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MEMORY CONSIDERED AS
AN EXTERNAL SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE
WITHIN AN EPISTEMOLOGY OF THEOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

A Paper

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Course
PHIL 625: Religious Epistemology

by

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May 2006

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INTRODUCTION

Problem

Epistemological systems are not necessarily consistent with metaphysical systems. With regard to the will, the metaphysical position known as theological determinism (TD) asserts that the actions and thoughts of human beings are ultimately determined by God even while they are experienced as if autonomous. This affects which epistemology a determinist can consistently adopt. It seems that a consistent epistemology has not yet been formulated for TD.

Reliabilism, a form of externalism, is somewhat consistent with TD and is therefore a good starting point. The modification I call “hard externalism,” which eliminates the internal as a source of knowledge, fits the needs of TD. A major problem this system faces is the distinction between internal and external sources of knowledge. The typical use of “internal” is inconsistent with the defining factor of TD, namely, that the human will is not the primary thinker or actor. As a result, sources of knowledge previously thought to originate within the mind of the cognizer, such as memory and introspection, would require reclassification in order to be consistent with the presuppositions of hard externalism.

Thesis

Since the presuppositions of hard externalism thus require reclassification of at least some internal sources as external, this can be turned into a test. If these presuppositions, which seem to lead necessarily to this reclassification, are born out by a successful (coherent) reclassification, then hard externalism will have overcome its first major hurdle. Thus, I propose the first stage in this experiment, an analysis of one source of knowledge.

I have selected memory for the initial stage of the analysis because, as many will admit, it seems to straddle the line between what is external and what is internal. This is intended as a first

step toward dissolving the distinction between internal and external sources of knowledge in view of eventually eliminating the internal sources category altogether and making hard externalism distinct from reliabilism.

Significance of Research

This research will benefit a neglected area within epistemology that exists perhaps due to a tendency to combine TD with compatibilism. But, epistemological systems consistent with compatibilism will not necessarily be consistent with TD. Therefore, a new system that is fully consistent with TD is needed and I here propose hard externalism. This line of research may eventually uncover novel facts and new solutions to stubborn problems that other epistemologies have been unable to resolve.

Methodology

The thesis will be defended by close examination of memory as a source of knowledge with an attempt to classify it as fully external. Memory is a natural starting place due to its median status. That is, while perception is usually admitted to be a completely external source of knowledge, and intuition and introspection are, to my knowledge, universally considered to be internal, a generous philosopher may consider memory's status to be, upon careful consideration, debatable.

The analysis of memory will be done through the following arguments: the passive nature of memory use, the apparent practical indistinguishability between the natural and artificial memory apparatuses, and a comparison with testimony. Should the experiment be successful, the method used with memory will be suggested as a method that could possibly be employed to "externalize" introspection, intuition, etc.

ARGUMENTS

Hard externalism, the epistemology I am proposing as a partner to TD, is an attempt to follow determinism to its conclusions within epistemology. This should be an interesting investigation that, to the best of my knowledge, has not been attempted previously. I shall begin with beliefs and knowledge because belief formation and knowledge acquisition are foundational to how thought is seen to function within determinism. Justification is a secondary consideration that takes the role of thought about thought and is, in that sense, a meta-analysis that can only be done after this more fundamental analysis is complete.

Beginning with knowledge, then, the first issue is control. Within deterministic systems, there is no actual control regardless of the fact that there is usually an experience *taken to be* volitional. This is the key defining characteristic of determinism. It is also the defining factor in hard externalism. Because there is no possibility of manipulation of the environment outside of the subject and no absolute control within the subject's own mind, the things he experiences are all presented to him, within *theological* determinism, by God. Thus, all sources of knowledge are *passively* received by the subject.

The classic sources of knowledge are testimony, perception, memory, introspection (consciousness), and intuition (reason).¹ Perhaps this list could be added to or nuanced, but it will suffice for this analysis. Within other epistemological systems, the distinction between what are external and internal sources of knowledge is very important. However, within hard externalism, apparently, the distinction may be nonsensical or at least not necessary since the notion represented by the word "internal" loses a significant aspect of its definition, as will be shown.

