

Evidence, Memorial Seemings, and Knowledge from Memory*

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A thesis with a distinguished history in epistemology is this: no one knows something without having adequate evidence for it. More precisely:

The Necessity of Evidence: For any subject S and any proposition p , S knows p only if S has adequate evidence for p (see, e.g., Chisholm, 1957; Conee and Feldman, 1985).

I will argue that a version of The Necessity of Evidence (TNE, for short) is false. How so? In short, it is false because we do not have evidence for many of the things we nonetheless know from memory. I will also argue that a defence of my target version of TNE—an appeal to *memorial seemings*—does not do the job.

Preliminaries first: I must elucidate my target version of TNE, and I must give some gloss on the notion of having occurrent adequate evidence. TNE, as stated, is ambiguous, since it does not account for (a) the fact that knowledge can be either latent or occurrent (inasmuch as the belief which constitutes it is latent or occurrent) and (b) the fact that one's evidence can be either latent or occurrent (inasmuch as bits of it are or aren't part of one's conscious stream of thought). As I see it, that gives us four possible principles:

Doubly Latent TNE: S latently knows p only if S has adequate latent evidence for p .

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Doubly Occurrent TNE: *S* occurrently knows *p* only if *S* has adequate occurrent evidence for *p*.

Latent-Occurrent TNE: *S* latently knows *p* only if *S* has adequate occurrent evidence for *p*.

Occurrent-Latent TNE: *S* occurrently knows *p* only if *S* has adequate latent evidence for *p*.

Much could be said of all of these versions of TNE, but I'll save that for future discussion. The target of *my* argument is **Doubly Occurrent TNE**. In case you're wondering whether anyone endorses Doubly Occurrent TNE, I direct you to Feldman (1988). We can also look to him to provide us with an account of having evidence suitable for our purposes: one has *x* as evidence iff one is currently thinking of *x* (where "thinking of" is construed *very* thinly to mean something like "is an occurrent mental state"). I shall adopt Feldman's account of having evidence for the purposes of this paper. I won't say much about the adequacy condition on one's evidence, since it won't arise in this paper.

Preliminaries finally aside, let us consider Katie. She is a woman of above-average intelligence and good memory. She suffers from no neurological disease or cognitive defect. It seems plausible to think that that Katie knows the proposition *that my name is Katie* (I'm phrasing things from the first-person perspective for the sake of clarity). Of course, this bit of knowledge is encoded as a latent belief most of the time; she surely doesn't go about her business thinking constantly to herself (muttering under her breath, perhaps), "My name is Katie... My name is Katie... My name is Katie." So, she knows (latently, most of the time) this proposition all the same, and—barring temporary cognitive dysfunction (too many wine coolers, a bump on the head) or something strange (witchcraft, alien radiation)—she can recall this proposition from her memory.

One day, Katie goes to her friendly neighbourhood (so they say) Bureau of Motor Vehicles to renew her driver's license. The BMV clerk asks Katie for her name. "My name is Katie," she replies cheerfully. In that instant, Katie *occurently* knows the proposition *that my name is Katie*. According to Doubly Occurrent TNE, it follows that Katie has adequate occurrent evidence *that my name is Katie*. But this seems false. She has *no* occurrent evidence (adequate or not) whatsoever for the proposition *that my name is Katie*. Yet she still knows it. Therefore, Doubly Occurrent TNE is false.

A popular response to this charge is to invoke *memorial seemings* to serve as evidence (see Huemer, 1999). What happens when Katie comes to occurrently

believe *that my name is Katie* in response to the clerk's question is that a concurrent memorial seeming—something like *it seems to me* that my name is Katie—springs to her mind as well. This memorial seeming is Katie's evidence. Let us call this response **The Memorial Seemings Gambit**, or TMSG, for short.

TMSG is implausible. There needn't be anything at all in Katie's mental life which answers to the name of "memorial seeming" in order for her to have knowledge of her name in this particular instance. You can see this for yourself. Call to mind your knowledge of your name. Does a memorial seeming accompany that knowledge (more precisely, does a memorial seeming accompany the belief which constitutes your knowledge)? I must confess that in my case, no such memorial seeming comes to mind. The only thing I notice is the belief which constitutes my knowledge. As I call my knowledge of my name to mind, I cast about in search of an accompanying memorial seeming, and I cannot find one. Yet all the same, I retain my knowledge of my name.

Let me be very careful about what I'm *not* saying. I'm not saying that I cannot try to conjure up a memorial seeming (nor, for that matter, that someone like Katie couldn't). It would be a very strange exercise to do so, but I probably could. And I'm not denying that in *some* cases of memorial knowledge there is an accompanying memorial seeming. I know that *D-Day is June 6th*, and as I call that piece of knowledge to mind, a memorial seeming accompanies it.

Pushback: "Your argument relies upon introspection to verify the absence of a memorial seeming when you recall your knowledge of your name. But to do this is to commit the 'no-seeum' fallacy. It is to infer from the fact that you fail to introspect x the claim that there is no x at all. This inference is, as they say, a chestnut."

Reply: Point taken. However, in some cases, a "no-seeum" inference, while not deductively valid, is nonetheless above reproach. I'm looking for the bottle of Salopian Entire Butt Porter that I thought I had in the fridge. I take every item out of the refrigerator, examine it carefully, and place it on the counter. After the refrigerator is empty, I check again all the items on the counter. I do not see the Salopian Entire Butt Porter in either search, and I infer—with great disgruntlement—that there is no Salopian Entire Butt Porter in the fridge. I submit that this particular inference is allowable. And I also submit that the inference that I perform to arrive at the conclusion that there is no memorial seeming around when I recall my knowledge of my name is much like the inference I make when I (dejectedly) close my refrigerator door.

In conclusion, the problem with the TMSG is quite similar to the one Doubly Occurrent TNE faces. Both require too much to be true of human psychology.

They require that in *every* instance of memorial knowledge that something beyond the recall of belief is required. And that seems to ignore the fact that for at least *some* of our memorial knowledge, memory requires nothing but bare recall to preserve it.

References

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