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FOUNDATIONALISM

Berit Brogaard

1. Introduction

Memory has been a mystery to philosophers for millennia. Part of the reason for this is that they seem to encompass very disparate mental states. You might remember: how to ride a bicycle, that Bill Clinton was impeached by the US House of Representatives but acquitted by the Senate, that 119 is a composite number, that your wife forgot your anniversary two years ago, that you were feeling joyous and elated while dancing salsa at Ball and Chain last Saturday night. These mental states that we refer to as ‘memories’ seem to be intrinsically different. Your memory that 119 is a composite number seems more like a belief, whereas your vivid memory of feeling joyous and elated while dancing salsa seems more like an experience or an affective state.

Nowadays, it’s common to recognize that these states really are very different. They are encoded and retrieved differently in the brain, they have a different phenomenology, and they have different types of contents (McKoon et al. 1986). It is not hard to see why philosophers of the past felt that providing a unified philosophical account of memory was a tall order. Presumably no unified account can be given (see Chapter 1, this volume).

Cognitive psychologists commonly distinguish among procedural memory, semantic memory and episodic memory.¹ Procedural memory is memory of how to do things, such as how to ride a bicycle, semantic memory is memory of propositions or facts and episodic memory is memory of yourself partaking in an event. Episodic memory can include laboratory tasks, such as remembering long lists of words as an experiment. A particular subclass of episodic memories are known as ‘autobiographical memories’. They refer to a system depending on both episodic and semantic memory, such as my memory of your wearing a yellow shirt at breakfast on 15 March 2015. This memory contains an episodic memory, viz. an episodic memory of the breakfast, which you remember from a distinctly first-person perspective and a semantic memory, viz. that the breakfast took place on 15 March 2015. This chapter will focus exclusively on autobiographical memories. For simplicity’s sake, I shall often simply refer to these as ‘memories’.

One of the big debates in philosophy concerning autobiographical memories is that of whether they can provide us with direct awareness of the past or whether they are representations, or constructions, of the past. Philosophers have had a special interest in this question because on the one hand it seems that our memories only rarely, if ever, could provide us with direct awareness of the past; on the other hand, if they are massively mistaken and don’t track

the truth at all, how could our memories ever be justified? If our memories of the past are constructions, they are unlikely to reveal what actually happened, and it's not hard to see how realizing this fact might lead to the radically sceptical view that we can never be justified in believing what happened in the past (Bernecker 2008, 2010).

In recent years, psychologists have gathered numerous pieces of evidence for the view that our memories are in fact constructions of what happened in the past (Eichenbaum and Cohen 2001). We don't experience something and then store it in the brain as a unit that can be taken out and put on display when convenient. Our memories are stored in the brain in a distributed pattern in the outer layer of the cortex. As a rule, experiences are stored in the area of the brain that initially processed them (Squire 1992; Danker and Anderson 2010). So, a visual aspect of an experience is normally stored in the visual cortex, an auditory aspect of an experience is stored in the auditory cortex and a motion element of an experience is stored in the sensory-motor cortex. When we retrieve a memory, we need to put all those pieces and fragments back together again, and empirical studies also reveal that we rarely put them back together again to form a whole that is exactly like the initial experience (Schacter 1989).

Although there is no one-one correlation between brain processing and the nature of mental states, the empirical data strongly suggest that memories are representations, and indeed representations in a strong constructivist sense. They are models of what happened in the past, and often not very good models.²

Although one can be justified in holding a false belief, it is a *prima facie* attractive view that one cannot be justified in holding a type of belief that by its very nature is unlikely to track the truth (e.g. beliefs based on imagined clairvoyance). This raises the question of how we can ever come to have justified beliefs about the past. A hardcore externalist might dismiss this question as a hard one (see Chapter 22, this volume). A reliabilist, for instance, can maintain that when our memory retrieval processes function optimally, we know what happened in the past, even if we don't (internally) know that we know this. But what is the internalist supposed to say? Here I will argue that some of our *memory seemings* have a special property that qualifies them as immediate and full justifiers of our memories, regardless of how wildly mistaken our brain was when putting the stored fragments back together. This view is also known as 'phenomenal dogmatism'. Phenomenal dogmatism says that a seeming can immediately justify a mental state (e.g. a belief), if the agent has no mental states that defeat the justification. The view has been defended by numerous authors for visual experience (Tolhurst 1998; Pryor 2000, 2005; Huemer 2007; Tucker 2010; Brogaard 2013a; Chudnoff 2013), higher-level perception (Brogaard forthcoming a, forthcoming b) and memory (Audi 1995: 37; Huemer 1999; Conee and Feldman 2004; Ginet 1975; Pollock 1974: 193; and, with reservations, Schroer 2008).

