Practical Assent in *The Practical Self* by Anil Gomes[1]

The Practical Self is a Kantian book three times over. First, it is, in many parts, a book *about* Kant; the overarching aim of the book is to revive and if possible to complete the Kantian and Cartesian projects of moving from the resources available to the self-conscious thinker to the establishment of the existence of an objective external world — and to do this, Gomes must critically work through various moves from those earlier attempts. Secondly, Gomes takes, in several parts, key arguments and concepts from Kant's critical and practical philosophy as live argumentative tools for his own purposes. But even in the parts of the book not directly concerned with Kant's proprietary argumentative ends and means, this is a deeply Kantian book in flavour — that is the third Kantianism of the book. At every turn, we see unabashedly full-strength claims how things must be, given other ways things must in turn be, or the elimination of ways things cannot be, or ways in which we cannot but think of them as being.

Put altogether, it's natural to think that the result of all of this will be a book that is aloof or inaccessible; beyond reach or regard by those of us who don't normally swim in Kantian waters. Nothing could be a less apt description of this book. In Gomes' hands, the Kantian and Cartesian grand projects find a tractably sober presentation; the selected moves from Kant and other historical figures are given lucid and unharried exposition; the active Kantian concepts and argumentative tools are deployed in ways that shed dependence on the more arcane aspects of the Kantian framework; and the fierce standards of argument make for an exceptionally exciting read — on every page, one feels, there is something to jump up and down about.

Of the many points in the book ripe for discussion, my response will focus on the first positive turn in the book – an argument that comes in the chapter on Faith (Chapter 4), in which Gomes argues that we have a distinctively practical reason to assent to the claim that we are the agents of our own thoughts. In what follows I'll first set out the context in which this argument comes up in the book, then I'll set out the argument itself, and I'll end by raising a number of critical questions for it.

First, then, some stage-setting. In order to proceed in his project of moving from the resources available to the self-conscious thinker to the establishment of an objectively existing world, Gomes must address Lichtenberg's complaint that the most the self-conscious thinker can posit is that 'there is thinking', on the model of 'there is lightning'; 'One should say *it is thinking*, just as one says, *it is lightning*. To say *cogito* is already too much as soon as one translates it as I am thinking.' (Lichtenberg K76, cited in Gomes p.131). What emerges from his insightful extended discussion of Lichtenberg in Chapter 3 is an original understanding of what it would take to answer the challenge: we must provide grounds for thinking of ourselves as the agents

[1] Thanks to audiences at University of Leeds, especially Will Gamester, Heather Logue and Jess Keiser, and at the University of Oxford, especially Anil Gomes, for discussion.

of our own thoughts. Merely to show that there is a unified location – a self – at which the thoughts are happening is not enough – for all that, the thoughts might still merely strike at that unified self like lightning. No, to answer Lichtenberg we must produce grounds for the claim that we are not just unified loci of our thoughts, but the *agents* of our thoughts. This demand comes in two versions: we must show that we can render the idea of ourselves as mental agents *intelligible* to ourselves, and we must show that we are *epistemically entitled* to think of ourselves as such. It is this second version of the demand that will be important in what follows.

By the time he reaches Chapter 4 Gomes already takes himself to have shown that this demand cannot be met through either experience or *a priori* conceptual mastery; as he says, 'Our status as agents does not show up in our experience of the world. And there is nothing conceptually incoherent about the idea that we might be the mere passive recipients of all our thoughts.' (p.102) What, then? His answer: faith, in the Kantian sense of practical assent. There are some claims, the idea is, that we are required to practically assent to, because they precondition the attainability of an end that we are required to set ourselves. The attitude we end up adopting is not one of belief – or at least, not so long as we think of belief as a state that aims at the truth of a given matter on the basis of some theoretically justifying evidence; 'if what it is to be a belief is constitutively tied up with the aim of truth in such a way that only considerations which bear on the truth of a claim count towards believing the claim, then assent on practical grounds cannot be a form of belief.' (p.111). The attitude we end up adopting, rather, is a sui generis state of *Fürwahrhalten*, or holding-for-true, which we take up for distinctively practical reasons. The closest folk psychological counterpart Gomes gives us for reference is that of *acceptance* of a claim, which we may do for practical reasons that do not straightforwardly reflect theoretical justification for thinking it is true.

