

CHAPTER 3: SKEPTICISM



It's an old problem. Are things as they seem? How could I know since I can't compare things-as-they-are to things-as-they-seem-to-me? If however I can't know, then what reason do I have to believe that there are things 'out there' that are like things-as-they-seem-to-me? What reason do I have to believe that there are any objects out there—independent of me?

It's commonsense, but commonsense can be unreliable. Descartes, writing in the 17th Century, when a variety of commonsensical beliefs were collapsing under the weight of new scientific discoveries, was worried. His aim in *The Meditations* was to challenge commonsensical beliefs in order to jettison those that were unwarranted and arrive at a foundation of beliefs that were certain, on which the edifice of belief could be reconstructed.

1 CAN WE TRUST THE 'EVIDENCE OF THE SENSES'?

'All that I have, up to this moment, accepted as possessed of the highest truth and certainty', writes Descartes in his *Meditations*, 'I received either from or through the senses. I observed, however, that these sometimes misled us; and it is the part of prudence not to place absolute confidence in that by which we have even once been deceived'.¹

Can we trust the evidence of the senses? We ordinarily assume that most of our experiences are *veridical*, that is, that they are experiences of real things as they really are. But sometimes things are not as they seem...



Lines of the same length appear to be of different lengths, straight sticks immersed in water appear bent, small, stationary lights in the night sky appear to be moving—leading to reports UFOs. Optical illusions are familiar (and there are lots of them on the powerpoint for this chapter which you'll find entertaining!). These are examples of *non-veridical experience*. In these cases we experience real things but we don't experience them as they really are. The lines are real, but they *look* to be of different lengths. No one is fooled by the Muller-Lyer illusion any

¹ Descartes, *Meditation I*

more: we know the lines are the same length. But we cannot help *seeing* them as of different lengths.

In other cases of non-veridical experience we aren't experiencing real things at all. We see afterimages and mirages—like the wet patch on the road ahead that isn't really there. And some non-veridical experiences are all-encompassing, as Descartes writes:

I am in the habit of sleeping, and representing to myself in dreams those same things, or even sometimes others less probable, which the insane think are presented to them in their waking moments. How often have I dreamt that I was in these familiar circumstances, that I was dressed, and occupied this place by the fire, when I was lying undressed in bed? At the present moment, however, I certainly look upon this paper with eyes wide awake; the head which I now move is not asleep; I extend this hand consciously and with express purpose, and I perceive it; the occurrences in sleep are not so distinct as all this. But I cannot forget that, at other times I have been deceived in sleep by similar illusions; and, attentively considering those cases, I perceive so clearly that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep, that I feel greatly astonished; and in amazement I almost persuade myself that I am now dreaming.²

How do we know that we're not dreaming—or systematically deluded about matters that we have taken for granted as commonsensical and certain? Descartes is worried...

I sometimes think that others are in error respecting matters of which they believe themselves to possess a perfect knowledge, how do I know that I am not also deceived each time I add together two and three, or number the sides of a square, or form some judgment still more simple, if more simple indeed can be imagined?

Descartes entertains the possibility that the existence of a good God guarantees that he is not always deluded:

But perhaps Deity has not been willing that I should be thus deceived, for he is said to be supremely good. If, however, it were repugnant to the goodness of Deity to have created me subject to constant deception, it would seem likewise to be contrary to his goodness to allow me to be occasionally deceived; and yet it is clear that this is permitted.

Of course the problem is that we can doubt the existence of a good God just as easily as we can doubt the existence of an external world. So Descartes, in the *Meditations*, feels that he has to prove (to his satisfaction) the existence of God in order to extricate himself from skepticism!

But suppose we cannot prove the existence of God. Can we provide any independent reason, apart from an appeal to God's goodness, to believe that there is an 'external world'—a world of objects and events independent of ourselves? Are there any propositions of whose truth we can be certain even without divine assistance? To see whether this is possible, Descartes contrives a *thought experiment*

² Descartes, *Meditation I*

I will suppose, then, not that Deity, who is sovereignly good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity; I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses, and as falsely believing that I am possessed of these; I will continue resolutely fixed in this belief, and if indeed by this means it be not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, viz., [suspend my judgment], and guard with settled purpose against giving my assent to what is false, and being imposed upon by this deceiver, whatever be his power and artifice.