2. Phenomenal dogmatism for memory

Suppose you have a memory as of dancing salsa with your boyfriend last Saturday at the Latin-American club Ball and Chain. It's a nice memory. Next time you talk to your boyfriend you say 'remember how much fun we had dancing last Saturday?' With a big smile he replies: 'yeah, I remember.' In ordinary language, 'I remember that *p*' is typically factive. This means that it entails that *p*. So, if you say 'I remember that *p*', you are also saying '*p*'. This does not mean that you are right, only that you are saying that you are right. Here I am not going to use 'remember' the way it is typically used in ordinary language. When I say 'you remember dancing salsa', I shall use that to mean that you have a memory as of dancing salsa. This (autobiographical) memory may be very similar to a mental image, a vivid imagination, or a vivid dream, but it

need not be. You might have a (autobiographical) memory that feels more like a thought or a belief (as in 'I believe I danced salsa last Saturday'). In addition to the notion of a (retrieved) memory I shall introduce another notion relating to retrieved memories, which I shall call a 'memory seeming', 'memory appearance', or 'memory image' (see Chapter 11, this volume). I take memory seemings to be experience-like in ways I will detail below. A memory seeming just is a memory of the kind that is like a mental image, a vivid imagination, or a vivid dream. But it could (e.g. over time) lead to a memory that is not a memory seeming – one of those memories that are thought- or belief-like.

Given these distinctions we can articulate phenomenal dogmatism with respect to memory as follows:

If it (memory-wise) appears to *S* as if *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, *S* thereby has immediately and full justification for her memory belief that *p*.

Phenomenal dogmatism holds that memory seemings or appearances can confer immediate and full justification on memories. The memories that are justified in this way are foundational, that is, they do not depend on any other memories, beliefs, or background information for their justification. Phenomenal dogmatism is thus a version of foundationalism in epistemology, which is the view that some mental states (e.g. beliefs or experiences) are properly basic and that (the rest of) our beliefs are justified in virtue of receiving proper support from the basic mental states. This form of foundationalism can be differentiated from the view that every memory belief is *prima facie* justified simply in virtue of being a memory belief (Audi 1998: 68–9).

As noted above, we can refer to memories that are phenomenally like a mental image, a vivid imagination, or a vivid dream as memory seemings. For memories of this sort, phenomenal dogmatism can be articulated as follows:

If it (memory-wise) appears to *S* as if *p*, then, in the absence of defeaters, that memory appearance that *p* is immediately and fully justified.

Having a memory (or memory seeming) then may simply all by itself be sufficient for that memory (or memory seeming) to be justified, depending on its phenomenology.

Phenomenal dogmatism is consistent with the possibility that memory can be the source of new justification for belief, a view also known as 'generativism' (Bernecker, 2010). For example, you may have a number of stored memory images that would provide justification for a new belief, were they retrieved together as a single memory seeming. For instance, I may have a memory seeming of you being super-sensitive to criticism at time t_1 , a second memory seeming of you bragging about your accomplishments at time t_2 , and a third memory seeming of you belittling your peers at time t_3 . The three memory seemings, if retrieved together, may form a single memory seeming that confers *prima facie* justification on a memory belief about your personality, for instance, the memory belief that you have a narcissistic personality (Brogaard forthcoming a).

The view defended here is a radical form of internalism with respect to justification for memory. But it is not as radical as it could be. Let's distinguish among three views: strong access internalism, weak access internalism, and mentalism. Strong access internalism is the view that if you are justified in remembering that *p*, then you can tell by introspection alone that you are justified in remembering that *p*. Weak access internalism is the view that if you are justified

in remembering that p , then you have conscious access to the full justifier of your memory. Mentalism, finally, is the view that what justifies your retrieved memories is a mental state but you need not have conscious access to all parts of the mental state. As we will see, the view I am defending here is a version of weak access internalism.