¹ Robert Audi, "The Sources of Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Epistemology*, ed. Paul K. Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 72.

Definition of Internal and External

Saul Kripke uses the notion of epistemic counterparts to distinguish external sources from internal sources.² This distinction hinges on the notion of substitutability for any source of knowledge. For example, he argues, one can conceive of a substance that has all the macroscopic qualities of water that could fool a person into thinking it is water. This is an “epistemic counterpart.” However, pain apparently has no epistemic counterpart since nothing could feel *like* pain and not *be* pain. Therefore, anything with a counterpart is external because it is actually reducible to sensory data from a source outside the self. And, anything that is not external is internal.

This method of marking the boundary between internal and external sources of knowledge will not work within hard externalism because both the experience of painfulness *and* the sensory experience of water-ness are passively received. Moreover, if they are both passively received, they both originate from “outside” and are subject to error based upon the reliability of the source rather than the directness of the access. Kripke’s point is still important, there is a distinction here, but it is mostly existential and not necessarily relevant to epistemology within the deterministic view. If all of our thoughts are passively received instead of being generated internally, then it is clear that Kripke’s distinction only reveals what thoughts *seem* to be the most internal psychologically, but which remain passive and outside of our control.³

That which we seem to experience directly (emotions, feelings, thoughts, memories, etc.) or which seems to be under some form of volitional control may lead us to assume that it is

² Sarah Sawyer, “An Externalist Account of Introspective Knowledge,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (1999): 361. For the original paper on the notion of epistemic counterparts see S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture III, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972). For the original use of the term “epistemic counterpart” see C. McGinn, “Anomalous Monism and Kripke’s Cartesian Intuitions,” *Analysis* 37 (1977): 78-80.

³ While it remains to be shown that introspection itself can be external, thoughts like, “I am in pain.” may suffer from the same criticisms as Descartes’ cogito. Namely, when one is presented with an experience one cannot

internal. Nevertheless, internality is actually just as incoherent, or at least as mysterious, a concept as free will. From this perspective, it seems that no other definition of internalism would fare any better than Kripke's. Therefore, it is concluded that metaphysical determinism and epistemological internalism with respect to knowledge are incompatible.

Extreme Externalism

Since externalism merely *adds* external sources of knowledge to internal ones, it is not sufficient for the demands of determinism. Therefore, a harder form of externalism, one that eliminates internal sources of knowledge altogether, is required. No admittance of internal sources, as the true genesis of any knowledge, can be allowed simultaneously with determinism.

Nevertheless, the question remains, is it coherent to view all sources of knowledge as external in this sense? All of the sources must be examined in order to see if such a concept is coherent. While testimony and perception are clearly and admittedly within the external camp, memory, introspection, and intuition are usually thought to be internal. As a test case, I shall begin with memory. If I can present a coherent argument for memory's external status, the same methodology might be capable of establishing the possibility for other contested sources of knowledge.

Biological Function

According to Thomas Reid, we naturally believe what our automatic cognitive functions "tell" us even while their "testimony" is subject to revision based upon generalizations taken from experience.⁴ Also according to Reid, memory is an immediate faculty that comes not from

be sure that there is even a subject in existence that is experiencing it. For details see W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 90.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, "Justification and Theism," in *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga Reader*, ed. James F. Sennett (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 177.

reasoning but from our constitution, that is, the way we are constructed and the way we function.⁵ Memory has a biological or, more specifically, a neurological basis. This nervous system is, in some sense, external to our core since, according to all but physicalists, we are not identical with our bodies. Thus, when I look at my hand, I perceive it to be ‘out there’ in front of me. It is a part of me in some sense, but it is not part of my sense of being.

