



Eudaimonist Epistemology

By

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Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that studies knowledge. Distilling epistemology into a nineteen hundred word essay is an ambitious project. Hoping that it will be understood and accepted as true is hubris. Let this act of excessive pride begin.

This essay is divided into seven sections: Identifying Mental Phenomena (memory, actuality, imagination, and others are discussed), What is Knowledge? (in which knowledge is defined as “shared experience”), Psychologizing (in which two strategies for dealing with the failure to achieve knowledge are discussed), What is Opinion?, What is Belief?, Two Big Pitfalls (in which limitations upon experience and the desire to “know” everything are discussed), and Conclusion.

1. Identifying Mental Phenomena

1.1. Memory, Actuality, and Imagination

The first task of epistemology is to catalog mental phenomena. The dominant divisions of mental phenomena are a trinity consisting of memory, actuality, and imagination. This “Holy Trinity” of mental phenomena corresponds with the categories past, present, and future. I claim elsewhere

that the Christian concept of the Holy Trinity derives from this fundamental fact of epistemology.

1.2. The Five Senses

The point of data input for all mental phenomena is actuality, the present. The means of input to our minds is our five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. These five senses produce experiences in our minds automatically. Sensations are organized automatically into perceptions. An example is the sensational blur that is a newborn infant’s mother, which is formed automatically by the infant’s mind into the perception Mother. Perceptions are organized often automatically into categories that may become, with definition and labeling, concepts. An example is the shape “triangle.” The mind automatically recognizes the shape and the child can articulate that two different triangular objects are somehow similar. Soon the child will be taught that his experience of the abstraction “triangle” is a concept with that name and a certain definition. Abstractions can also be formed from other abstractions. This process may or may not be automatic. An example is the realization from the existence of the concepts “triangle,” “square,” “circle,” that there is a higher and broader concept, “shape.”

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1.3 Hallucinations and Dreams

We learn about other mental phenomena as we grow to maturity. Hallucinations and dreams are often experienced by the person hallucinating and the dreamer as “actuality.” Actuality means present awareness or the experience of the present. In identifying knowledge, a person must be prepared to identify these states, at least after the fact, and treat the experience appropriately. As an experience that is not shared, personal hallucinations and dreams are not knowledge. An example is a dream that the dreamer’s wife has cheated on him. It would not be appropriate behavior for the dreamer to file for divorce when he awakes!

1.4 Emotions

Emotions are important mental phenomena. Emotions include love, hate, joy, anger, pride, guilt, attraction, and fear. Like the formation of perceptions from sensations, emotions are automatically formed. Like the formation of abstractions from perceptions that can become concepts only by definition and labeling, emotions require mental effort to process successfully. Acting upon attraction or fear without mental effort might lead to adultery or murder. Emotions are essential to life. Without emotions we cannot flourish. I am tempted to say that without emotions we cannot live. As important as emotions are, though, they require work. The complex of causes for each emotion must be identified and the appropriate response formulated and enacted.

1.5 Aesthetic Experience

Aesthetic experience is a mental phenomenon. The range of aesthetic experience is large, from the enjoyment of a beautiful sunset to the unitive or oceanic experience. The unitive experience is the profound experience of oneness with all of existence. The unitive experience, rarely enjoyed, is at the foundation of all religions. The unitive experience is that which is sought by all mystics and by those who meditate. The unitive experience is a common subject of poetry. I emphasize that the unitive experience is aesthetic, not mystical.

1.6 Intuition

Intuition, revelation, extrasensory perception, insight are all labels for the automatic formation of abstractions from abstractions, a phenomenon discussed above. Whether these experiences yield knowledge depends upon the mental work of the person experiencing them. These experiences have to be actively managed, as emotions and concept formation have to be actively managed.

1.7 Introspection

Introspection is a mental activity analogous to the five senses. Introspection is the active examination of our own mental contents. Only by introspection are we able to identify the mental phenomena described in this essay: memory, actuality, imagination, sensations, perceptions, abstractions, concepts, hallucinations, dreams, emotions, and aesthetic experience.

2 What is Knowledge?

Having surveyed the contents of the mind, we now turn to knowledge. Knowledge is shared experience. (For those suffering over the word “shared,” consider the more familiar expression “objective knowledge.” The adjective “objective” means that the knowledge is “out there,” accessible to and *shareable* in principle by one and all and not “in here,” “in my head” and merely subjective.)

The simplest example of knowledge is the experience of red. If we both look at a beautiful woman wearing a red sweater, we share the experience of red. We can label it “red.” We have knowledge of red. We have a shared experience of red. We also have a shared experience of “beautiful,” “woman,” “wearing,” “a,” and “sweater.” We must be capable of abstracting out, of separating, all these elements from our act of looking at the woman. Our memory of that experience, when we discuss it at FOR Pub on Thursday night, is knowledge. We have all just shared the experience in our imagination of a beautiful woman wearing a red sweater thanks to my writing these words. What color was her hair?