3. Which seemings can serve as justifiers?

On my view, memory seemings can serve as immediate justifiers either of belief-like memories or of themselves. The hard question that needs to be addressed is what it is about memory seemings that make them justifiers. In ordinary language, we speak of seemings, looks, and appearances in a number of different ways. Consider the following statements:

- 1(a) I just realized that Lisa looks exactly like her sister.
- 1(b) I can't quite put my finger on what's wrong with it, but the first premise of the argument just seems wrong.
- 1(c) I just heard on the radio that a hurricane is coming our way. It seems to me that it would be wise to evacuate.
- 1(d) That looks like a dog behind the tree.
- 1(e) It still seems to me that we were dancing salsa that night, even though I know we didn't.

These are some of the ways that we can express seemings, looks and appearances in ordinary language. Not all of these expressions stand in a one-one correspondence to mental states. 1(a), for example, compares Lisa to her sister. On the most plausible reading, it states that Lisa's physical appearance is very similar to the physical appearance of her sister. When you make this statement, it is likely based on your visual experience (either current or past), but the statement itself does not make it clear how things appear to you. It merely makes it evident that there are certain similarities, in your view, between Lisa and her sister. Roderick Chisholm (1957) called this sort of use of 'appear' words 'comparative'.

1(b) and 1(c) appear to express degrees of belief rather than how things sensorily appear to you. On a likely reading of 1(b), you are stating that you have a high degree of belief that the first premise of the argument is wrong, even though you cannot quite explain why you have that belief. And on a plausible reading of 1(c), you are stating that you have a high degree of belief that you should evacuate the area, given what you heard on the radio. Chisholm (1957) called this use of 'appear' words 'epistemic'.

The use of 'look' and 'seem' in 1(d) and 1(e) is non-comparative and non-epistemic. Following Frank Jackson (1977), let's call this use of 'appear' words 'phenomenal'. It's the phenomenal uses of 'appear' words that correspond to the sorts of mental states phenomenal dogmatists think can serve as immediate justifiers. But if they are right, what exactly is it about them that makes them suitable for this role?

Elijah Chudnoff (2014, 2016a) has proposed that what makes these seemings (or in his terminology 'experiences') the sorts of entities that can serve as immediate justifiers is that they have what he calls a 'presentational phenomenology'. To a first approximation, seemings have a presentational character only when their accuracy conditions 'include both p and awareness of a truth-maker for p ' (Chudnoff 2016a). Suppose you are looking at the coffee mug in front of you. It seems to you that there is a coffee mug in front of you. If someone were to ask you 'why does it seem to you that there is a coffee mug in front of you?', one of the most plausible answers is to point out that the coffee mug (whether it's actually there or not) makes it seem that



Figure 23.1 Despite the fact that some of the parts of the coffee mug are occluded, the whole mug ‘pops out’ and your experience of it has presentational phenomenology, on Chudnoff’s view.

way to you. You are thereby making a reference to your (alleged) awareness of the truthmaker for ‘there is a coffee mug in front of me.’

On Chudnoff’s view, a seeming that a thing is in front of you can have presentational phenomenology, even when you cannot see every part of that thing. Consider the above illustration (Figure 23.1).

Although the coffee mug is partially occluded from the scene, it ‘pops out’ in your perceptual experience of the scene, owing to what is known as ‘amodal completion’. Chudnoff would say that this gives us reason to think that your experience represents the coffee mug and all its parts. However, the occluded parts of the coffee mug that you cannot see have a different phenomenology than the non-occluded parts. The non-occluded parts have a presentational

phenomenology, whereas the occluded parts do not. While the occluded parts of the mug do not have a presentational phenomenology, the coffee mug does. That makes sense. You clearly cannot see the occluded parts of the coffee mug but you can clearly see that there is a coffee mug behind the Mexican candy and in front of the book. So, despite the mug being partly invisible, the parts we do see suffice to make it 'pop out' in a way that gives rise to an experience that has presentational phenomenology. The presentational phenomenology of the experience is, in Chudnoff's view, what makes the experience the sort of thing that can confer immediate and full justification upon belief. His view thus satisfies what he calls 'epistemic elitism' (Chudnoff 2016b):

Epistemic Elitism – If a perceptual experience can immediately justify believing that p , then p needs to meet some condition over and above being part of its representational content.