Having gotten into this pickle, can Descartes extricate himself? Is there any good reason to reject *solipscism*—the view that only I (in your case, Reader, only you) exist and that all the objects of my experience are my thoughts? Is there any good reason to reject Descartes Evil Demon hypothesis or, if demons are not *au courant*, the possibility that you are a brain in a vat, or that you are enmeshed in the Matrix?³

2 EXTERNAL WORLD SKEPTICISM

Arguably, it is logically possible that all my experiences are non-veridical.⁴ But could I *have reason to believe* that? Here in philosophyland we *love* picky distinctions and I will suggest that even if it could be that all my experiences really were non-veridical, I could not have any good reason to believe that they were.

Prima facie, it seems that the recognition that some of our experiences are non-veridical gives us reason to doubt whether any of our experiences are veridical. Like Descartes, we are in the habit of sleeping and dreaming. Some of our dreams are highly realistic and, when dreaming, we rarely realize that we're dreaming. You *could* be dreaming right now for all you know! Any given experience could turn out to be non-veridical.

Moreover, we could have reason to believe that any one of these experiences was non-veridical. We wake up, and recognize that we were dreaming; we pull the apparently bent stick out of water and see that it is straight; we get to what appeared to be a wet patch on the road and see that the ground is dry, and that what appeared to be a wet patch has receded into the distance. But can we get from here to the conclusion that we could have reason to believe that *all* our experiences are non-veridical—to full-blown skepticism? Remember, being picky, the question is not whether all of our experiences could be non-veridical—we grant that. The question is whether we *could have reason to believe* that all our experiences were non-

³ For the classic discussion of the Matrix hypothesis see David Chalmers [The Matrix as Metaphysics](#). For lots more links to discussions of the 'simulation argument', the argument to the effect that we may be living in a computer simulation, see [The Simulation Argument page](#).

⁴ This is controversial. See O. K. Bouwsma, "Descartes Evil Genius" at <http://home.sandiego.edu/~babert/analytic/Bouwsma1949.pdf>

veridical, that is, whether we should be External World Skeptics. Consider the following argument for External World Skepticism:

2.1 A Bad Argument for External World Skepticism

(1) *Any* experience is such that I could have reason to believe it is non-veridical.

(2) Therefore I could have reason to believe that *all* experiences are non-veridical.

(1) is the *premise* of the argument, a statement cited as evidence for the *conclusion*, which is the claim we're arguing for—which, in this argument, is (2). An argument is *valid* if its premise(s) make its conclusion true, that is, *if it is logically impossible for its premise(s) to be true and its conclusion false*. We want to know whether the Bad Argument for External World Skepticism is valid.

Showing invalidity is easier than proving validity. To show that an argument is invalid, we just need to produce a *counterexample argument*—another argument *of the same form* that has *all true premises and a false conclusion*. And, fortunately, the argument for External World Skepticism is invalid. We will show that by producing a counterexample argument.

In using the Method of Counterexample to test for invalidity we rely on two facts:

Fact #1: If an argument has all true premises and a false conclusion then it must be invalid.

Fact #2: If two arguments are of the same form, and one of them is invalid, the other must be invalid too!

Fact #1 just follows from the definition of validity: if it's logically impossible for a *valid* argument to have all true premises and a false conclusion then no argument that has all true premises and a false conclusion can be valid: any such argument must be *invalid*. No problem here. Fact #2 is frankly a stipulation. For the purposes of doing formal logic we understand validity as a matter of *logical form*, so that nothing but the logical form of an argument contributes to its validity or invalidity. We can't give a serious account of logical form apart from a formal system and we aren't there yet. But we can get an intuitive understanding of what the form of an argument is and learn to recognize when two arguments are of the same form by considering examples:

Argument A

All men are mortal.
Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Argument B

All even numbers are divisible by 2.
6 is an even number.
Therefore, 6 is divisible by 2

Arguments A and B are, intuitively of the same form, namely:

All S are P
x is an S
Therefore x is a P

Here we use 'S,' 'P' and 'x' as place-holders or *variables* to display the form of argument of which both Argument A and Argument B are instances. Arguments A and B are about completely different subject matter but they both plug into the same form.

