be unified and real if it is generated by subpersonal processes.

And despite his denials in the *Collapse* interview that he is merely beating the old drum that ‘the self is a process, not a thing’, his critique of the self like his critique of objects boils down to nothing more than this very point. We have seen that Metzinger, that hardheaded devotee of aggressive-extermintative scientism, sometimes sounds like one of the most beatnik-bohemian continental philosophers:

The concrete wholeness of my own self... is characterized by a multitude of internal part-whole relationships. These relationships are dynamical relationships... they may undergo swift and kaleidoscopic changes... [They are] not composed of a bag containing atomic elements, but [emerge] out of an ordered hierarchy of part-whole relationships. However, any realistic phenomenology will have to do justice to the fact that this hierarchy is still a highly flexible, ‘liquid’ hierarchy. (322)

Stated differently, ‘there is no single entity in or outside the system that directly corresponds to the primitive, prereflexive feeling of conscious selfhood’. (564-565) In a truly refreshing move, Metzinger draws on a classical *Indian* source to justify the point: ‘Śaṅkara... in his *Vivīkacūḍamāni*, or *Crest-Jewel of Wisdom*, argued that just as we don’t confuse ourselves with the shadow cast by our own body, or with a reflection of it, or with the body as it appears in a dream or in imagination, we should not identify with what appears to be our bodily self right now’. (549-550) What Metzinger neglects to note is that Śaṅkara makes this point not in order to decompose the self into a ‘dynamic subpersonal physical process’, but in order to defend the concept of the soul in its union with Brahma, not the sort of doctrine that Metzinger generally endorses. From this we can see that one might easily draw all manner of conclusions from the non-identification of ourselves with our apparent bodily selves of the present. In any case, objects for Metzinger have exactly the same shadowy status as the self: ‘The book you are holding in your hands, as experienced by you at this moment, is a dynamic, low-dimensional shadow of the actual physical object in your hand, a dancing shadow in your central nervous system’. (549) The phenomenal self-model, which makes us think that we exist as a united self, has ‘a true neurobiological description, for example, as a complex neural activation pattern with a specific temporal fine structure, undergoing kaleidoscopic changes from instant to instant’. (303) You may at least think that you are in contact with your own body, but even this turns out to be false: ‘as an embodied, conscious entity you are the contents of an *image*, a dynamical image that constantly changes in a very high number of different dimensions’. (301)

We saw earlier that objects are both undermined by being reduced to subpersonal processes and overmined by being embedded in a holistic tapestry of richly intertwined significations. The same is true of Metzinger’s critique of the self. For as he puts it: ‘self-related information is only one subset of globally available information because... the phenomenal self is always embedded in a phenomenal world, seamlessly and preattentively. Being self-conscious is being-in-a-world’. (307) Self and world are so intertwined in principle that only late in the evolutionary chain did their difference become conscious-

ly available: ‘it seems likely that only human primates started to make the subject-object dichotomy cognitively available, by eventually turning it into the object of explicit intellectual operations’. (314) The difference between them emerges in the following way: ‘The existence of a coherent self-representatum for the first time introduces a self-world border into the system’s model of reality. For the first time, system-related information now becomes globally available *as system-related* information [while] environment-related information can now be referred to as *non-self*’. (308) It thus turns out that selves are such an artifact that they can be eliminated by Occam’s Razor, the most pampered pet in the homes of both analytic philosophy and scientism: ‘under a general principle of ontological parsimony it is not necessary (or rational) to assume the existence of selves, because as theoretical entities they fulfill no indispensable explanatory function’. (337) Anything that can be explained according to a ‘self’ can be explained just as easily with the notion of a ‘self-model’. But if Metzinger enjoys claiming what an easy intellectual shift this is, he boasts simultaneously of its daringly counterintuitive character, when he asserts that none of us could really *believe* his self-model theory of subjectivity. ‘*You* cannot believe it... *You* cannot believe in the truth of this idea’. (627) But take comfort in your errors, for ‘some types of false belief may even be conducive to mental health’. (597) Nonetheless, while preserving your mental health you will also pay the price of bowing before a false mystery: ‘...[my self-model theory] is a theory of which *you cannot be convinced*, in principle. I would also claim that this fact is the true essence and the deepest core of what we *actually* mean when speaking about the “puzzle”—or sometimes even about the “mystery”—of consciousness’. (627) The inability to accept Metzinger’s theory turns out to be the true source of the supposed mystery of consciousness.