Part of what qualifies experiences as immediate and full justifiers in many cases, on Chudnoff's view, is that in veridical cases they literally make us aware of the truth-maker for the content of the experience. Non-veridical cases that are indistinguishable from the equivalent veridical cases make it seem to us as if we are in direct conscious contact with the truth-maker for the content of the experience.

While the view seems rather plausible for standard cases of visual experience, the question arises whether it can be extended to memory? Although memory seemings are image-like, they are very different from experience. They typically are less vivid, they lack in brightness, saturation, and hue (in comparison), and details may be missing from the 'image'. When having a memory seeming of you dancing salsa last Saturday, it is not at all like having the experience itself. It is not at all as if you are in direct conscious contact with the truth-maker of the seeming. And here we are even just focusing on the visual element of memory. Once we move onto other sensory modalities, the contrast is even greater. Memories of olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and auditory experiences can be image-like but they are not at all like the original experience. While there may be a resemblance between the phenomenology of the visual experience of the cheese you ate and that of your visual memory of the cheese, it is not as if your memory of the smell of the cheese has any smell phenomenology. So, in these cases, (apparent) awareness of the truth-maker of the content of your memory is partially or completely lacking.

4. The evidence resistance of phenomenal seemings

If phenomenal dogmatism about memory is true, then what is it about memory seemings that makes them suitable as immediate and full justifiers of themselves or their propositional memory equivalents? My proposal is that those memory seemings that can function in this way are evidence resistant. I have defended this view for visual experience, appearances of personality, and speech comprehension elsewhere (Brogaard 2013a, 2016a, 2016b). Here I will defend it for memories.

Phenomenal seemings are quite unlike epistemic seemings in being evidence resistant. By 'evidence resistant', I mean that they endure even when we are faced with strong evidence that they are inaccurate, at least assuming a rational agent. Let's consider a non-controversial case: the Müller-Lyer illusion (Figure 23.2).

In the Müller-Lyer illusion, the line segments have exactly the same length but because of the fish hooks, they appear as if they have different lengths. This illusion persists even when you measure the line segments and come to the conclusion that they do have the same length. This is

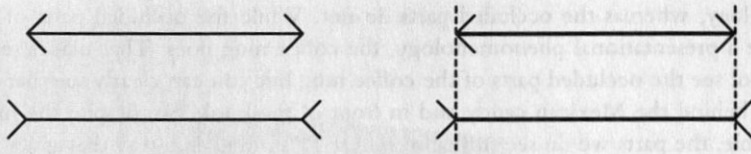


Figure 23.2 The Müller-Lyer illusion – even when you learn that the line segments on the left have the same length, they continue to appear as if they have different length.

a mark of phenomenal seemings. Epistemic seemings are not evidence resistant in this way. When you hear on the radio that there will be a hurricane, and it comes to seem wise to you to evacuate, this seeming will dissipate if you come to believe that the radio announcement was a hoax.

It is this evidence resistancy of phenomenal seemings that makes them the sort of thing that can serve as an immediate and full justifier of other mental states. The seemings themselves are not subject to defeat, even if the mental state they immediately and fully justify is. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, the seeming persists after you measure the two line segments and come to the conclusion that they have the same length. After your measurement you have a defeater, viz. your belief that the line segments have the same length, so the immediate justification your seeming confers on your belief (if you still have it) is defeated, and your belief that the two line segments have the same length is no longer justified. This view satisfies a version of epistemic elitism, viz. the following:

Epistemic Elitism (Seem) – If a seeming can immediately justify believing that p , then p needs to meet some condition over and above being part of its representational content.

It may be argued that the view defended here does not satisfy epistemic elitism, as formulated by Chudnoff. However, this only follows if all experiences are evidence insensitive. This, however, need not be the case. We can imagine a scenario in which an evil demon makes your experience fade away whenever you receive evidence that your experience is inaccurate. For example, if you are looking at the Müller-Lyer illusion and measure the line segments, your experience of them having different lengths fades away, and you immediately come to see them as having the same length.

On my view, the reason that evidence-insensitive seemings can confer immediate justification upon belief is that, in normal circumstances, they are likely to lead to true belief in the absence of further background information. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, circumstances are not normal. The illusion likely occurs as a result of the way the brain processes depth (Gregory 1968; Howe and Purves 2005; Brogaard and Gatzia in press). Depth perception involves generating an internal three-dimensional model of the environment. Part of the mechanism that produces the three-dimensional model adjusts for the sameness in size of objects located at different distances from us. This is also known as ‘size constancy’. This mechanism ensures that objects are not perceived as shrinking when we move away from them. As a result of this process, the brain projects the retinal image of the outward arrowheads to what would normally be its correct distance in our internal model, thus making the line segment with the outward arrowheads seem longer (Figure 23.3).

