

Philosophical Studies  
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# Remarks on Epistemology Musicalized

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## 1 A Hint from Epistemology Naturalized

Epistemology always matters. People sometimes make a categorical assertion or firmly declare something. How should we react to that situation? In that case we couldn't be philosophically thorough without asking 'how do you know that?' It's applied to, for example, the case that someone proposes a deterministic way of thinking, which implies that the world is already determined as a causal necessity, although we human beings can't know all of its details because of the limitation of our ability. This deterministic idea is so deeply rooted in our mind that the idea is tacitly introduced in many phases. One of typical cases in which causal determinism is simply presupposed is the traditional controversy about free will where it is asked whether liberty and necessity is compatible or not. However, we ought to ask, 'how can you know that the world is determined as a causal necessity? As far as you yourself admit that we couldn't know all of details because of our limited ability, is it unknown to us whether the world is determined or not?' How on earth could we, flesh and blood, claim that even the future of the world is also determined? As far as epistemological questions are concerned, apart from metaphysics, I can't go along with such a sort of arguments as literally declares a deterministic view.

Well, let's turn our attention to an expression, 'know'. What is 'to know something'? This is nothing but a notorious difficulty which epistemology has spent a lot of energy to think about. How can we resolve the difficulty plainly? In this respect, it is very natural that there arises an idea of clarifying our knowledge in a positive and objective manner. That's the trend to elucidate the structure of our knowledge in virtue of objectifying our epistemic phenomena. Actually such sort of trend is realized in present cognitive science, cognitive psychology, or psychometrics to a certain extent, and also in philosophical arguments about epistemology 'epistemology naturalized' or 'naturalistic epistemology' which corresponds to that trend has been

developed by some groups of philosophers since Quine. Epistemology naturalized consists of two basic claims; (1) epistemology is a branch of natural science and (2) to know is a natural phenomenon (Quine 1969, p.82). Recently even a more radical viewpoint, namely, an idea to regard knowledge as a natural biological kind is being proposed (E.g. Boyd 1999). However, this epistemology naturalized isn't exempt from all difficulties (See Ichinose 2006). How can the epistemology explain institutional knowledge like, for instance, 'Beckham is a husband of Victoria', as natural phenomena? How can it take in the notion of intellectual property which is intrinsic to the present concept of knowledge? How can knowledge as a natural biological kind ingest nutrition? Such kinds of difficulties descend on epistemology naturalized one after another.

## 2 Knowledge as Voices

However, I don't want to utterly reject epistemology naturalized at all despite those almost fatal difficulties. Its basic standpoint obviously intends to realize desirable plainness and clarity in that it takes our knowledge to be some phenomena or events appearing in the space and time which can be studied from an objective and scientific point of view, in comparison to another type of epistemology such that appeals to some *a priori* structure of our knowledge which couldn't be truly accessible as empirical appearance. But, then, is there such a well-balanced epistemology that not only accepts that good point of epistemology naturalized but also avoids its difficulties, and, hopefully, suits the tradition of philosophy?

'Epistemology Musicalized' is nothing but what I have proposed as a candidate of such a well-balanced epistemology. Its idea is quite simple; (a) knowledge or cognition is made through language (language must be indispensable as long as we follow such the traditional definition of knowledge as 'a justified TRUE belief'), (b) language (including that in internal speech) is spoken as voices (including internal ones), so (c) knowledge or cognition, not metaphorically but literally, has a musical structure as voices (no matter what they are from a aesthetic point of view), therefore (d) knowledge or cognition can be studied as a sort of music, and by thinking so we can clarify what knowledge or cognition actually is. That's an outline of my idea. What I mean here by 'music' is a voice or a sound (including internal speech) improvisationally produced, in particular its aspect of rhythm. That is to say,

epistemology musicalized is a programme of epistemology which tries to regard, for instance, such a knowledge that Beckham is a husband of Victoria, as the phonetic sound or voice (including internal ones), particularly as a temporal series of the sound, i.e. a rhythm, and investigate what is found, or to put it more appropriately, what is heard from such the standpoint.

This programme has a basic idea in common with epistemology naturalized in that it is based upon sound-phenomena or sound-events appearing in the space and time, which is why I give the programme a name similar to epistemology naturalized. Actually epistemology musicalized can comprehend a wide range of epistemic phenomena like those that are composed of gestures without any physical sound. For example, when we show feelings of rejection by shaking our head, people who recognize this virtually put the event in order by linguistically individualizing and dividing into parts the movements of head like, ‘she shakes her head in this way, and then in that way.....’. Undoubtedly here arises a sort of rhythm, which can be absorbed into epistemology musicalized.