Let’s close this section with Metzinger’s attempt to reread Plato’s myth of the cave in neurophenomenological terms. Given what we have seen, his reading of the myth will not be surprising, though it remains perfectly interesting nonetheless. ‘The cave in which we live our lives is formed by our global, phenomenal model of reality’. (547) As for the underground aspect of the cave, ‘our conscious model of reality is subterranean in that it is determined exclusively by the internal properties of our central nervous system: there is a minimally sufficient neural correlate for the content of consciousness at any given point in time’. (547) We have already seen that this represents little more than Metzinger’s faith in scientistic materialism, given his confession that for at least seven of his eleven constraints on human consciousness (and actually more like nine or ten) we have no idea what this neural correlate may be. But even more interesting is how Metzinger *glosses* the statement above: ‘If all properties of this local neural correlate are fixed, the properties of subjective experience are fixed as well’. (547) Yet this is a completely different sort of claim. The point that the same causes have the same effects every time *does not entail* that said effects can be eliminated in favor of a description of their causes. Notice that different possible causes might yield the same consciousness: if a few brain cells die out through vodka consumption, there is no *a priori* metaphysical reason to believe that what I take to be my self is altered by this micro-disaster. Even if we concede that the mind has neural underpinnings it does not follow that the self is an illusion, any

more than the girders in the John Hancock Building render the building as a whole illusory. And neither is the Hancock Building merely a *functional* unit, as if it were one thing only because it has Hancock-effects that resemble one another across time. Quite the contrary: it can have such Hancock-effects only because *it is* the Hancock Building. Metzinger is always too quick either to tear things down to micro-foundations or suck things up into a final functional effect. In this way he repeats the basic gesture of all materialism, which is to undermine and overmine objects simultaneously.²⁵

But let's return to Plato's cave. Metzinger asks: 'What is the cave? The cave, according to [the self-model theory] is simply the physical organism as a whole, including, in particular, its brain'. (548) So, we are trapped in our physical organisms, subject to autoepistemic closure. And what do we see in our prisons? 'What are the shadows on the wall? A shadow is a low-dimensional projection of a higher-dimensional object. *Phenomenal* shadows are low-dimensional projections of internal or external objects in the conscious state space opened within the central nervous system of a biological organism. According to [the self-model theory], the shadows on the wall are phenomenal mental models', (548) by which he means models both of objects and of ourselves. 'But what is the fire... [in our interpretation of the myth]? The fire is neural dynamics'. (549) And as for the wall, it 'is not a *two-dimensional* surface. It is a *space*, namely, the high-dimensional phenomenal state space of human Technicolor phenomenology'. (549) He adds further that 'in a conscious human being, the wall and the fire are not separate entities: they are two aspects of one and the same process'. (549) And just as in Plato's myth we only see *our own* shadow on the cave wall, Metzinger is easily able to explain this by saying that 'we are only given to ourselves though what I have called... the phenomenal self-model'. (549)

But in Plato's myth, the point is that one of the captives eventually escapes. And this is where Metzinger differs from Plato: 'I claim that there is no one *in* the cave. There is no one who could leave... I claim that the conscious self is not a thing, but a shaded surface. It is not an individual object, but a *process*: the ongoing process of shading'. (549) Or as he puts it at least twice in the book: 'The cave is empty'. (551) Yet there are some ambiguities in Metzinger's claims about the myth. For one thing, it is not quite relevant whether *the cave* is empty. After all, we are willing to concede his point that everything that appears in consciousness is a flickering shadow, and we would never expect a shadow to escape the shadowy realm. The point is not whether the cave is empty (we conceded this point long ago) but whether anyone is watching the wall. And in Metzinger's model, what seems to be watching the wall is the cave itself, the same cave that we heard him define as follows: 'What is the cave? The cave, according to [the self-model theory] is simply the physical organism as a whole, including, in particular, its brain'. (548) But this 'physical organism as a whole' is not merely a collection of parts; it is a *whole*, after all. And it is this *whole* that we can call a self. This self observes the wall of the cave, mistaking itself for the shadow of itself that it sees there, and mistaking objects for the shadow of objects it sees there. But this does not entail that it does not exist. If the self