Now let's consider the form of the Bad Argument for External World Skepticism:

- (1) Any experience is such that I could have reason to believe it is non-veridical.
- (2) Therefore I could have reason to believe that all experiences are non-veridical.

This form of this argument is:

- (i) *Any* x could be F
- (ii) Therefore *all* x's could be F

In other words, it's a particular kind of argument from *any* to *all*, from the premise that it's possible for any given object to have a certain property to the conclusion that it's possible for *all* objects to have that property. This argument however is invalid because we can easily produce an example of this form that has a true premise and false conclusion:

Counterexample Argument

- (3) *Any* runner could win this race.
- (4) *All* runners could win this race.



A race cannot have more than one winner. If two or more runners come in at the same time, then it's a tie: there is no winner. So while (3) is true—it is at least logically possible that any one of the runners could win the race, however unlikely—(4) is necessarily false. This argument is therefore a counterexample to the Bad Argument for External World Skepticism, since it is (a) of the same form and (b) has all true premises and a false conclusion. Since the argument has a counterexample it is shown to be invalid!

However we really haven't gotten very far in our campaign against skepticism because showing that the argument is invalid doesn't show that the conclusion is false! An invalid argument can have a true conclusion! You can believe the right thing for the wrong reasons! We can however take on that conclusion independently. *Could* we have reason to believe that all our experiences were non-veridical? Here is an argument to show that we can't:

2.2 A Pretty Good Argument Against External World Skepticism

- (5) We have reason to believe that an experience is non-veridical only if we assume that other experiences are veridical.
- (6) Therefore, we could never have reason to believe that *all* our experiences are non-veridical.

Is (5) true? To make a case for it, consider how we test to see whether an experience is veridical or not. Why do I believe that an experience of mine was just a dream? Because I wake up and, *assuming that my experiences after waking up are the real thing*, I conclude that my dream-experiences were not-veridical. How do I determine that what appeared to be a wet patch on the road ahead was a mirage? I go up to the place it appeared to be and discover it's dry. In doing this I *assume that the experience I get when I test is veridical*. If I don't make that assumption I have no reason to believe that the experience I'm testing is non-veridical.

And, in general, unless we assume that at least *some* experiences are veridical we cannot have reason to believe that any experience is non-veridical! (6), therefore, follows. We cannot test *all* of our experience against some further experience that we assume to be veridical because there *is* no further experience: all of our experience is *all* of our experience! The argument is, therefore, valid.

However it is important to be clear about what this argument shows—and doesn't show. The argument does not provide any positive reason to believe that any of our experiences are veridical, or that there is an 'external world'. It shows only that there is no reason to believe that any experience is non-veridical unless we assume that some experience is veridical, but it does not provide any reason to make that assumption! It does not establish the existence of an external world or even show that we have good reason to believe there is one. In general, showing that we don't have any good reason to believe a proposition, *P*, doesn't by itself show that we have good reason to believe *Not-P*. So, even if we could never *have reason to believe* that all our experiences were non-veridical, it does not follow that we have reason to assume that any of our experiences are veridical. So at this stage of the discussion we are in we don't have reason to believe either that there is an external world, a world of mind-independent objects, or that that isn't. And, as Descartes suggests, it is logically possible that there isn't: it is possible that I am the only thinking being in the world and that all my experiences, of persons and other material objects, are my dream.

2.3 A Plausibility Argument for the Existence of an External World

Do we have any positive reason to reject solipcism, to believe that there is a mind-independent world independent of us? Arguably, the external world hypothesis is the best explanation of certain familiar phenomena. First, there is the fact that things happen to us against our will. Presumably, if we were making it all up, we'd do better for ourselves. Secondly, we note that things happen unexpectedly. Finally we note that in waking life our experience is coherent, unlike the way it is in dreams. So many suggest the existence of an independent world explains our experiences better than any known alternative. That may be the best we can do—an argument to the best explanation.