### **3 Accidental Improvisationality**

This epistemology musicalized pays full attention to ‘accidental improvisationality’ in our epistemic activities, which actually permeates an occurrence of our knowledge, nevertheless is rarely taken up in epistemology. This becomes the most obvious in our choice of vocabularies to express our knowledge. Suppose the case that we go to a greengrocery and come to know there is a heap of aubergines. Then we can express this knowledge in various ways, for example, ‘there is a heap of aubergines’, ‘there is a heap of eggplants’, or ‘there is a heap of dark purple vegetables whose skins are shiny’, etc. This depends upon our vocabulary that occurs to us by chance the moment we see those vegetables, and obviously this process are impromptu. At least we can surely say that such expressions with such vocabularies were not planned and intended many hours before. The same thing is true of our choice of vocabularies between ‘TV’, ‘telly’, and ‘display’ when we come to know there is a television broadcasting the news in the room and then express such knowledge. Actually all sorts of knowledge must be permeated by such accidental improvisationality, in so far as our knowledge is regarded as an actual events or phenomenon which occurs by means of such linguistic descriptions that we know

such and such right now.

Unquestionably those improvisational features of our epistemic activities must be reflected in our ordinary conversation, since certainly exchanges of knowledge or information are very important part of our conversation. Improvisational status of our conversation has already been pointed out by some scholars. For instance, Sawyer describes this point like this;

.....everyday conversation is also a collective improvisation, as jazz musicians often point out.....in many everyday situations where no script is specified—dinner conversation, small talk waiting for the bus, gossip in the company cafeteria—most of us can rise to the occasion and engage in emergent, improvised behavior (Sawyer 2000, p.184).

I want to assert that this is also a feature of our epistemic activities, and to add that, therefore, our knowledge is improvisational, and moreover, musical in the sense that I've explained.

To put it another way, what epistemology musicalized proposes is nothing but an idea to understand knowledge as some expressions continuous with poems or lyrics. As a matter of fact, poems or lyrics are obviously filled with accidental improvisationality at least at that very moment of creating them, and there is no doubt by definition that poems or lyrics are musical and rhythmic phenomena. Additionally, operas in classical music often include ordinary conversation as their constituent parts, so probably this fact also confirms my point that even just a linguistic expression can be taken to be musical.

However, developing my argument to this stage, another important part is heard. That is a personality that improvisationally chooses a particular vocabulary every time knowledge occurs within some grammatical or phonetic restrictions on the choice of vocabularies, for example, of English. Those personalities to which accidental improvisationality is ascribed, as it were, are sounding as continuous under knowledge or cognition that epistemology musicalized performs. Then, it is quite natural in respect of the root of words that this personality introduces the concept of 'person'. Thus, it comes to be suggested that 'person' exists at the base of our knowledge. Obviously it has been a tradition in the history of philosophy since John

Locke that an epistemic subject is regarded as a person. Locke's epistemology is so famous for being based upon his unique concept of 'idea' that his methodology is often called 'A Way of Ideas'. Locke simply defines 'idea' as the 'term which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks' (Locke 1975, bk.1.chap.1.sec.8, p.8). But, what actually happens when a man thinks? To this Locke answers, 'it being hard to conceive, that anything should think, and not be conscious of it' (Locke 1975, bk.2.chap.1.sec.11, p.110). That is to say, ideas are established by our consciousness. On the other hand, however, consciousness also establishes our person or personal identity. Locke describes this point like this;

We must consider what Persons stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as it self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness (Locke 1975, bk.2.chap.27.sec.9, p.335).

If that is the case, we should say that it is a person which is an epistemic subject who acquires knowledge by being conscious of ideas. As a matter of fact, even apart from Locke's context, it sounds very natural in our ordinary language to call each individual with a unique personality his or her 'person'. However, those aren't only reasons for me to bring the concept of person up here.

#### 4 Person and Personare

A point that I want to propose and highlight here is that the English word, 'personality' or 'person', is a concept in which a musical significance is inherent. The word, 'personality' or 'person', as is well known, comes from a Latin word, *persona*, which means 'mask', and *persona*, at least partly, originates from another Latin verb, *persono* (whose infinitive is *personare*). According to *A Latin Dictionary*, *persona* is 'from per-sono, to sound through, with the second syllable lengthened' (Lewis & Short 1975, p.1355). As is suggested, *persono* means 'to sound through and through, to resound', 'to make a sound', or 'to cry out, call aloud' (Lewis & Short 1975, p.1356). Actually, *persona* is a combination of two words, i.e. *per* which means 'through' and *sonus* which means 'sound'. We should notice that, grammatically



speaking, *persona* is an imperative of *personare* (See ‘*persona*’ in *Wiktionary*). Following this circumstance, we should say that the concept of person is originally musical. For example, A. H. Khan refers to those etymological circumstances about the concept of person as one of its origins and says;

.....let us look at the meaning complex for the term “person.” The term is derived from the Latin *persona*, from which semantically subtend two ideas that form its core meaning. One of the ideas is suggested by *personare*, meaning to sound thru, as in the case of the voice of an actor resounding (*sonare*) through (*per*) a mask (Khan 2002, p.3).