Perception works through this apparatus and, except for medical discoveries, we are ignorant of the nature of its function, so it is, by definition, subconscious. In fact, most of the processes of our biological apparatus are subconscious, and they must be considered external to our innermost consciousness, which, by definition, is limited to the sphere of awareness. For example, in visual perception, the eye processes visual data within the complex neurological circuitry of the retina. The retina sends the data through the optic nerve to the visual cortex. Both the optic nerve and the visual cortex are involved in further data manipulation. Binocular spatial data is combined with color and shape data to create a three-dimensional data packet. Once created, this packet is subconsciously associated with previously experienced data packets in the hippocampus. In this way, the scene is even partially *interpreted* without the conscious mind being involved. In the final state, the data packet together with contextual and historical associations is presented to the consciousness-bearing portions of the frontal lobe. Presumably, at least biologically, this is where the consciousness actually interfaces with the perceptual data. Before this passive receipt, none of this was under conscious control or subject to inspection.^{6, 7}

⁵ W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 161-162.

⁶ The notion that memory may be active or passive is considered by Audi. Nonetheless, his definition of “active” reduces to a form of awareness instead of an action originated by the cognizer. For details see Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Second edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), 65.

⁷ Robert Audi admits that memory functions passively when he says, “A remembered proposition can surface in consciousness ... can spontaneously surface upon the need for the proposition as an answer to a question or as a premise for an inference ...” See Audi, “The Sources of Knowledge,” 72.

The neurological scheme for memory is quite similar. In fact, as far as the consciousness-bearing portions of the frontal lobe are concerned, the data packets received from the visual cortex and the data packets received from the hippocampus are of the same category of thing. They are both data packets that are received passively from subconscious parts of the nervous system. Therefore, memory, like perception, bears these three hallmarks of externality: passivity, lack of control, and lack of awareness.⁸

The Epistemological Consequences of the Function of Memory

That the function of memory is outside of our consciousness neurologically allows for two revealing possibilities. There are at least two alternate ways in which memories could possibly be stored outside of the normal, memorial portions of the brain. First, we can imagine a rather futuristic scenario in which a man has a damaged portion of his brain replaced with a microchip. If it functions in the same way as the neurons would have, his behavior will be unchanged. Yet, this creates an interesting question epistemologically: is the information he stores in and retrieves from the chip a memory? One can hardly reject the chip as a legitimate source of memory knowledge because it both performs *all* of the requisite functions of the neurons that it replaced and it measures up to all of the tests of justification that the neurons did. Passing these tests of justification would then satisfy the objection that the artificial memories are not the subject's because they are indistinguishable in function. To think otherwise would be to embrace physicalism, the notion that our selves/being and our bodies are the same thing. That is, to reject the microchip as the subject's own memories is to assume that his ownership of the memories is dependent upon their biological and neurological composition rather than their

⁸ The conscious mind is capable of distinguishing, as a matter of its function, data packets that are memorial from data packets that arrive from the sensory nervous system. Locke and Russell, according to Martin and Deutscher, make this the defining distinction between memory and imagination. While this is true, it does not bear on the case at hand and it is essential not to confuse the issues in order to see the argument that I am making here.

function within the cognitive process.

Let us consider a twist in the plot. What if the chip takes a form similar to that of a disk drive in a computer? What if the microchips function very well, but are limited in size so that the man finds himself filling them up and exchanging them for blank ones. He could then store all of his memories in a file cabinet to be retrieved at any time he wishes. Such a scenario clearly reveals that the capacity for memory, the act of recalling, and memories themselves, while being internal to the brain, can be indistinguishable from functions performed by devices that are fully external to our consciousness.

Similarities of Biological Memories with Written Memories

Second, we can consider a diary as a form of indirect memory.⁹ When a young woman commits important details of her life to the pages of a diary, she does so in order to avoid forgetting them. With time, the neurological memories in her brain will fade, but the diary will faithfully retain 100% of the details put into it. Later, she may read the diary and be presented with first-person data about the past. These memories are completely external and are not stored in the way that neurological memories are, yet the functional nature of the basic steps of memory storage and retrieval are the same in both cases.¹⁰ In either case, recalling the memory involves data being presented to the conscious mind, which receives it passively. It is hard to imagine a less internal way for memory to function than this.