However the matter is not conclusively settled. It is still logically possible that things be much, much weirder than we imagine. Dan Dennett that raises a number of interesting philosophical questions about what is possible in his philosophical fantasy 'Where Am I?'⁵ with which we close this chapter.

⁵The version here is excerpted from the full story at <http://www.newbanner.com/SecHumSCM/WhereAmI.html>

3 WHERE AM I

Several years ago I was approached by Pentagon officials who asked me to volunteer for a highly dangerous and secret mission...the Department of Defense was spending billions to develop a Supersonic Tunneling Underground Device, or STUD. It was supposed to tunnel through the earth's core at great speed and deliver a specially designed atomic warhead "right up the Red's missile silos," as one of the Pentagon brass put it...

The problem was that in an early test they had succeeded in lodging a warhead about a mile deep under Tulsa, Oklahoma, and they wanted me to retrieve it for them...According to monitoring instruments, something about the nature of the device and its complex interactions with pockets of material deep in the earth had produced radiation that could cause severe abnormalities in certain tissues of the brain...which were apparently harmless to other tissues and organs of the body.

So it had been decided that the person sent to recover the device should leave his brain behind. It would be kept in a safe place as there it could execute its normal control functions by elaborate radio links...Would it really work? The Houston brain surgeons encouraged me... "We're simply going to make the nerves indefinitely elastic by splicing radio links into them" ...

The day for surgery arrived at last and of course I was anesthetized and remember nothing of the operation itself. When I came out of anesthesia, I opened my eyes, looked around, and asked the inevitable, the traditional, the lamentably hackneyed postoperative question: "Where am I?" The nurse smiled down at me. "You're in Houston," she said, and I reflected that this still had a good chance of being the truth one way or another. She handed me a mirror. Sure enough, there were the tiny antennae poling up through their titanium ports cemented into my skull...

"I gather the operation was a success," I said. "I want to go see my brain." They led me (I was a bit dizzy and unsteady) down a long corridor and into the life-support lab. A cheer went up from the assembled support team, and I responded with what I hoped was a jaunty salute. Still feeling lightheaded, I was helped over to the life-support vat. I peered through the glass. There, floating in what looked like ginger ale, was undeniably a human brain, though it was almost covered with printed circuit chips, plastic tubules, electrodes, and other paraphernalia.

"Is that mine?" I asked.

"Hit the output transmitter switch there on the side of the vat and see for yourself," the project director replied.

I moved the switch to OFF, and immediately slumped, groggy and nauseated, into the arms of the technicians, one of whom kindly restored the switch to its ON position. While I recovered my equilibrium and composure, I thought to myself: "Well, here I am sitting on a folding chair, staring through a piece of plate glass at my own brain . . . But wait," I said to myself, "shouldn't I have thought, 'Here I am, suspended in a bubbling fluid, being stared at by my own eyes?'" I tried to think this latter thought. I tried to project it into the tank, offering it hopefully to my brain, but I failed to carry off the exercise with any conviction. I tried again. "Here am I, Daniel Dennett, suspended in a bubbling fluid, being stared at by my own eyes." No, it just didn't work...

Nagged by confusion, I attempted to orient myself by falling back on a favorite philosopher's ploy. I began naming things.

"Yorick," I said aloud to my brain, "you are my brain. The rest of my body, seated in this chair, I dub 'Hamlet.'" So here we all are: Yorick's my brain, Hamlet's my body, and I am Dennett. Now, where am I? And when I think "where am I?", where's that thought tokened? Is it tokened in my brain, lounging about in the vat, or right here between my ears where it seems to be tokened? Or nowhere?"...I began making a list of alternatives:

1. Where Hamlet goes there goes Dennett. This principle was easily refuted by appeal to the familiar brain-transplant thought experiments so enjoyed by philosophers. If Tom and Dick switch brains, Tom is the fellow with Dick's former body — just ask him; he'll claim to be Tom and tell you the most intimate details of Tom's autobiography. It was clear enough, then, that my current body and I could part company, but not likely that I could be separated from my brain. The rule of thumb that emerged so plainly from the thought experiments was that in a brain-transplant operation, one wanted to be the donor not the recipient. Better to call such an operation a body transplant, in fact. So perhaps the truth was,

2. Where Yorick goes there goes Dennett. This was not at all appealing, however. How could I be in the vat and not about to go anywhere, when I was so obviously outside the vat looking in and beginning to make guilty plans to return to my room for a substantial lunch? This begged the question I realized, but it still seemed to be getting at something important. Casting about for some support for my intuition, I hit upon a legalistic sort of argument that might have appealed to Locke.