Arguments of the kind Gomes has in mind here are not transcendental arguments – indeed, the rational derivation of states of practical assent is explicitly *contrasted* in this chapter with the strategy made available by transcendental arguments. With a bit of a squint, however, I have found it useful to think of the two argument-forms as having something of an overall outline in common. A transcendental argument begins with a claim that all parties are inclined to agree on, and then identifies a substantive precondition of that starting claim that one of the parties initially wanted to deny. The dialectical force of the argument, then, is that of showing that so long as one's interlocutor wants to hold on to the accepted starting claim, she is already precommitted to the very substantive claim that had been in contention. The practical version of this argument-shape goes as follows: it begins with an end that everyone must set themselves, and then identifies a substantive claim that preconditions the attainability of that end. Since we can only set ourselves ends that we take to be attainable

(various caveats aside[2]), the practical requirement to set ourselves the end in question carries over through closure to a practical requirement to accept the substantive precondition on its attainability. So as in the case of a transcendental argument, the dialectical force here is not designed to move a sceptic or to provide justification for the substantive claim on its own terms. It is to demonstrate to one's interlocutor that she must already be precommitted to that claim, given its conditioning role in the attainability of an end that she does, because she must, accept. As Gomes puts it, 'If it is a condition on setting an end that we take it to be attainable and we are required to assent to any claim which is a condition on the attainability of a required end, then a claim will be practically required when it is a condition on the attainability of some end which we are required to set.' (p.115)

So much for the argument's outline. Gomes thinks we can run a specific argument of this kind as a way of generating the needed Lichtenberg-busting grounds for our conception of ourselves as the agents of our own thoughts. His proposed argument, or rational reconstruction, goes as follows[3]:

> (1) We are practically required to set ourselves the end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world
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> (2) For that, we must take that end to be attainable
>
> (3) For that, we must take ourselves to be the agents of our own thoughts[4]

I'll briefly talk through each of the steps in this argument as presented by Gomes, before turning to my questions about whether it is an argument we should accept. Premise one says that we self-conscious thinkers are each required to set ourselves the end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world. Why is that? Because self-conscious judgments are rarely punctate events. They typically occur in the course of stretches of cognitive activity, many of which have an internal telic structure. In these cases the self-conscious thoughts are in part individuated by their position in the broader cognitive context. As Gomes says,

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[2] The caveats, on pp.115-6 are that these must be ends that we actively *will* rather than merely *want*; that sometimes we only will the *attempt* at some further specified end; and that we need not *believe* the end to be attainable, we need only *practically assent* to their attainability.

[3] Gomes calls this an argument, as I will too, but it is not an argument we must work through performatively to reach the attitude of practical assent; in that sense it is best thought of as a rational reconstruction of the way in which we find ourselves holding such attitudes.

[4] This numbered reconstruction is mine; Gomes sets out the argument in a number of places, but one version is: 'Our aim is to show that we have practical grounds for assenting to the claim that we are the agents of our thinking. This requires us to show that assent in the claim is a rational requirement on the pursuit of ends that we are required to set. I have argued […] that self-conscious judgments are situated within extended episodes of cognitive activity, some of which are guided by decisions and thus involve the setting of ends. No doubt many of these ends are particular and idiosyncratic but there is at least one end that self-conscious deliberators are required to set: that of settling some question about the propriety of their perspective on the world.' (pp.124-5)

> even though we do not decide to make particular self-conscious judgments, such judgments are part of extended stretches of cognitive activity which may themselves be deliberate. The judgment 'I am thinking' which concludes a piece of reasoning, for instance, is partly individuated by the stretch of reasoning which comes before it. And *that* stretch of reasoning may be the result of a decision to pursue some end. (p.96)

Which ends? They may be many and varied: I might be solving the riddle of the sphynx, while you might be recalling the value of pi to 1000 decimal points, and yet others among us, we might imagine, will be pursuing less elevated cognitive ends — working out tutorial allocations, deciding what to have for lunch, planning a child's birthday party, and so on. These are all *different* ends of course, but they have in common that they all involve the evaluation of the first order beliefs about and experiences of the world that make up the thinker's perspective on the portion of reality she is considering. This overarching end is the one that we are required to set ourselves, regardless of which particular thinking projects a given individual is idiosyncratically inclined to pursue. By grounding the requirement in stretches of cognitive activity, rather than in isolated first person thoughts, Gomes is spared the implausible-seeming task of showing there to be some end that guides our thinking of individual thoughts. It is much more plausible that there is an end that guides *stretches* of cognitive activity.