One important difference, however, is the conscious effort to store the information in the case of the diary. Whereas the biological function of memory is automatic in most cases and in the relevant sense, the diary entries are written for a purpose by an agent. This issue will become

⁹ Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, Second edition (New York: Routledge, 2003), 57.

¹⁰ C.B. Martin and Max Deutscher, "Remembering," in *Knowledge: Readings in Contemporary Epistemology*, eds. Sven Bernecker and Fred Dretske (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 535. These authors

much more important when considering intuition and introspection as potentially external sources of knowledge, but makes little difference when considering the status of memory as a source of knowledge. This is supported by instances of completely natural yet volitional memory storage. Most will admit that memory normally functions automatically and without invocation of the will. However, there are many cases where the subject tries to remember. A student studying for a test will rehearse information from multiple angles and repeat exercises with the conscious intention of remembering. As a result, because natural memory *can* either be under volitional control or can be automatic, the subject's intention does not bare upon the validity of the microchip or diary examples given above.

Testimony

It may be possible to go one step farther. Consider the function of testimony as a source of knowledge. Based upon the example of the diary as a form of memory, we are lead to ask whether testimony and memory are distinguishable in a sense that is relevant to this discussion. Michael Huemer uses the example of Mike2, a man identical to him who was created five minutes ago, to examine the nature of memory knowledge.¹¹ Since Mike2 possesses memories of events that he never personally experienced, Huemer argues, it is clear that his memory beliefs do not constitute knowledge. However, in this scenario, the neurological information is actually a form of testimony! A clear causal chain can be traced from the events in Michael's life to Mike2's memories. Though the doppelganger's beliefs about his relationship to the memories are in error, the data stored in Mike2's brain is not fictitious.

What if Mike2's memories were somehow falsified? What if a man was somehow given

doubt that a diary can constitute a true memory yet their description of the process fulfills all of the criteria for memory given on page 515 of the same article. (These criteria are listed on page 10 below).

¹¹ Michael Huemer, "The Problem of Memory Knowledge," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (1999): 352.

memories that were fictitious? Typically, false testimony leading to a stored memory is not seen as a failure of memory.¹² Yet, if memory is seen as a subset of testimony, we can detect a potential problem. Thus we must propose that memory, as well as testimony, is merely a link in a chain from an information source to the conscious mind.

In addition, testimony meets the three criteria for memory proposed by Martin and Deutscher: a memory must represent the thing remembered, it must be observed if public and “owned” if private, and there must be a causal link between the thing remembered and its representation in memory.¹³ Testimony certainly represents the thing remembered. It also represents a legitimate link in a causal chain. One might doubt whether testimony meets the second criterion, but, if we go back to the example of the diary and notice that it is a form of testimony, we see that all of these distinctions are beginning to overlap. This overlap renders the distinction between memory and testimony useless in supporting internality for memory.¹⁴

Testimony also shares with memory, over and against the other sources of knowledge, a temporal disposition. That is, both testimony and memory give us information that is outside of the present whereas the other sources of knowledge give us information about the present.¹⁵

And, lastly, memory and testimony are both considered *essential* sources of knowledge. This means that they *transmit* rather than *generate* knowledge.¹⁶ All of these similarities work to establish memory as a form of testimony.

Conclusions for the Arguments

Based upon the examples given, there is sufficient reason to think that memory, as a

¹² Martin and Deutscher, 514.

¹³ Ibid, 515.

¹⁴ Audi, in stating that perception has no fixed list of modalities, suggests that similar overlaps between perception and memory may further blur the distinctions between the sources of knowledge. See Audi, “The Sources of Knowledge,” 91.