Suppose, I argued to myself, I were now to fly to California, rob a bank, and be apprehended. In which state would I be tried: in California, where the robbery took place, or in Texas, where the brains of the outfit were located? Would I be a California felon with an out-of-state brain, or a Texas felon remotely controlling an accomplice of sorts in California? It seemed possible that I might beat such a rap just on the undecidability of that jurisdictional question, though perhaps it would be deemed an interstate, and hence Federal, offense. In any event, suppose I were convicted. Was it likely that California would be satisfied to throw Hamlet into the brig, knowing that Yorick was living the good life and luxuriously taking the waters in Texas? Would Texas incarcerate Yorick, leaving Hamlet free to take the next boat to Rio?...

3. Dennett is wherever he thinks he is. Generalized, the claim was as follows: At any given time a person has a point of view and the location of the point of view (which is determined internally by the content of the point of view) is also the location of the person...

Point of view clearly had something to do with personal location, but it was itself an unclear notion. It was obvious that the content of one's point of view was not the same as or determined by the content of one's beliefs or thoughts. For example, what should we say about the point of view of the Cinerama viewer who shrieks and twists in his seat as the roller-coaster footage overcomes his psychic distancing? Has he forgotten that he is safely seated in the theater? Here I was inclined to say that the person is experiencing an illusory shift in point of view. In other cases, my inclination to call such shifts illusory was less strong. The workers in laboratories and plants who handle dangerous materials by operating feedback-controlled mechanical arms and hands undergo a shift in point of view that is crisper and more pronounced

than anything Cinerama can provoke. They can feel the heft and slipperiness of the containers they manipulate with their metal fingers. They know perfectly well where they are and are not fooled into false beliefs by the experience, yet it is as if they were inside the isolation chamber they are peering into. With mental effort, they can manage to shift their point of view back and forth, rather like making a transparent Necker cube or an Escher drawing change orientation before one's eyes. It does seem extravagant to suppose that in performing this bit of mental gymnastics, they are transporting themselves back and forth.

But to return to my adventure. At length, both the doctors and I were satisfied that I was ready to undertake my subterranean mission. And so I left my brain in Houston and headed by helicopter for Tulsa. Well, in any case, that's the way it seemed to me. That's how I would put it, just off the top of my head as it were. On the trip I reflected further about my earlier anxieties and decided that my first postoperative speculations had been tinged with panic. The matter was not nearly as strange or metaphysical as I had been supposing. Where was I? In two places, clearly: both inside the vat and outside it. Just as one can stand with one foot in Connecticut and the other in Rhode Island, I was in two places at once. I had become one of those scattered individuals we used to hear so much about...This answer did not completely satisfy me, of course...For it did seem undeniable that in some sense I and not merely most of me was descending into the earth under Tulsa in search of an atomic warhead.

When I found the warhead, I was certainly glad I had left my brain behind, for the pointer on the specially built Geiger counter I had brought with me was off the dial. I called Houston on my ordinary radio and told the operation control center of my position and my progress. In return, they gave me instructions for dismantling the vehicle, based upon my on-site observations. I had set to work with my cutting torch when all of a sudden a terrible thing happened. I went stone deaf. At first I thought it was only my radio earphones that had broken, but when I tapped on my helmet, I heard nothing. Apparently the auditory transceivers had gone on the fritz. I could no longer hear Houston or my own voice, but I could speak, so I started telling them what had happened. In midsentence, I knew something else had gone wrong. My vocal apparatus had become paralyzed. Then my right hand went limp — another transceiver had gone. I was truly in deep trouble. But worse was to follow. After a few more minutes, I went blind. I cursed my luck, and then I cursed the scientists who had led me into this grave peril. There I was, deaf, dumb, and blind, in a radioactive hole more than a mile under Tulsa. Then the last of my cerebral radio links broke, and suddenly I was faced with a new and even more shocking problem: whereas an instant before I had been buried alive in Oklahoma, now I was disembodied in Houston.