From here, the argument gets going relatively quickly. If we are required to set ourselves the end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world then we must take it to be possible for us to do so. Otherwise, Gomes argues, we are not rational in setting ourselves the end. (Something in this vicinity is surely plausible: I cannot rationally set myself the end of being in seven places at once, since that is not something I take it that I can do.) But if it is possible for me to settle these questions – which is, notice, an *active* enterprise – then I must be the agent of my thoughts, which is to say that at least some of my thoughts must fall under my agency. And here we reach the Lichtenberg-busting endpoint of the argument. I am practically required to have faith in my own mental agency, because it preconditions the attainability of an end that I must set myself – that is, that of settling questions about the quality or appropriateness of the first order beliefs and experiences that make up my perspective on the world.

A final observation about this argument. Premise one is surprisingly strong. Not only is this an end that we all happen to have, or are inclined to have, or typically have; this is an end that we self-conscious thinkers *must* have. What's more, Gomes makes it clear that the modal force of this requirement is something in the neighbourhood of (or perhaps just is) the categorical imperative. It would not, for instance, suffice for this to be an end that we find ourselves saddled with as a contingent matter of cognitive evolutionary biology. It must be an end that we are required to have, as a matter of necessity, in a way that flows from our nature as self-conscious thinkers. Why so strong? To avoid the charge of wishful thinking. If we replaced the end in this premise with any end that any one of us merely happened to have, then this argument-form would appear to legitimise a sort of bootstrapping of epistemic entitlement

wherever we would find it congenial to have. Suppose, for instance, that I happen to have the end of learning Japanese in three months; for that to be attainable I am practically required to assent to the claim that I am a whizz at learning languages. But, of course, that would be nothing but wishful thinking – a rationally bankrupt form of reasoning that Gomes needs to hold at a distance from whatever the form of reasoning is that provides him with his anti-Lichtenbergian grounds. Strengthening the end in question to one that we do not simply choose, but one that we *must* set ourselves is his way of avoiding this pitfall. It is part of what gives this form of reasoning the sort of stability, or anti-accidentality, that avoids its collapse into localised instances of wishful thinking.[5]

There is, I think, something tantalising about this argument. Surely it is right that there are certain claims that find ourselves liable to accept, not because of the evidence we find in their favour, but because without them we couldn't make sense of the things that we do or that we try to do. And what's more, we are surely *right* to accept such claims for such reasons: it doesn't smack of acting incautiously or carelessly, but rather evinces an epistemically mature spirit of commonsense — we *must* accept these claims, or else we wouldn't be able to get going on anything else. What is intriguing about this argument is that it doesn't merely leave matters there, pointing to a little-noticed but psychologically plausible and motivationally intelligible distinctive kind of attitude that we sometimes hold towards claims for practical reasons. This argument goes further in elucidating the *epistemic entitlement* we have for those claims – in saying how it is that it can be epistemically well-grounded to hold such an attitude for such reasons. For Gomes, this is part of what is needed in answering the Lichtenbergian challenge. But more broadly, this is a tantalising aim, because if we could properly epistemically ground the attitude of practical assent, it may be that this is a notion that could profitably be taken up into mainstream philosophy of mind and epistemology, as a way of helping to characterise parts of the mind that don't quite fit the more traditional truth-holding attitudes of belief or (evidentially grounded) knowledge.

I take it that the entitlement in question originates from the force (whatever it is) of the requirement that we must set ourselves the end in question in premise one, which carries over through closure via an interim step of the end's supposed attainability, to a substantive claim that conditions that attainability. We are entitled in accepting that final claim to whatever degree and in whatever mode in which we were originally entitled to set ourselves that end — which, as we saw, is an end that we must *necessarily* set ourselves, so (the idea might be) are surely entitled in doing so. Recall too the theoretical significance of that necessity claim: Gomes prevents his argument from collapsing into a charter for wishful thinking by strengthening the end mentioned in the first premise to one that we *must* set ourselves, rather than looking to the hurly-burly of individual ends that we happen to set ourselves. So the key to understanding the entitlement that is present in the good case, and isn't in the case of localised wishful

[5] The second thing that gives this stability is that the claim must not be theoretically decidable (p. 113), so that there can be no internal conflict to the unity of reason.

thinking, has something to do with the strengthening of that first premise to the identification of a necessary end rather than a merely contingent one.