¹⁵ Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, 56.

¹⁶ Audi, “The Sources of Knowledge,” 81.

source of knowledge, can be consistently and coherently viewed as external to the subject in every relevant sense. If this is the case, then the burden of proof now falls to those who wish to regard memory as internal. They must show why internality with regard to memory is not superfluous.

ANTICIPATED COUNTERARGUMENTS

One could argue that memory is part of the cognitive process, and so, regardless of any attempt to view it as passive, it is still experienced within the conscious self and therefore retains the status of internality. In response, I point out the nature of the conscious mind as essentially subjective experience. In other words, I am defining consciousness *as* the experience of anything. I believe this is the most fundamental definition one can give. While it is true that memory is typically a part of the neurological process, I believe the arguments presented above reveal that it need not even be part of the nervous system and this is enough to remove it from any conception of the core consciousness.

Next, I examine the claim that I am irresponsibly editing the carefully crafted definitions for the various sources of knowledge, especially memory and testimony, simply to fulfill my purposes. It is true that I am performing major surgery on definitions widely accepted by non-determinists, therefore, I believe I am justified in my revisions in light of the presuppositions entailed by TD. In addition, I believe I have uncovered some clear cases of ambiguity and overlap in the definitions. In fact, I believe that these ambiguities, when realized, will become a serious obstacle to non-determinists and internalists with regard to knowledge.

One might wonder, if memories come ultimately from God, whether there is a causal gap between memories and reality similar to the gap between reality and perception in cases of hallucination. That is, in TD, don't we face the same problem that subjective idealists face,

namely, that there is no independent reality that causes experience except for the mind of God interacting with the minds of people? Interestingly, subjective idealism has not been, and probably cannot be, disproven. As a result, the causality problem for memory cannot be logically established since subjective idealism is at least one possible solution. Certainly there is nothing incoherent with the notion that God is the creator of reality and that memory is simply one of the parts that relates to the subject in a way that seems quite personal. The link is still legitimately causal. It is ultimately the consistent nature of God with which we are interacting and which directly causes all forms of input within a fully consistent and coherent system that we call reality. The existence of the third element, that which is neither God nor the subject and is an independent object, is superfluous. This is not to say that perceptual error never occurs or cannot be explained within TD. Hallucination, as an example, can be viewed as a consistent part of a reality that exists in an estranged state. How else can estrangement be communicated than through error?

Two major, though non-epistemological, criticisms that loom large upon the prospect of memory as an external source of knowledge, and upon TD as well, are the continuity and responsibility of the subject. In response, I will first deal with continuity, specifically existence through time and persistence of identity. There is no absence of continuity for the subject if consciousness is primarily experience. The subject most basically *is* that which experiences inputs from any and all of the sources of knowledge including memory. Memory, to be sure, has a much more personal aspect than perception and testimony, yet they are all easily classifiable as experience, as input of one form or another. One could argue that the subject is so much more than one who experiences, that he is distinct as a generator of output in addition to the recipient of input. This is true, but if the output is also characteristic of the “design” of the subject and if

the output is created by God so that subjects also receive from him the experience of generating output, then the scenario of TD is adequately defended while retaining the unique character of the subject. One cannot say that the subject is “lost” in such a scenario because no other theory of identity can account for existence through time or persistence of identity without the same problems. TD is a legitimate contender, in other words.