He points out that another idea characterizing *persona* is that of *personnalite* substance that is human and even divine or what is one in and of itself (*per se una*). In any case, if he is correct in claiming the intrinsic connection between person and *personare*, a mask (*persona*) that an actor or an actress wears in plays seems to be used as a sort of loudspeaker.

That musical status of person or *persona* followed up thus far is also confirmed in the contemporary discussion about music. Probably, the striking example is found in Naomi Cumming’s book, *The Sonic Self*. She, for instance, argues about synthesis of “voice” and “voices” in musical utterance, and asserts;

If a quasi-personal utterance, or “*persona*,” is heard in this combination of signs, it is now of one whose expressive impulse is offered a degree of containment by its relationship to broader tonal goals. The “*persona*” can be apprehended as a complexly formed yet singular character, whose synthesis as “one” is an ongoing process in musical time, responsive to new information as it is heard, and thus mutable in its emergent qualities (Cumming 2000, p.232).

If person or *persona* is an expressive self in music as Cumming argues, and our knowledge is thought to be a kind of music, then it is safe to say that the concept of person is perfectly suitable as an epistemic subject. Obviously this line of thought conforms not only to my idea of epistemology musicalized but also to a traditional standpoint of philosophical epistemology.

It seems that, by introducing the concept of person as a musical epistemic self in that way, epistemology musicalized can smoothly avoid those almost fatal difficulties I've pointed out earlier as to epistemology naturalized. First, this musical epistemic person is an institution-laden existence in the sense of submitting to restrictions on his/her choice of vocabularies, namely, to formal structures of music, therefore the person fits institutional knowledge from the outset. Second, obviously epistemology musicalized can explain the concept of intellectual property. For the person must be an author or a composer of knowledge that are created and performed improvisationally, so that it's rather natural to read a mechanism of producing property rights deeply in the person.

## 5 Augustinian Concept of Music

In fact, we can trace those ideas of epistemology musicalized back to St Augustine's *De Musica* in the Middle Ages. Augustine takes music to be a study to analyse sounds in general from a viewpoint of *tempus* (time or tempo) or *numerus* (number or rhythm) and declares;

Musica est scientia bene modulandi.

(Augustine 1947, liber 1. II-2, p.24.)

That is to say, 'music is the knowledge of modulating well'. Probably, 'modulating well' in this case can be interpreted as 'making a good rhythm'. Then Augustine extends the application of the concept of *numerus* or rhythm to corporeal bodies, memory, sensation, actions, pleasure and pain, judgement about justice and other things. In a word, he tries to musicalize all epistemic phenomena in general. In an Augustinian sense, the turn of the seasons is a sort of rhythm, and so are moral judgements.

This argument might sound extremely bold and even opposed to such a discovery in the contemporary brain science that a part to understand music in our brain is different from the speech centre. Actually Steven Mithen reports as to this circumstance, 'the neural networks that process language and music have some degree of independence from each other; it is possible to 'lose' or never to develop one of them while remaining quite normal in respect to the other. To use the technical



term, they exhibit double dissociation, and this requires us to consider language and music as separate cognitive domains' (Mithen 2006, p.62). Then, should we simply abandon the Augustinian concept of music because it's just nonsense and is unable to reflect the fruits of contemporary sciences?

I don't think so. The reason why we think language and music must be distinguished is simply that by 'music' we mean only classical music like Bach's or popular music. However, such a way of understanding music isn't absolutely correct. For a Greek word, 'μουσική', from which a contemporary word, 'music', is derived, is a common origin to both prose or poems and music in a contemporary sense according to a musicologist, Georgiades (See Georgiades 1954, Kap.2). If so, whatsoever voices, sound, and rhythm participate in must be 'μουσική'. The concept of music in this traditional sense must be the keynote to accompany the epistemology musicalized.