Evidence resistance of experience thus is a mark of accuracy of the beliefs that are directly generated by the brain on the basis of the experience.

The memory seemings that are evidence resistant in the same way as our experience of the Müller-Lyer illusion are those seemings that can serve as immediate justifiers of themselves or

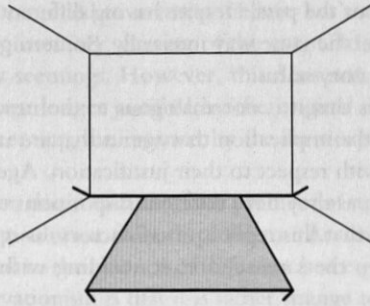


Figure 23.3 The Müller-Lyer illusion – illustration of how the outside corners generate the appearance of the object being further away from us, whereas the inside corners generate the appearance of the object being closer to us.

their propositional counterpart. Suppose after reminding your boyfriend of the great time you had dancing salsa at the salsa club last Saturday, he denies that you and he were dancing salsa. He even shows you evidence (e.g. text messages and pictures) that you left before the salsa band came on stage. You come to believe he was right. You memory was a mere construction with no grounds in reality. Suppose, however, that when you think back to that Saturday night, it still seems to you very vividly that you were dancing salsa with him (see Mazzoni et al. 2010). In this case, you have a memory seeming that can serve as an immediate justifier of itself. It's just that in this particular case, you have a defeater, viz. your belief that you weren't dancing salsa, so the original memory (or memory seeming) is not in fact justified despite having the right justificatory marks.

If, on the other hand, your memory seeming of dancing salsa fades away after seeing counter-evidence and you suddenly remember that you never were dancing salsa, then your memory seeming was not the sort of memory state that can serve as an immediate and full justifier in the first place. It was an epistemic memory seeming, perhaps with a sensory phenomenology, but not a sensory phenomenology that can make it play the role of an immediate and full justifier.³

There are several objections that can be raised against this version of phenomenal dogmatism.⁴ One turns on the idea that evidence resistance is a disposition. It is notoriously difficult to provide an adequate account of dispositions. For instance, an evil demon may make you resist evidence for all of the seemings that you generate.

This objection, however, raises no special problem for the present account, as we are assuming a certain level of rationality on the part of the agent. As outside forces influence your psychology, this is not a case in which you are acting as a rational agent.

Another, potentially more devastating, objection turns on the new evil demon problem in epistemology (Cohen 1984; Pollock 1984). The new evil demon problem was originally formulated as a challenge for a version of reliabilism that defined justification in terms of reliability. Imagine a world in which you have all the cognitive dispositions you have in the actual world but in which a demon hinders their reliability. Since you have the same cognitive dispositions in the actual world and the evil demon world, it seems that you ought to be equally justified in both worlds. But this is not what the reliabilist predicts. Since your dispositions are not reliable in the evil demon world, you are not justified.

One might raise a similar problem for the version of phenomenal dogmatism defended here. Imagine two agents who, owing to their psychology, generate different memory seemings. One agent forms an evidence-insensitive seeming about the past, whereas the other forms a

evidence-sensitive seeming about the past. Despite having different dispositions toward potential evidence, however, they feel the same way internally. So, it might be argued, their memory seemings have the same justificatory status.

My reply to this objection is that it is not analogous to the new evil demon problem. The latter provides an objection to the implication that agents that are internally the same can be in a different epistemic standing with respect to their justification. Agents in the scenario outlined here are not on a par internally, as they have different dispositions toward potential evidence.

It may be argued, however, that this reply is unsatisfactory, as it may be thought that agents who feel the same should be in the same epistemic standing with respect to the justification they possess.