My recognition of my new status was not immediate. It took me several very anxious minutes before it dawned on me that my poor body lay several hundred miles away, with heart pulsing and lungs respirating, but otherwise as dead as the body of any heart-transplant donor, its skull packed with useless, broken electronic gear. The shift in perspective I had earlier found well nigh impossible now seemed quite natural. Though I could think myself back into my body in the tunnel under Tulsa, it took some effort to sustain the illusion. For surely it was an illusion to suppose I was still in Oklahoma: I had lost all contact with that body.

It occurred to me then, with one of those rushes of revelation of which we should be suspicious, that I had stumbled upon an impressive demonstration of the immateriality of the soul based upon physicalist principles and premises. For as the last radio signal between Tulsa

and Houston died away, had I not changed location from Tulsa to Houston at the speed of light? And had I not accomplished this without any increase in mass? What moved from A to B at such speed was surely myself, or at any rate my soul or mind — the massless center of my being and home of my consciousness. My point of view had lagged somewhat behind, but I had already noted the indirect bearing of point of view on personal location. I could not see how a physicalist philosopher could quarrel with this except by taking the dire and counterintuitive route of banishing all talk of persons...

[M]y technical support team sedated me into a dreamless sleep from which I awoke, hearing with magnificent fidelity the familiar opening strains of my favorite Brahms piano trio. So that was why they had wanted a list of my favorite recordings! It did not take me long to realize that I was hearing the music without ears. The output from the stereo stylus was being fed through some fancy rectification circuitry directly into my auditory nerve. I was mainlining Brahms... My sleep lasted, I later learned, for the better part of a year, and when I awoke, it was to find myself fully restored to my senses. When I looked into the mirror, though, I was a bit startled to see an unfamiliar face. Bearded and a bit heavier, bearing no doubt a family resemblance to my former face, and with the same look of spritely intelligence and resolute character, but definitely a new face...I soon accommodated to my new body, to the point of being unable to recover any of its novelties to my consciousness or even memory. The view in the mirror soon became utterly familiar. That view, by the way, still revealed antennae, and so I was not surprised to learn that my brain had not been moved from its haven in the life-support lab.

I decided that good old Yorick deserved a visit. I and my new body, whom we might as well call Fortinbras, strode into the familiar lab to another round of applause from the technicians, who were of course congratulating themselves, not me. Once more I stood before the vat and contemplated poor Yorick, and on a whim I once again cavalierly flicked off the output transmitter switch. Imagine my surprise when nothing unusual happened. No fainting spell, no nausea, no noticeable change. A technician hurried to restore the switch to ON, but still I felt nothing. I demanded an explanation, which the project director hastened to provide.

It seems that before they had even operated on the first occasion, they had constructed a computer duplicate of my brain, reproducing both the complete information-processing structure and the computational speed of my brain in a giant computer program. After the operation, but before they had dared to send me off on my mission to Oklahoma, they had run this computer system and Yorick side by side. The incoming signals from Hamlet were sent simultaneously to Yorick's transceivers and to the computer's array of inputs. And the outputs from Yorick were not only beamed back to Hamlet, my body; they were recorded and checked against the simultaneous output of the computer program, which was called "Hubert" for reasons obscure to me. Over days and even weeks, the outputs were identical and synchronous, which of course did not prove that they had succeeded in copying the brain's functional structure, but the empirical support was greatly encouraging...

The laboratory technicians now showed me the master switch, which had two positions, labeled B, for Brain (they didn't know my brain's name was Yorick) and H, for Hubert...