## 6 Question about Meaning

Probably at least two questions will be raised as to my idea of epistemology musicalized. First, knowledge is supposed not only to be an impromptu sound-event actually occurring in a particular space and time but also to be universal in a timeless sense, but it seems that epistemology musicalized can't deal with the aspect of universality in knowledge. This is a reasonable criticism. To this I want to distinguish two modes of knowledge firstly, namely, 'knowledge in play' which epistemology musicalized treats and 'knowledge in score' which is an epistemic mode with universality. For score or sheet music seems to be independent of particular actual plays or performances.

However, how can we understand musical score or sheet music as such? How can we identify the music which the score or the sheet represents? Surely, it's by playing it in our mind. Otherwise it hasn't yet been music. Actually just a score can't be music to those who can't read music. Therefore, my point is that; the very phenomenon that we regard just a score or written knowledge as being universal must be taken to be a sort of impromptu sound-event in that we take it to be so here right now, so 'knowledge in score' has to be eventually absorbed into 'knowledge in play'. Perhaps we could compare 'knowledge in score' to a rest in music.

The second question that will be raised as to epistemology musicalized is

concerned with the concept of meaning. Is it really possible to explain meanings of words that constitute knowledge only by virtue of voice or sound? This question gets to the heart of the matter so straightforwardly that success or failure of the programme of epistemology musicalized depends upon how I could answer this question. As to this, first of all, I want to confirm a self-evident point that tone, intonation, pitch, and accent in our speech have much to do with meaning of the speech. Compare the case that someone say 'it snows' in a cheerful tone with the case that someone say the same thing in a flustered tone. Such musical aspects of speech decide its meaning, as everyone knows well in an ordinary life. Perhaps, we have to investigate how this point is corresponding to Austin's speech act theory, particularly whether those musical effects could be explained by analogy with locutinary acts or not, but this will be a future task for me.

In addition, I want to propose an idea that meanings of words can be understood through sounds of some collaborative speech acts, namely, a function of our interaction in the form of 'call and response', in which meanings of words are regarded as answers to questions, 'what's that?' This is, as it were, a musicalization of meanings. Referring to two linguists, Wray and Auer, Mithen suggests that;

They argue that traditional linguistics has neglected to study the rhythms and tempos of verbal interaction — the manner in which we synchronize our utterance when having a conversation. This is a fundamental and universal feature of our language use (Mithen 2006, p.12).

If that is the case, we should understand meanings of words by tuning in to such musical features of those.

## 7 A Prospect

Reaching this stage, we are ready to clarify the problem about a causal determinism, to a certain extent, that I mentioned at the beginning of this article. We need to pay attention to the multilayered dynamic process of occurrence of knowledge. If someone says 'everything is causally determined', a hearer acquires knowledge that the person utters it. But then, the hearer could call the utterance in question by uttering an interrogative sentence, 'what is "causally determined?"' or 'how do you

know that?’ Perhaps, the initial utterer responds to that. Of course, the hearer comes to know that the utterer responds. However, if the response doesn’t make the hearer feel persuaded, or to put it another way along the present context, if the response doesn’t get into the rhythm of the hearer, then their interaction would be out of tune, when knowledge wouldn’t be established at least at that time. Still, there is a possibility that those unrhythmical interactions would be a motivation to produce another utterance in the future, which might lead to another knowledge as another utterance.

In any case, it is definitely a very interesting task to scrutinize and try to listen to other applicabilities of epistemology musicalized. I’m now thinking of applying the idea to the problem of how we should understand the law of non-contradiction. What is a contradiction? This question is quite important in the contemporary philosophical scene, as Priest’s paraconsistent logic takes the problem of contradiction very seriously. Paraconsistent logic suggests a logical system in which everything isn’t necessarily deduced from a contradiction, which is called ‘not explosive’ (See Priest 2004, pp.24-29). However, in fact, it is still unclear what a contradiction is. For example, Patrick Grim divides contradictions into four kinds, namely, semantic, syntactic, pragmatic, and ontological ones (Grim 2004, p.53). Perhaps, contradictions that conform to the scrutiny from a viewpoint of epistemology musicalized best in his classifications may be contradictions in pragmatic sense, since such contradiction is defined as ‘the joint assertion of a proposition and its denial’ (Grim 2004, p.53) which can be interpreted as the definition in terms of actual utterances.

However, I want to ask, ‘can’t we utter A and not-A simultaneously?’ If we accept epistemology musicalized, such question is inevitable, and the answer to it must be ‘no, we can’t’. But, how about the case in which two people utter those two contradictory sentences simultaneously? Is that case an example of contradictions? Yet, in that case, the situation is not impossible but rather very trivial, which sounds just contradictory to the very impossibility of contradictions. Probably, similar questions will arise one after another. I am keen to listen to what kind of fruits those considerations will produce, or what sort of sounds those will play.

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