25. Harman, *The Quadruple Object*, 13-16.

cannot escape the cave, this is not because there is no self that could escape, but because the very nature of perception entails that it must occur in a cave: to encounter anything, including ourselves, can only mean to simulate it, not to witness it directly. Why does Metzinger fail to see this? Because his hardheaded reductionism does not allow him to grasp that even if the self is causally generated by the physical-organism-as-a-whole, this does not mean that it is *nothing but* a group of disconnected nerves and cells. The entire ‘ominous’ dimension of Metzinger’s book, which has made it so especially appealing to nihilistic younger males who enjoy breaking things into pieces, is therefore based not on some devastating insight into a scary ‘nemocentric’ world where selves do not exist, but on a simple *a priori* dogma that if something has causal antecedents, then only those antecedents can have independent reality. But this is simply a familiar and platitudinous form of materialism applied to neurophysics, not a philosophical insight with any sort of pathbreaking rigor. When on the final page of the book Metzinger says that ‘there is no one *whose* illusion the conscious self could be, no one *who* is confusing herself with anything’ (634), this is a mere bit of melodrama as the curtain falls, with half of the audience frightened by the man in the Jack-o’-lantern mask, and the other half wanting to be just like him.

6. SIMULATION AND INTENTION

Metzinger’s commitment to autoepistemic closure, thanks to which we have no direct access to the reality of objects or our (supposedly nonexistent) selves, now leads him into a paradoxical position. For like all hardheaded scientific realists, Metzinger needs to claim some sort of direct scientific access to the real in order to be able to denounce the gullible, folk-psychological beliefs of naïve people who ‘desperately seek emotional security’²⁶ and thereby fall into error. In short, Metzinger’s rather harsh assessment of those who disagree with his views makes a poor match with his insistence that we are all trapped in a cocoon of unreality, bewitched by flickering shadows. His thoughts on intentionality are designed to explain how we can sometimes escape the awesome darkness of his neurological version of Plato’s cave and make contact with reality itself.

Structural realists now rank among the heroes of continental scientism. The structural realist holds that despite the recurrent collapse of scientific theories over time, a certain degree of mathematical structure is preserved from one theory to the next. In this way, some *direct* contact with reality is preserved despite theory failure, and ammunition is thereby provided for assaulting the supposedly gullible beliefs of ‘unscientific’ people from one generation to the next. If Metzinger often seems to share the same motive, he is more honest about the darkness of the human epistemic predicament, and thus refuses to adopt such an easy solution straightaway. In fact, he openly criticizes ‘isomorphist theories [that] assume a form of similarity between image and object which rests on a partial conservation of *structural* features of the object in the image’. (27) As he puts it a bit later, ‘we are never in any direct epistemic contact with the world sur-

²⁶ Metzinger, ‘Enlightenment 2.0’, 206.

rounding us even while *phenomenally* experiencing an immediate contact...’ (50) Stated differently, ‘all mental activities are simulational activities.’ (50) The brain ‘constantly hallucinates at the world... vigorously dreaming of the world and thereby generating the content of phenomenal experience.’ (52) The theme continues: ‘our phenomenal states at no point in time establish a direct and immediate contact with the world for us. Knowledge by simulation always is approximative knowledge...’ (59) Although ‘many people believe that mental presentation creates an epistemically direct connection from subject to world[,] obviously, this assumption is more than dubious from an empirical point of view.’ (92) There is no epistemic justification for our mental states. Rather, ‘we have those states because they were functionally adequate from an evolutionary perspective.’ (115) And moreover, ‘all phenomenal content is hallucinatory content...’ (250) Even the intimacy we experience with our own physical bodies is a mere illusion: ‘you are never in contact with your body—as an embodied, conscious entity you are the contents of an *image*, a dynamical image that constantly changes in a very high number of different dimensions.’ (301) It was important to dwell on how seriously Metzinger takes this problem. For in continental scientism there is a tendency to group all aggressively scientific authors together as if they were a united front in agreement on all essential content as well. In these circles no one seems to have considered the huge difference on questions of isomorphy between Metzinger on the one hand and figures like Ladyman and Ross on the other, though the former views our access to reality as basically a hallucination, while the latter see no problem at all with accessing the structure of the world mathematically. At the same time, continental scientism regularly sneers at OOO for its insistence on the withdrawal of realities from all access, even as their hero Metzinger says precisely the same thing. Unfortunately, what seems to matter more for this group than anything else is a certain scientific *attitude*, and once this attitude is adopted then all else is forgiven and all internal differences are ignored; thus, the direct conflict between Metzinger and structural realism is treated as if it did not exist.

