

The Brain in a Vat

The scenario of the brain in a vat, first aired thirty-five years ago in Hilary Putnam's classic paper, has been deeply influential in philosophy of mind and language, epistemology, and metaphysics. This collection of new essays examines the scenario and its philosophical ramifications and applications, as well as the challenges which it has faced. The essays review historical applications of the brain-in-a-vat scenario and consider its impact on contemporary debates. They explore a diverse range of philosophical issues, from intentionality, external-world skepticism, and the nature of truth, to the extended mind hypothesis, reference magnetism, and new versions of realism. The volume will be a rich and valuable resource for advanced students in metaphysics, epistemology, and philosophy of mind and language, as well as for anyone interested in the relations between language, thought, and the world.

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Acknowledgments

I first encountered Hilary Putnam's reflections on the brain-in-a-vat (BIV) scenario as a graduate student in one of Sidney Morgenbesser's courses in the early 1990s. I was quickly convinced of the significance of these reflections. Partly this was due to the power of Putnam's writing and the provocativeness of his conclusions in *Reason, Truth, and History* (including in the "Brains in a Vat" chapter). But it was also due in part to the twinkle in my teacher's eyes and the devious look on his face when, on those blustery autumnal days on the seventh floor of Columbia's Philosophy Hall, Morgenbesser ruminated on what could be said or thought if the BIV scenario were actual. (Then again, maybe it was the way Morgenbesser managed to connect the BIV scenario, now to the centerfield play of Yankees' great Joe Dimaggio, now to the interpretative debates surrounding the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, now to the (by then) long-overdue fourth chapter of my dissertation.) But I pondered the BIV scenario even out of the classroom. To this day, one of my most cherished memories from graduate school remains going out to dinner with both Putnam and Morgenbesser (and several others) one evening after Putnam delivered one of his Dewey Lectures (subsequently published by Columbia University Press as *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World*). Since Putnam was still grappling at the time with the issues surrounding his "internal realism," those of us at dinner that night had the opportunity to discern the lingering effects of the BIV scenario on Putnam's thinking. It should come as no surprise, then, that the two greatest debts in my own thinking on these matters are to Hilary Putnam and to Sidney Morgenbesser. (I still can't read "Brains in Vats" without thinking of those twinkling eyes and that devious grin – let alone Dimaggio and the Israelite exodus.)

I have continued to think about the BIV scenario over the years, during which time I have benefited profoundly from relevant discussions with many people. With apologies to those I have forgotten to name, these people include Kelly Becker, Paul Boghossian, Jessica Brown, Tony Brueckner, Gary Ebbs, Sean Ebels-Duggan, Kati Farkas, Brie Gertler, Alvin Goldman, Peter Graham, Thomas Grundmann, David Henderson, Terry Horgan, Henry Jackman, Jesper Kallestrup, Jennifer Lackey, Jack Lyons, Brian McLaughlin, Susana Nuccetelli, Duncan Pritchard, Baron Reed, Sarah Sawyer, Ernie Sosa, Åsa Wikforss, Crispin Wright, and no doubt others; I would like to express my gratitude to all of them.

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I dedicate this book, with love, to my father, Allen Goldberg, who, though not a philosopher in the narrow (academic) sense of the word, has pondered central issues in metaphysics and epistemology for longer than I have walked this earth. I continue to remain uncertain, however, whether he knows that he is not a brain in a vat.