Here's a starting worry about this strategy: there is an anti-tragedy assumption guiding this strengthening move that (ironically) leaves it open that the move itself rests on a piece of wishful thinking. Why think it impossible that there could be an end that we must all set ourselves, that we don't even take to be attainable? A quick clarification before I press this question further. There are at least two ways of reading the key verb, *settling*, that features in this required end, which are naturally read as implying different levels of demandingness. It might be read in the progressive, as something that we must be *in the course of doing*, or it might be read as an achievement verb – as an undertaking that we must succeed in completing. The attainability of the end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world is much more plausible read the first way, so that's how I propose to read it – viz., as having no inbuilt commitment to our achieving the settling of our questions, only to our undertaking to settle them.

My question now is: what is it exactly about the move from contingent to necessary ends that is supposed to immunise that end from the possibility that it is not, in fact, attainable, and that our commitment to any claim that would seem to render it attainable is nothing more than a case of wishful thinking? (An instructive comparison here is with Montaigne's argument that faith in God is universal – there are no atheists on their deathbeds – but for that very reason faith is psychologically shallow because improperly motivated. Here the requirement that we must all have faith is precisely taken to indicate a *lack* of epistemic credentials.[6]) Another way of putting the challenge is that there is a *must implies can* principle underlying the strengthening move – but we are left without an account of why this is a principle we should accept.

Perhaps the answer will come from details about the modal force, nature and source of the necessity of setting the end. I won't pursue that option here because I'm not exactly sure how to fill in this part of the picture. The requirement to set ourselves this end emerges, for Gomes, from the observation that self-conscious judgments tend to arise in the context of stretches of telic cognitive activity, which can all be properly characterised under this broader end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world. But this still leaves us with unanswered questions about the force, source and nature of the requirement that results. In what sense, exactly, *must* I set myself this end, on the basis that I *in fact* seem to comply with it in many cases? In what sense does the modal claim follow from the descriptive, and what sort of requirement does it generate?

Without a way of filling in this part of the picture, things risk looking even worse for the strengthening move than might at first have seemed. Not only is it unclear why and whether a

[6] Montaigne 1576/2006

move from a contingent to a necessary end gives the resulting attitude of practical assent the epistemic credibility Gomes needs to have it play the theoretical role it does in his argument. It strikes me that a move to positing a required end precisely *weakens* our rational responsibilities with respect to it, and so too the epistemic credentials of any attitude that results – thus making it *less* likely that the resulting attitude is safe from the charge of wishful thinking. After all, in cases where I select an end from a multitude of options – *I will learn Japanese in three months!* – it is incumbent on me to check the end for attainability before committing, and I can be properly rationally criticized where those checks are not sufficiently robust. These checks underwrite the sort of move Gomes has in mind between steps 1 and 2 in the argument above — from the setting of an end to its implied perceived attainability; if I didn't take it to be attainable, I would not be rational in setting the end. Contrast this with a case where I find myself with an end because it is one that I *must* have. My due diligence with respect to checking its attainability now seems neither here nor there. It's an end that I must have, regardless of how attainable I take it to be. To illustrate: suppose that I find myself facing a forced choice between climbing down an unclimbable mountain or certain and immediate death by exposure.[7] There is really no choice here at all – I cannot but give the unattainable a go. Am I rationally criticisable in doing so? My strong intuition is that I am not. If this is right, then in just these cases – the cases in which the end is not locally chosen, but *required* of us in some way – we have reason to reopen the move from 1 to 2 in Gomes' argument above. In other words, the fact that we posit a required end no longer implies, by the standards of rationality, that we take it to be attainable.

Suppose I'm right that the strengthening move doesn't, as Gomes had hoped, automatically immunise his argument against the charge of wishful thinking. This wouldn't settle, but would merely reopen the question whether the end he identifies is in one that we (must) set ourselves, and if so whether it is an end that we take to be attainable. Perhaps he can still get what he wants – which is to say, epistemically entitled assent to our own mental agency – if it turns out that the identified end *is* apparently attainable, even if the move to rendering that end a necessary one hasn't by itself ruled out the possibility that it isn't. My question now is: do we have independent reason to think that Gomes's identified end – that of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world – is one that self-conscious thinkers of our kind in fact set for ourselves?