Nonetheless, as a science-minded realist, Metzinger cannot remain comfortable for long with this situation of hopeless obscurity in the realm of knowledge. For him this could only lead to relativism, which would thus bring an end to any denunciation of religions, pseudo-sciences, and folk psychologies—yet such denunciations are the very staff of life for scientific realists. Thus, Metzinger needs to find a way out of the jam. And this is why we often see him cautiously feeling around for some way to distinguish between mere simulations and full-blown representations, even though according to his own theory *everything* ought to be nothing better than a simulation. Here is one early attempt in the book: ‘Representata are those simulata whose function *for* the system consists in depicting states of affairs in the *real* world with a sufficient degree of temporal precision.’ (53) It is in no way clear how such a thing could even be possible, given the absolute nature of autoepistemic closure. And that is what makes the following passage so astonishing:

Phenomenal representation is that form of mental simulation, the proper function of which consists in grasping the actual state of the world with a sufficient degree of

accuracy. *In most cases this goal is achieved*, and that is why phenomenal representation is a functionally adequate process. (57; emphasis added)

For a scientific realist, this is a remarkably pragmatist theory of truth. Here it sounds as if the difference between simulation and representation is nothing more than that the latter allows us to survive and procreate. Consider as well the distinction he draws between dreams and waking life: ‘Dreaming systems don’t behave, don’t process sensory information, and are engaged in a global, but exclusively internal phenomenal *simulation*. In the waking state, [by contrast,] we interact with the world, and we do so under a global phenomenal *representation* of the world’. (108) It is difficult to see what this means, if not that waking life is usually practically successful in a way that dreams are not.

More specifically, what Metzinger seeks is some concept of *intentionality*. Like many commentators, Metzinger appears at first to understand Brentano’s meaning of the term, but later turns out to use it in precisely the opposite sense, even when interpreting Brentano. For on the one hand Metzinger defines the intentionality of the mental as meaning that ‘mental states seem to be always directed at an *object*, they are states *about* something, because they “intentionally” contain an object *within themselves*’. (16) The phrase ‘within themselves’ seems to indicate that he grasps Brentano’s meaning, but we see that this is untrue once we read the following statement: ‘The most fundamental level on which mental states can be individuated, however, is not their intentional content or the causal role that they play in generating internal and external behavior. It is constituted by their *phenomenal* content, by the way in which they are experienced from the inward perspective’. (16) But there is no distinction between the intentional and the phenomenal for Brentano. Contra Metzinger’s misreading, the intentional for Brentano does not mean leaping outside the mental sphere and making direct contact with the real. Intentionality intends intentional *inexistence*, not something lying behind that inexistence; indeed, this is one of the main lacunae in Brentano’s thought that his pupils tried to address.

But misreading Brentano is not such a mortal sin for Metzinger, who is concerned with Brentano and Husserl only as polemical targets. Much more important is whether Metzinger can actually find a way to jump outside the phenomenal capsule and make some sort of contact with the real. The same problem certainly exists for object-oriented philosophy, but note that Metzinger’s problem is much bigger than this, since for him it is vital that a sort of direct access be achieved in order to allow for scientific denunciations of folk psychology, religion, phenomenology, alchemy, astrology, and so forth—a brand of denunciation that is of little interest to object-oriented thought. Metzinger begins with another of his ‘background assumptions’, namely that ‘phenomenal states are a special subset of intentional states’ (111). In other words, Metzinger here *assumes* that the intentional and the phenomenal are already united, and this will simply yield the opposite problem of weakening his otherwise very strong claims about epistemic closure. For how can my phenomenal experience of a tree be a hallucination if it is already a ‘subspecies’ of direct contact with that tree? Metzinger’s attempt to have it both ways is sometimes fairly glaring:

However, there are many representational contents which *simultaneously* belong to the world and to the self... The philosophically most important example of a representational content bridging the gulf between subject and object in phenomenal experience is formed by the different varieties of the [phenomenal model of the intentionality relation]... If you visually attend to the book in your hands as a perceptual object, the process of attention is itself modeled on the level of conscious experience. It is like a nonverbal arrow pointing from you to the book, uniting subject and object as it were. (316)

The closing phrase ‘as it were’ does not get Metzinger off the hook, since he is making a strong and rather contradictory claim. If you insist like Metzinger that the book in your hands is merely a hallucination due to the autoepistemic closure of the nervous system, and then *also* claim that paying attention to the book is like a nonverbal arrow going outside and pointing at the real book, then this is an almost comical analogue of eating and preserving the cake simultaneously. Metzinger may as well say ‘humans touch the outside world by means of a touching faculty’. But here again, his aggressively scientific tone immunizes him in advance against any serious critique of his shaky logic, at least among his continental admirers.