This objection, however, seems to me to presuppose that strong access internalism is a viable position. Strong access internalism, recall, is the view that you can tell by introspection alone whether you are justified in holding a given belief. But not even the defender of the view that only experiences with presentational phenomenology can serve as immediate justifiers can plausibly maintain a view of this sort. Imagine a case where two perceivers are both looking at the same coffee mug but where the mug is partially occluded for just one of the perceivers (Figure 23.1). Imagine that both perceivers have an experience that p , where p is that the coffee mug is regular-shaped. Let's furthermore suppose this experience is accurate. As a matter of an abnormal psychology, however, perceiver S_1 , who is looking at the mug behind the occluders, has an experience with the same presentational phenomenology-like feel to it as S_2 . In that case, the two perceivers feel exactly the same internally but only S_2 is immediately justified in her belief about p . Because the two perceivers are internally on a par, neither perceiver can tell by introspection alone that they are immediately justified in holding the belief in question. So, the view in question is inconsistent with strong access internalism.

It may be replied that S_1 's experience is just like S_2 's, because of partial hallucination. S_2 genuinely sees a truth-maker for p . S_1 just seems to see a truth-maker for p . So absent defeaters both have experiences that immediately justify believing p . This, however, requires not only that the content of their experiences is: p , and it seems that I am aware of a truth-maker for p , but also that this highly intellectual content is reflected in the phenomenology of experience, which seems rather controversial.

5. Metacognition and the problem of forgetting

Phenomenal dogmatism about memory has been subject to various criticism, the best known of which is the problem of forgotten evidence (Harman 1986; Bernecker 2008). We often forget our original evidence for our beliefs. Yet it would seem that beliefs for which we have forgotten our original evidence remain equally justified. This has been taken to be a problem for the internalist view that holds that your beliefs can be justified only if you have access to the evidential ground of your belief.

A related problem is that most of our memory beliefs and memory seemings are stored rather than occurrent. Yet it would seem that a memory should not lose its justification even if I happen not to entertain it. Accordingly, most of my beliefs are only intermittently or potentially justified. This problem is also sometimes referred to as the 'problem of stored beliefs'.

Conee and Feldman (2001) propose to solve the first problem by pointing out that our beliefs may still be justified even if we no longer have access to the original evidence for our beliefs. Even if I forget how I first learned that your name is 'Sven', I have multiple other sources of evidence for this belief, for instance, the fact that people consistently address you in this way.

This sort of reply can be extended to memory beliefs. Let's say that I believe we have met in the past, but that I have no memory seeming of the event. In this case, my memory belief is not justified by any memory seemings. However, this does not mean that my memory belief is unjustified, only that it is no longer justified by the original memory seeming. It might be justified by a new memory seeming, for instance, by the memory seeming that you said 'nice to see you again' earlier today.

This sort of reply, however, doesn't ward off the problem of stored memory. Preservationism offers a potentially promising solution to both problems. According to this view, our beliefs, once justified, remain justified in the absence of defeaters (see e.g. Bernecker 2008).

One problem with preservationism is that it is rather strange to think that beliefs retain their justification after being dismantled and put back together again upon retrieval. This form of radical reconstruction often introduces new mistakes that may undermine the original justification. Suppose, for instance, that I have 'stored' a memory image of you wearing a yellow shirt at a party ten years ago, and that this image epistemically supports a memory belief that you were wearing a yellow shirt at that party. Although the memory image represents you as wearing a yellow shirt, retrieval of the image might result in a memory seeming of you wearing a red shirt – perhaps owing to a flaw in your memory retrieval system. It seems odd in these circumstances to maintain that the stored belief of you wearing a yellow shirt is justified by the stored memory image. One way to avoid problematic cases of this sort is to modify preservationism as follows:

Dispositional Preservationism – If memory image M would confer prima facie justification on memory belief B at time t upon retrieval, then memory image M confers primary facie justification on memory belief B at time t , even if neither is retrieved at time t .

Unlike the original version of preservationism, dispositional preservationism does not solve the problem of forgotten evidence. So, it would need to be accompanied by a different solution, for instance, the one proposed by Conee and Feldman (2001).

Another promising way to deal with the problem of forgotten evidence is to expand the set of memory seemings to include metacognitive feelings of familiarity (Proust 2008; Bernecker 2008; Arango-Muñoz and Michaelian 2014). If asked what President Obama's first name is, I can readily provide this information. Like most people, I would be at a loss to explain where I first learned this fact. However, semantic memory beliefs are often accompanied by a metacognitive feeling of familiarity that appears to be evidence insensitive and hence should be able to confer prima facie justification on the belief much like memory images. *Feelings of familiarity* is a degree notion. So, the degree of justification that a feeling of familiarity can confer on belief will depend on its strength, which can be partly captured in terms of retrieval fluency (Proust 2008). Retrieval fluency depends, among other things, on how readily the information can be retrieved, and how many related details can be retrieved in addition to the requested information. For example, if you can cite all sorts of facts about President Obama, then your fluency is greater than if you only know that his first name is Barack.

