

Is the Hypothesis of the Extended Mind Conceivable within the Framework of Phenomenal Intentionality?

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Must we drop the idea that the mind needs to be outlined in sharp opposition to external reality if we accept the existence of extended cognition? Traditionally, supporters of the Extended Mind have thought so: any attempt to separate the mind from the world by exploiting the internal-external dichotomy is merely high-handed. Thus, the conventional, internalist and Cartesian conception of cognition must be supplanted by a new model able to explain the extended mind hypothesis. In any case, Terry Horgan and Uriah Kriegel maintain this is not a necessary outcome: the validity of such a hypothesis can also be explained by an internalist framework such as the Phenomenal Intentionality paradigm.

Firstly, I try to critically analyse some assumptions inherent to the Extended Mind paradigm: Horgan and Kriegel's examination seems to reveal some circularities in the Extended paradigm; for instance, it seems to require, and at the same time to reject, a clear distinction between mind and world.

Secondly, I inquire whether this form of the Phenomenal Intentionality framework is indeed able to account for the extended mind hypothesis: can a phenomenally intentional subject justifiably consider the alleged cases of external cognition? The assessment criteria suggested by the authors seem hard to apply from a first-person perspective: some skeptical implications of their framework screen the access to the world and render the answer to the question of the extended mind either unwarranted or trivial.

In the end, I believe that the confrontation between these two opposing paradigms can underline their respective critical issues: they both, in fact, fail to describe the mind and the world as two different but never completely separable realities. A successful solution to this concern may provide the key to a new approach to subjectivity that might prove useful in settling some of the thorniest issues in the contemporary debate about the mind.

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