Metzinger also has another, more technical way of saying that humans touch the world by means of a touching faculty. Namely, he says that we are able to ‘pulsate’ outside our hallucinatory capsules, our hopeless Platonic caverns: ‘we are systems which generate the intentional content of their overall representational state by pulsating into their causal interaction space by, as it were, transgressing their physical boundaries and, in doing so, extracting information from the environment.’ (21) Here once more, the weaselly phrase ‘as it were’ provides shifty cover for a radical claim: that it is somehow possible to leap beyond the cave and ‘pulsate’ into a direct relationship with reality. Autoepistemic closure turns out not to be so closed after all, since ‘pulses’ can run through the walls any time they please. If Metzinger’s phenomenal sphere resembles Leibniz’s monad in having no windows, Metzinger now reassures us that ‘[phenomenal models of the intentionality relation] can metaphorically be conceived of as windows.’ (585) There is no use of ‘as it were here’, but there is still a use of ‘metaphorically’, without clarification of what metaphorical means in comparison with the literal. Yet here just as with the earlier question of ‘minimally sufficient neural correlates’ for constraints on human experience, the most damning testimony comes from Metzinger himself: ‘Please recall that I have not given an explicit theory about intentional content in this book, or about what actually makes a mental or phenomenal state a carrier of information, or about the conditions under which it can embody knowledge...’ (612) There is no need to ‘recall’ this point, since it will be constantly on the mind of any reader who is still paying attention more than 600 pages into Metzinger’s gargantuan work. But while continental scientism condemns OOO for not having a completely worked-out theory of the interaction between sensual and real, OOO has at least deployed its full attention to attacking the problem. Metzinger, by contrast, blithely confesses that he has not even tried to explain how nonexistent selves can magically pulsate

from Plato's cave into direct contact with the outer world: a situation that could only be described as a miracle, 'as it were'.

7. CONCLUSION

We already know that Metzinger has a low opinion of philosophy done in *a priori* fashion. He criticizes what he calls 'analytical scholasticism... [which] consists in an equally dangerous tendency toward arrogant armchair theorizing...' (3) The finger-pointing about 'arrogance' is surprising, since even Metzinger's admirers would probably not claim that modesty is his strong suit. It is equally puzzling when he makes the accusation that analytic philosophers 'have a tendency to get technical even if there is not yet a point to it', (4) which could be said just as easily of Metzinger's regular flight into the neuro-terminological underbrush at moments when he is making his most simplistic *a priori* claims.

Be that as it may, an even more disingenuous aspect of Metzinger's program is his call for 'interdisciplinary' work, by which he seems to mean that neurophysiology will open itself to the Exotic Other of neurochemistry. He says that 'epistemic progress in the real world is something that is achieved by all disciplines *together*'. (4) But the phrase 'all disciplines' is a remarkable exaggeration, given Metzinger's attempts to lay waste to the fields of both phenomenology and psychoanalysis, treating them as utterly useless. Brentano and Husserl are simply doomed, as is Freud, since whereas science uses 'procedures' to settle conflicts,

the same is not true in cases where two experiential subjects arrive at conflicting statements like 'This is the purest blue anyone can perceive!' versus 'No, it *isn't*, it has a faint but perceptible trace of green in it' or, 'This conscious experience of jealousy shows me how much I love my husband!' versus 'No, this emotional state is not love *at all*, it is a neurotic, bourgeois fear of loss!'

The vulgarity and (yes) *corniness* of this parody should be sufficient proof that Metzinger has no interest in interdisciplinarity at all, except as a communication between the sciences and their new breed of philosophical handmaid. For just like phenomenologists and psychoanalysts, mainstream analytic philosophers are apparently driven by only the most jealous of motives: 'the deeper motive behind falling into... the isolationist extreme of sterility and [analytic] scholasticism may really be something else. Frequently it may actually be an unacknowledged respect for the rigor, the seriousness, and the true intellectual substance provided in the hard sciences of mind'. (4) Metzinger later asks rhetorically: 'is conscious experience a target phenomenon that will eventually force us to forget traditional boundaries between the humanities and the hard sciences?' (106) But what he really means here is that consciousness will eventually force us to *forget* the humanities as anything but an ethics panel made up of subservient handmaids. Especially audacious is his citation of Goethe: 'as Goethe said, all theory is gray but green is the golden tree of our inner life'. (439) But Goethe is no more likely an ally for Metzinger than Śaṅkara was. It is unlikely to say the least that Goethe would have supported

Metzinger's eliminationist program of replacing 'armchair theorizing' with brain research. Goethe shunned the grayness of theory not in order to reduce everything to subpersonal physical components, but to sing like a nightingale while developing a rather poetic sort of botany and an anti-Newtonian theory of color that is ridiculed to this day by scientific enforcers of Metzinger's stripe.