I think we have overintellectualisation reasons for suspicion that it isn't – or, at least, that it isn't for all self-conscious thinkers of our kind. To see this, notice that Gomes is inviting us to adopt a third order psychological attitude. At the first order are the beliefs and experiences that constitute one's perspective on the world. At the second are the evaluative stances we take towards those first order beliefs and experiences. The suggestion from Gomes is that we ascend yet another level, at which we set ourselves the end of engaging in this second order evaluative mental activity. This is certainly something that some of us can do when in the right

[7] This example is modelled on one given by Bill Brewer in person.

frame of mind — in a seminar room, say, or in a pensive mood. And Gomes is surely right when he says that this is what Descartes' enquirer is in the business of doing. I even think it is something that some of us may be *prone* to do – especially those whose perspective on the world is routinely challenged. But can all of us do it? Can children? Can the intellectually impoverished or the cognitively diminished? It certainly isn't obvious that the answer is 'yes' for all thinkers who would count as self-conscious. The capacity to reflect on our own first order thoughts and experiences (conceptually guaranteed for all self-conscious thinkers) doesn't automatically imply a capacity to reflect on that second order capacity at the third order.

Of course, the question whether we can do it rests in large part on what would take for us to count as having done it. Gomes is explicit that the setting of an end in the relevant Kantian sense involves the active *willing* of the end, or *deciding to pursue it,* so part of what it takes is an occurrent mental event of willing an end with a particular content (rather than something more dispositional, say). He says, 'Ends which are the object of our will are ends which we have decided upon: ends that we *will* and do not merely wish.' (p.91) If this is really what it takes, it is a high bar to meet; speaking for myself, I'm not sure I have ever actively willed this end, even if reflecting on my perspective is something I often do. Likewise, the presumed attainability of the end is one that must be positively assented to on Gomes' view – naturally read as entertaining of a thought about its attainability – rather than a mere absence of assent in its unattainability. Again, it seems to me that this is asking rather a lot. I also find myself with questions about how often we have to will the end. Once in a lifetime? Must we reaffirm it once in a while? And how much attempted evaluative activity at the second order would suffice for the end's attainment?

While these are genuine questions I have about how Gomes' argument is supposed to work, I don't doubt that there will be ways of answering them that will make the envisaged psychology of the end-setting a better fit for the sorts of limited self-conscious thinkers we are. Even supposing such adjustments can be made, however, there is another sort of question lingering in the background, this time a normative one: is this an end we *ought* to set ourselves? Is it one we would wish for ourselves or our loved ones?

Let's walk through the levels again: we spend much of our time at the first order, immersed in beliefs about and experiences of the world, alongside other first order attitudes. It's no doubt beneficial to our functioning that have the capacity to keep an eye on the quality of this first order perspective on the world – that we are, at the very least, dispositionally able to take a higher-order evaluative stance towards it. But except in certain special circumstances – unless, for instance, we are engaged in an exploratory exercise in the method of radical doubt – it *doesn't* seem especially beneficial to our functioning to reside at that second order too resolutely. Take Second-order-Sam. Sam has thoughts about the world just like the rest of us. She believes it to be raining, that Trump is the greatest current threat to geo-political stability, and that cats make better pets than dogs. She has well-functioning sensory systems, and

experiences her immediate physical environment just fine. The special thing about Sam, however, is the immense importance she places on her second order evaluative attitudes. Rarely does a first order thought about or experience of the world pass through her mind, but she bolts up to the second order to review whether it's a good thing to think, or a good experience to have. What do we think of Sam? I don't think it's a stretch to say that this describes a less-than-optimal set of mental facts: Sam comes across as a little neurotic, somewhat self-alienated, and probably exhausted. Suppose now that – looking for guidance about how she should organise her mental life – she comes to us for advice. And suppose that rather than encouraging her to spend a bit more time dwelling at the first order as any good mindfulness app would do, we urge her to rise up another level. We tell her: not only is it good that she places such importance on second-order evaluation of her first order states, but she should set the performance of that second-order evaluative activity as her end. This is, I think we can all agree, bad advice. The general lesson here is that even if the fact that we have the capacity for second-order evaluative mental activity seems like a good feature of our psychologies, this is a far cry from thinking that it would be good for us to explicitly set ourselves the end of engaging in this second-order activity.