6. Transfer of epistemic badness

For the case of visual experience, phenomenal dogmatism has met with criticism that it leads to a kind of unwarranted bootstrapping. Susanna Siegel (2012) offers the following case. Jill dogmatically believes that Jack is mad at her. Jill's belief is irrational and not even minimally justified. But because she holds this belief, she sees his neutral face as expressing anger the

following day. According to phenomenal dogmatism, it would seem, this experience of Jack expressing anger can now confer immediate and full justification on the belief she already holds, viz. the belief that Jack is mad at her. This seems less than satisfactory. All she did was see Jack, and then – as if by magic – her unjustified belief turns into a justified belief.

There is a way of blocking this sort of argument against phenomenal dogmatism. One possibility is to deny that bad epistemic properties can transfer from belief to experience, or from experience to belief. A phenomenal dogmatist may say that just because the initial belief was bad, this doesn't mean that the belief that follows the experience is bad too. After all, she might continue, the experience with all its experiential phenomenology intervened and made a difference.

In a recent symposium (2013), Siegel offers an argument for why we should believe that bad epistemic properties can transfer across chains of belief-experience-belief. She recognizes that experiences and beliefs are different in very many ways. Most evidently, experiences are not the sorts of things that can be rational or irrational. But, she notes, beliefs and experiences have an important property in common. Beliefs need not be irrational, in order for them to generate a subsequent ill-founded belief formed on the basis of it. If I rationally believe I am going to Ned's talk today but irrationally believe he is going to talk about philosophy of mathematics, then I may end up with the irrational belief that I will be going to a philosophy of mathematics talk. This irrational belief is based in part on my rational belief about where I am going later today. If beliefs don't need to be irrational in order for beliefs based on them to be irrational, then experiences (which Siegel claims are never irrational) should also be able to give rise to beliefs with bad epistemic properties.

So far, so good. But notice that while this argument does not rule out that transfer can occur, it also does not establish it. The argument cannot simply be that beliefs and experiences both have property *p* that allows for transfer of epistemic badness. Hence, since beliefs allow for transfer, experiences do too.⁵ This argument is fallacious. If you and I are both hit by John, it may be that John did something bad to you but not to me, because unlike you I had agreed to be in a boxing match with John. In this case, there is a further property I possess which makes the two cases disanalogous. But the phenomenal dogmatist might say that there is also a disanalogy between belief and experience even if they both have property *p* in common that might make it look like they can both transfer epistemic badness. The disanalogy might consist in the special phenomenology that experience has. That may be what prevents the transfer of the epistemic badness from the original bad belief to the belief Jill has after seeing Jack.⁶

Although I realize that this response is available to the phenomenal dogmatist in some cases, I don't think it works in all cases. In another of Siegel's cases, John fears that there is a gun in the fridge and subsequently comes to have an experience of a gun in the fridge. What he is seeing as a gun is really a banana. On the basis of this experience, John forms the belief that there is a gun in the fridge. Now, in this case, we have two options. We can either allow that fear can be subject to rationality constraints, or we can deny it. Emotions such as fear, sadness, and disgust are arguably kinds of perceptual experience (Prinz 2006; Brogaard 2015). So, if we say that emotions can be meaningfully said to be rational or irrational, then we should probably also allow that experiences in general can be subject to rationality constraints, in which case transfer of epistemic badness is less controversial. If, on the other hand, we deny that emotions can be subject to any badness constraints, then there is no epistemic badness to transfer from John's fear via his experience to John's belief. So, finding a way to argue against the transfer of epistemic badness is not going to block Siegel's argument. In fact, it is not clear that there is an argument to be made in that case.

Siegel's argument relies on the assumption that one's experience can inherit the content of one's belief. This is also what is known as 'cognitive penetration' (Pylyshyn 1999). Whether

our experiences are subject to cognitive penetration or not has been subject to much debate (Raftopoulos 2001; Macpherson 2012; Siegel 2012; Siegel in press; Brogaard and Gatzia in press). Here I shall set aside that debate and instead focus on how one can adequately address similar apparent bootstrapping cases for memory, if indeed there are any.