But Metzinger's hostility to psychoanalysis is especially noteworthy. The problem with psychotherapy, he believes, is its assumption that 'pathological structures can, simply by gaining the property of introspective availability, be dissolved, transformed, or influenced in their undesirable effects on the subjective experience of the patient by a magical and never-explained kind of "top-down causation"'. (33) Now, aside from the fact that the suppositions behind the talking cure are much less 'magical' than Metzinger's unexplained intentional pulsation beyond Plato's cave, therapeutic technique is only one portion of psychoanalysis. The wider question is whether any psychological phenomena at all can be explained by non-physical factors. And here Metzinger takes a hard line indeed, rushing to disdain 'psychoanalytic interpretations in terms of a repression of unpleasant information' (433) in favor of factors such as stroke damage to the right hemisphere of the brain. To strip the mental sphere of any psychoanalytic factors and to place all causality in the subpersonal physical realm is not a convincing olive branch when building the 'interdisciplinary' spirit of the future. As Metzinger shrilly puts it, 'the epistemological status of psychoanalysis resembles that of a religion and it is doubtful what contribution it can make to more rational forms of theory formation concerning consciousness and the phenomenal self'. (261) In that same passage, he holds (in perhaps 'prematurely technical' fashion) that the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams can be dispensed with in favor of 'aminergic demodulation and cholinergic autostimulation... [as well as] the overall connectivity of neurons...' (261) At the very least, we can be sure that the interdisciplinary knowledge of the future will not include phenomenology, psychoanalysis, or mainstream analytic philosophy. And of course, finding anything of value in *religion* will be entirely out of the question. When Metzinger insists that we 'not exclude researchers from outside philosophy of mind', (13) what he really means is that everyone should just cut the crap and bow down before the hard sciences.

Along the same lines, Metzinger constantly refers dismissively to the 'folk-psychological' aspect of nearly every theory he dislikes. For instance: 'Long before human beings constructed theories about intentional content or the causal role of mental representations, a folk-psychological taxonomy of the mental was already in existence'. (16) Moreover, 'theoretical approaches to the mental, still intuitively rooted in folk psychology, have generated very little growth of knowledge in the last twenty-five centuries'. (16) Elsewhere he disdains 'the typical grammatical error characterizing the folk psychology of self-consciousness by treating the content of a singular time slice of the process of self-representation as an object'. (271) In other words, anyone who disagrees with Metzinger's claim that momentary individual states of a thing should have priority over the thing treated as something enduring despite shifting states over time (a perfectly good philosophical debate) is guilty not just of being wrong, but of being sadly imprisoned in a

centuries-old fallacy generated by the primitive conditions of our evolutionary struggles. It is difficult to imagine a more smug response to one's opponents, unless the following dismissal of his professional rivals is even more so: 'folk phenomenology turns into folk metaphysics, as it were. On the other hand, if one interprets the content of a [phenomenal model of the intentionality relation] in a naïve-realistic fashion, one arrives at a folk epistemology...' (488) Given the incredible dismissiveness of such passages, it is always stunning to hear Metzinger make confessions of the following sort: 'The interdisciplinary project of consciousness research, now experiencing such an impressive renaissance with the turn of the century, faces two fundamental problems. First... *consciousness research is still in a preparadigmatic stage*'. (117; emphasis added)

If there were ever a time for modesty, the 'preparadigmatic stage' of one's science ought to be that time. But in his dealings with rival theorists, Metzinger generally behaves like a haughty modern physician laughing off a coven of village witches. In fact, he employs the medical metaphor himself: 'it is therefore important to have an effective cure for what Daniel Dennett has identified as "philosopher's syndrome"—mistaking a failure of imagination for an insight into necessity'. (213) He is sufficiently confident in this diagnosis to assert that there are 'failures of imagination' running all the way from Descartes through Kant. (429) But if the robotic debunkers Dennett and Metzinger count as 'imaginative' thinkers, then black is white and night is day. Not since Jerry Fodor's claim to be a better prose stylist than Kierkegaard²⁷ has there been a more ridiculous philosophical boast. Failure of imagination is, in fact, the problem with Metzinger

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