

Memories, Lies and Entitlements

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What should we think when what someone tells us conflicts with what we take ourselves to remember? According to one view, we should side with our memory, because we have an entitlement to believe what we seem to remember where we have no such entitlement to believe what people say.

Disagreement

A thinks about whether or not some hypothesis *H* is true. In her total evidence *E* there are only two considerations relevant to the truth or falsity of *E*. First, she has what appears to her to be a memory that *H* is true. She also has testimony from *B* that *H* is not true. *A* has no evidence concerning the reliability of her own memory and no evidence concerning the reliability of *B*'s testimony.

Three options:

1. *A* should think that *H* is probably true.
2. *A* should think that *H* is probably false.
3. *A* should suspend between the idea that *H* is probably true and probably false.

Entitlements

- One idea is that we have an entitlement to believe what we seem to remember, but no such entitlement to believe what other people tell us.¹
- Consider a game with the following structure:

¹ This is from Faulkner (2011) developed in response to Burge (1993).

TRUST GAME

		<i>Player B</i>	
		Trustworthy	Untrustworthy
<i>Player A</i>	Transfer	20, 20	0, 40
	Keep	10, 0	10, 0

- Rational play yields the *Keep/Untrustworthy* outcome. *Player B* has no incentive to do anything other than play *Untrustworthy*. Given this, *Player A* has no incentive to do anything other than play *Keep*.
- Faulkner makes two claims:

- Believing what people tell us is irrational unless we are aware of reasons for doing so.
- These considerations are distinctive to testimony—they are not true of memory.

Memory

- Does memory have the same payoff structure?
- According to Faulkner, the conflict in testimony comes from the idea that we have a *general* conflict of interests.
- But memories are formed in different ways—some voluntary, some involuntary.²
- Voluntary memories *can* bring about a conflict of interests.³
- And this means that there *is* the kind of general conflict of interests between our earlier and later selves that Faulkner identifies between speakers and listeners.

² The difference between things we find ‘unforgettable’ and the things we ‘commit to memory’.

³ My earlier self wants to remember the good points about something, my later self wants to remember the truth.

Testimony & Memory

- Does this payoff structure mean that we have no entitlement?
- The Argument from Cooperation rests on a (problematic) equivocation.
 - It’s true that there’s a *general* conflict of interests.
 - But this doesn’t entail any *specific* conflict of interests.
- If we think about general interests, we don’t get the payoff structure associated with the Trust Game, so belief is not irrational.
- If we think about interests in specific situations, we don’t get the payoff structure associated with the Trust Game, so belief is not irrational.

References

Burge, Tyler. 1993. “Content Preservation.” *Philosophical Review* 102:457–488.

Faulkner, Paul. 2011. *Knowledge on Trust*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.