Suppose you remember your girlfriend as sometimes being moody and aloof. Your memory turns out to be mistaken. Furthermore, the memory seemings upon which it is based do not have the marks that make them qualified for being an immediate and full justifier of your memory. Your memory, let's say, is not even *prima facie* justified. Today you meet up with your girlfriend, and owing to your mistaken memory, you experience her as moody and aloof. Later that evening, your memory seeming of her being moody and aloof earlier, which does indeed have the marks that make it qualified for conferring immediately justification on your memory, adds immediate justification to your earlier memory that your girlfriend is sometimes moody and aloof.

In this case, blocking the transfer of epistemic badness does not seem very compelling, as it should be rather uncontroversial that memories can transfer epistemic badness to other memories. The case also seems plausible, as it doesn't involve a case of cognitive penetration of visual experience, which has been the main controversy in the debate about cognitive penetration.

I think the right response in this case is that, upon further scrutiny, the case is non-worrisome. Given the assumption that your memory seeming of your girlfriend today is of the kind that can confer justification on memories, this memory seeming can and does indeed confer immediate justification on your memory that your girlfriend was moody and aloof today. This latter memory can now justify the generalized memory that your girlfriend is sometimes moody and aloof. If, on the other hand, we had a case on our hands where your memory seeming today did not have the properties that made it a candidate for conferring immediate justification on memories, then the case could not be used to challenge phenomenal dogmatism of the sort defended here.

7. Conclusion

I have argued that even if retrieved autobiographical memories are constructions put together by our brains out of stored pieces of experiences, as empirical data strongly indicate, this does not imply that we cannot come to have internal justification for what we remember. A version of phenomenal dogmatism is defensible for memory. On this view, memory seemings – which we can take to be akin to mental images, imaginations, or even sometimes vivid dreams – are self-justifying in the absence of defeaters, but can also justify propositional counterparts of these seemings. A hard question is what it is about memory seemings that makes them immediate justifiers. One suggestion is that they have a special presentational phenomenology that, at least in veridical cases, puts us in direct contact with the truth-makers for their content. This view, however, is not very plausible for the case of memory, as it is doubtful that we ever have any direct awareness of events in the past – certainly not when the events are far enough back in the past. I have proposed instead that what makes a memory seeming the sort of mental state that can self-justify or confer justification on memories is their evidence insensitivity. In the case of visual experience, visual illusions are remarkably resistant to defeat. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for example, it continues to appear to us that the two line segments have different lengths, even after gaining knowledge that this is not so. Many of our memory seemings possess this same property: they continue to persist in spite of knowledge that the seemings are highly inaccurate. At the end of this chapter, I offered what I consider the most plausible response to a recent challenge to phenomenal dogmatism, viz. the challenge that the position gives rise to bootstrapping cases.⁷

Notes

- 1 Many other distinctions can be drawn here, such as that between declarative and nondeclarative memory, that between implicit and explicit memory retrieval and that between short-term memory (also known as ‘working memory’) and long-term memory. Here my primary focus will be on explicit memory retrieval and long-term autobiographical memory.
- 2 This view is compatible with the view that our memories are causally connected to the past and also with the view that the past could partially constitute the content of the representation (Bernecker 2008, 2010). I shall not take a stance on these questions here.
- 3 Here it may be helpful to distinguish between noetic and auto-noetic awareness associated with memory (see e.g. Klein 2014). Auto-noetic awareness provides the subject with the ability to perform mental time travel, whereas noetic awareness does not. If you know that you saw a Jimi Hendrix concert when you were in high school, but cannot recollect being there, this memory is associated with noetic awareness but not with auto-noetic awareness. Memories associated with noetic awareness but not with auto-noetic awareness are less likely to be able to serve as immediate justifiers of belief. However, see the section below on metacognitive feelings.
- 4 Thanks to Elijah Chudnoff here.
- 5 Elijah Chudnoff (personal communication).
- 6 Elijah Chudnoff (personal communication).
- 7 I am grateful to Sven Bernecker, Elijah Chudnoff, and Casey Landers for comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

Related topics

- Taxonomy and the unity of memory
- Memory images
- Internalism and externalism

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