Now, of course, there will be ways of softening the filled-out story of what Gomes' end-setting involves that needn't land him in anything like this caricature. His suggestion is surely not that we occupy this third order perspective *all the time*, nor that the end we set is *always to be settling questions* at the second order. What the example of Second-order Sam brings out is not that it is always bad to reflect on what we think and experience, only that it's bad to do it too much, and perhaps this can be dealt with by reading a tacit proportionality qualifier into Gomes' posited end – perhaps the end is *sometimes*, or *when appropriate* to settle questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world. Or perhaps it will be cleared up once we have more information about the force, nature and source of the requirement in question. The thing is that by now it looks to me like we have all the materials on the table from Gomes to account for everything we need without appeal to anything like the claim that we are required to set ourselves – to actively *will* – a certain end with respect to our second-order mental activity. That is, that this second order activity is something we self-conscious creatures in fact sometimes do; and it is a good thing that we sometimes do it. What would be missing if we left things there?

Let me summarise where we've got to. There is something tantalising about Gomes' argument in which he has us derive a special sort of epistemically entitled practical assent in our own mental agency from the supposed practical requirement each of us is under to set ourselves the end of settling questions about the propriety of our perspective on the world. It is tantalising in the context of Gomes' own project – this is what he needs to neutralise Lichtenbergian worries – but there is also a broader prospect in the offing of characterising a distinctive kind of epistemically well-grounded attitude of practical assent that we might find other uses for in our philosophical theorising about our minds. I have raised a number of challenges to that argument: specifically, I have questioned whether the necessity of the end

immunises it against the charge of wishful thinking, and have given a few reasons for resisting the idea that this end is really one that we do or must set ourselves – at least, where that end is interpreted in the strong terms given by Gomes.

Still, I find there to be something compelling about the notion of an attitude of epistemically well-grounded practical assent, something worth seeing if we can make stand on its own feet. I want to end with a pair of lightning sketches of two ways forward that might allow us to preserve that notion, released from some of the stronger Kantian aspects of its presentation as offered by Gomes.

The first would be to uncouple the rational status of the attitude of practical assent from any claim to a positive epistemic status. The attitude is still *reasons-responsive* – it's just that the reasons being responded to are of a practical rather than a theoretical or evidential nature. This would be a concessive move forward – it would be to give up on the idea that we have any special epistemic entitlement to hold these claims as true. But we are rational in doing so, and that is not nothing. That we are rational in accepting such claims may be enough to satisfy the intuition that we are not being epistemically reckless or irresponsible in their acceptance. But it would not be enough to show that their epistemology is any better grounded than that of prudentially justified claims, including those claims it is psychologically beneficial for us to hold as true – and at this point, we might worry we have collapsed the idea we wanted to hold on to that there is a distinct category of practical assent that can be held apart from mere wishful thinking or prudentially beneficial acceptance.

For those with this worry, the second option will be to insist that practical assent isn't just a rational attitude. Over and above its rationality, the attitude is one with positive epistemic status – we are positively entitled to hold these claims as true. In a way, this is a much more natural position to hold; there is something uncomfortable about the idea that I might occupy an attitude of holding-for-true towards some claim which conforms to the norms of rationality, but to which I am not epistemically entitled. (Am I in the right or in the wrong here?). But of course, *where we get this epistemic entitlement from* in this second sketch is the big question. As Gomes shows us, it cannot be from the familiar sources of theoretical justification – that would turn this distinctively practical attitude into something quite different. My own (not very Kantian) inclination would be to turn to a virtue epistemological framework, that makes it much harder to pull apart the norms of rationality and questions of epistemological well-groundedness. These are, as we might put it, the sorts of attitudes a virtuous epistemic agent would hold in these situations, or they are the products of the subject's well-functioning intellectual traits. But whether or not Gomes would be tempted by this option, it seems to me that this question about how epistemic entitlement gets into the picture is the big question that needs answering if he is properly to fend off the Lichtenbergian challenge that we lack entitlement to think of ourselves as the agents of our own thinking. It is not a question I have found the answer to on the page in *The Practical Self*. But it is, I think, an extremely tantalising question that lies right at the heart of this book.

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