The one truly unsettling aspect of this new development was the prospect, which was not long in dawning on me, of someone detaching the spare — Hubert or Yorick, as the case might

be — from Fortinbras and hitching it to yet another body — some Johnny-come-lately Rosencrantz or Guildenstern. Then (if not before) there would be two people, that much was clear. One would be me, and the other would be a sort of super-twin brother...My strongest intuition was that in such an eventuality I would survive so long as either brain-body couple remained intact, but I had mixed emotions about whether I should want both to survive...

There was another prospect even more disagreeable: that the spare, Hubert or Yorick as the case might be, would be detached from any input from Fortinbras and just left detached. Then, as in the other case, there would be two Dennets, or at least two claimants to my name and possessions, one embodied in Fortinbras, and the other sadly, miserably disembodied. Both selfishness and altruism bade me take steps to prevent this from happening. So I asked that measures be taken to ensure that no one could ever tamper with the transceiver connections or the master switch without my (our? no, my) knowledge and consent. Since I had no desire to spend my life guarding the equipment in Houston, it was mutually decided that all the electronic connections in the lab would be carefully locked. Both those that controlled the life-support system for Yorick and those that controlled the power supply for Hubert would be guarded with fail-safe devices, and I would take the only master switch, outfitted for radio remote control, with me wherever I went. I carry it strapped around my waist and — wait a moment — here it is. Every few months I reconnoiter the situation by switching channels. I do this only in the presence of friends, of course, for if the other channel were, heaven forbid, either dead or otherwise occupied, there would have to be somebody who had my interests at heart to switch it back, to bring me back from the void. For while I could feel, see, hear, and otherwise sense whatever befell my body, subsequent to such a switch, I'd be unable to control it. By the way, the two positions on the switch are intentionally unmarked, so I never have the faintest idea whether I am switching from Hubert to Yorick or vice versa. (Some of you may think that in this case I really don't know who I am, let alone where I am. But such reflections no longer make much of a dent on my essential Dennettness, on my own sense of who I am. If it is true that in one sense I don't know who I am then that's another one of your philosophical truths of underwhelming significance.)

In any case, every time I've flipped the switch so far, nothing has happened. So let's give it a try

“THANK GOD! I THOUGHT YOU'D NEVER FLIP THAT SWITCH! You can't imagine how horrible it's been these last two weeks — but now you know; it's your turn in purgatory. How I've longed for this moment! You see, about two weeks ago — excuse me, ladies and gentlemen, but I've got to explain this to my . . . um, brother, I guess you could say, but he's just told you the facts, so you'll understand — about two weeks ago our two brains drifted just a bit out of synch. I don't know whether my brain is now Hubert or Yorick, any more than you do, but in any case, the two brains drifted apart, and of course once the process started, it snowballed, for I was in a slightly different receptive state for the input we both received, a difference that was soon magnified. In no time at all the illusion that I was in control of my body — our body — was completely dissipated. There was nothing I could do — no way to call you. YOU DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I EXISTED! It's been like being carried around in a cage, or better, like being possessed — hearing my own voice say things I didn't mean to say, watching in frustration as my own hands performed deeds I hadn't intended. You'd scratch our itches, but not the way I would have, and you kept me awake, with your tossing and turning. I've been totally exhausted,

on the verge of a nervous breakdown, carried around helplessly by your frantic round of activities, sustained only by the knowledge that some day you'd throw the switch.

“Now it's your turn, but at least you'll have the comfort of knowing I know you're in there. Like an expectant mother, I'm eating — or at any rate tasting, smelling, seeing — for two now, and I'll try to make it easy for you. Don't worry. Just as soon as this colloquium is over, you and I will fly to Houston, and we'll see what can be done to get one of us another body. You can have a female body — your body could be any color you like. But let's think it over. I tell you what — to be fair, if we both want this body, I promise I'll let the project director flip a coin to settle which of us gets to keep it and which then gets to choose a new body. That should guarantee justice, shouldn't it? In any case, I'll take care of you, I promise. These people are my witnesses.

“Ladies and gentlemen, this talk we have just heard is not exactly the talk I would have given, but I assure you that everything he said was perfectly true. And now if you'll excuse me, I think I'd — we'd — better sit down.”