The subject’s responsibility for memory knowledge that results in evil actions is a much more difficult problem to solve. In addition, memory is also involved in habituation. Habit is difficult to distinguish from identity, the person one has become as a result of actions taken in the past and limitations that past actions place upon possible future actions. Presumably, if a subject’s memories are presented to him by another entity, God within TD, then wouldn’t the responsibility for any resulting action be shared with that entity? Obviously this falls within a larger issue that is basic to TD. Namely, if God is the grand puppet master, then isn’t he the ultimate, culpable agent when considering the source of evil in the world? Due to this association with the larger issue, it will be no surprise that the defense of memory as an external source of knowledge will employ the same answers as TD does with the problem of evil. To be brief, but hopefully not too brief, there are two basic responses to the problem of evil within TD. First, we can make the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic goods and evils. If all evil has an extrinsically good property, which is a good purpose, and if God has the moral and legal right to put his creations through whatever conditions he wishes, then it is clear that even the worst conceivable evil can be justified even while God remains the ultimate agent. As a result, there is no logical problem since there is a logical solution. This leaves the emotional problem. People seem to respond instinctively to God-invoked pain with some form of “that’s not fair!” Arguments that are based upon emotional appeal, as these seem to be, should carry much less

weight than the competing arguments of TD.

Nonetheless, if one is not convinced by the intrinsically good character of all evil, then the following analogy might prove useful in viewing the argument from a different perspective. God is responsible for the moral evils in our world in the same way that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is responsible for the horrible yet ingenious evil of Dr. Moriarty. In a very real sense, Doyle owns Moriarty. He also owns Moriarty's victims. Nonetheless, no one has ever accused Doyle of being evil as a result of the acts of Moriarty. If one were to push the matter further and object that Moriarty's victims, only if real, would be *true* victims and would have Doyle to blame for their suffering, then the analogy breaks down since Doyle is not the source of moral notions in the first place. In this case no analogy will suffice. However, I can point out that the separation between Doyle and his creations is much less than the distinction between God and humanity. To fully appreciate the analogy, we must not allow the magnitude of this gulf of separation to be obscured. We cannot, then, discount the lifeless nature of Moriarty et al. as mere characters in comparison with Doyle without inadvertently lessening our conception of the magnitude of the difference between God and man. As such, Doyle is much closer to the characters he creates in his book than God is to the creatures in his creation even though both God and Doyle create in their own images. The relevant aspect of this analogy, then, should hit us in the same way that the emotionally charged "not fair" goes out from us. On what basis could Moriarty claim that Doyle has no right? *A fortiori*, can man claim that God has no right?

Lastly, hard externalists find themselves with a strange bedfellow. Naturalists agree with TDs that man is not an original source of action or thought. The alternative is to grant humans a "prerogative which some would attribute only to God: each of us, when we act, is a prime mover

unmoved.”¹⁷ Both naturalists and TDs reject the idea that humans are the prime uncaused cause of our thoughts and actions. But, unlike the naturalist, the *theological* determinist grants sovereignty, in its strongest sense, to God rather than to the laws of nature. Thus, the positions are strongly distinguished despite this point of agreement.

CONCLUSIONS

Memory beliefs are involuntarily presented to the consciousness as a matter of the way the brain functions. Though he would likely disagree with my conclusions overall, Robert Audi is one epistemologist who consistently uses passive language when he describes the use of memory. For example, he uses the phrase “experiencing in a memorial way” in addition to the quote given in footnote six. Note the passive nature of the phrase. In addition to the passivity of the receipt of memory, I have also highlighted the possibility that memory could be external to the brain physically, that it could be electronic rather than biological, and that it could take the form of written words. As such, the boundary with testimony begins to blur. I conclude after this analysis, that memory is best seen as a subset of testimony.

In the absence of an effective counter argument, I must conclude that memory, as a form of passively received testimony, can be classified as a fully external source of knowledge in a coherent fashion. It is clearly external to the core conscious mind. And, if established as fully external in all relevant senses, it marks a successful first step in eliminating internal sources of knowledge altogether.

The same methodology used in this paper may subsequently be employed systematically to reclassify other sources of knowledge as subsets of testimony as well. If, after subsequent analyses, all of the sources of knowledge can be legitimately formulated as external sources, then

¹⁷ Roderick M. Chisholm, “Human Freedom and the Self,” in *Metaphysics: the Big Questions*, ed. Peter van Inwagen (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 362.

hard externalism may be able to take a seat next to the other major epistemological options and lend theological determinism a more robust background.

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