While the knowledge of perceptions is crucial and the basis of all other knowledge, we are more interested in questions such as “Is volition an axiom?”

Is the proposition “Volition is an axiom” knowledge? A complex process of dialog is required to find out. We must first determine whether we share a common experience of the meaning of the crucial words “volition” and “axiom.” Then we must reason about these experiences, by analogy, by perception, and by syllogism.

In trying to share experience with another (to achieve knowledge), it is crucial to identify their experience. We must constantly ask, “What does she mean; what experience has she had; what experience is she trying to communicate to me?” This approach dictates that we emphasize listening more than talking when seeking knowledge. Everyone who speaks is trying to communicate a true experience. They may have labeled it differently than the listener has labeled it. They have mislabeled it. They may have incorrectly identified relationships and casual factors pertaining to their experience. They may have drawn false conclusions from their experience. All of these errors can thwart successful communication of the experience. Whatever they have done, their experience is real. Only by identifying that experience can we hope to share that experience with them and achieve knowledge.

3 Psychologizing

If we are unsuccessful, we must then ask questions pertaining to the parties to the dialog. These questions must be asked by each party of himself. “Why am I unable to share experience with my partner in conversation?”

3.1 *Meta-Narrative*

One possible answer relates to fundamental facts about the parties to the conversation. As mature speakers we all have a rich complex of values. A particular proposition may have bearing on a person’s worldview, his meta-narrative. Meta-narrative means the big story a person uses to organize his understanding of existence. A

believer in God has one meta-narrative. A non-theist has another, very different, meta-narrative. A person who believes in free will has one meta-narrative. A person who is a determinist has another. A humanist’s meta-narrative is so different from that of a post-modernist, for instance, that they cannot communicate meaningfully on intellectual matters at all.

3.2 *Petite-Narrative*

A particular proposition may have a bearing on a person’s self-perception or self-evaluation, his petite-narrative. A person who is pro-choice and who has had an abortion will be disinclined to change her view to the pro-life view that considers all abortion murder. People are not inclined to label themselves murderers. (I am pro-choice, by the way. I do not consider abortion murder.) Big philosophical questions are often difficult to resolve because of the impact that the parties’ personal answers have already had upon them. We are incapable of knowing some things about ourselves.

4 What is Opinion?

A personal opinion is a mental content different from knowledge. For example, “*The Godfather* is the best movie ever made” is a personal opinion. Personal opinions are formed because of the unique circumstances of the individual, his education, upbringing, and experience. The experience may not be shared. Even if the words are shared—“*The Godfather* is the best movie ever made”—by two persons, their reasons are likely to be different. An informed opinion is based upon training, experience, and extensive knowledge of the field. An informed opinion can be knowledge. Experts can agree and their informed opinions can be classified as knowledge.

5 What is Belief?

Belief is a mental content different from knowledge. “God is good” is a belief. The status of a belief is a learned proposition communicated by the community of the individual believer. “God is good” is not an experience, but it is a proposition shared by the

members of the community. A belief is not knowledge.

6 Two Pitfalls

Here are some pitfalls to knowledge.

6.1 *We Do Not and Cannot Experience Some Things*

We cannot know some things. As individuals we cannot experience the full range of human experience. We can only experience the range permitted by our specific equipment. A person who is colorblind cannot understand red. A person who is deaf from birth cannot understand sound. A male cannot know what it is like to enjoy a female orgasm and visa versa. A person who has never been in love cannot know love. A man cannot know what it is like to be pregnant and give birth. A non-parent cannot understand parental love. A person who has never enjoyed the unitive experience cannot understand it. As prideful beings, we may experience denial and resentment associated with the statement that we lack certain human capacities. But it is a fact. We must rise to the knowledge that there are just some things that we cannot know, even though those things may be known by others. The most pertinent experience for a group of non-theists is the real experience of some theists that compels them to believe in a god or gods. While I am confident in my belief that there are no gods, I am likewise confident that some few theists are actually having an experience that they incorrectly identify as proof of the existence of their god or gods.

6.2 *Boxing the Unknown*

There are many things that are not yet known. Lack of knowledge for beings who live or die by their knowledge is life threatening. To avoid fear, we are inclined to assume we know everything, at least everything important. We are inclined to deny the emotions of mystery, awe, amazement, or astonishment. A manifestation of this denial is the “boxing” of the unknown into “safe” categories. The two most common safe categories are “God” and “the-scientific-but-as-yet-undiscovered.” The proper “box” for the unknown is “the unknown.” The unknown has

no characteristics, is unbounded, and is not necessarily safe. Acknowledging the unknown is not comfortable, but it is rational.

7 Conclusion

Epistemology is the study of knowledge. The key to the study is clarity about the contents of consciousness and awareness that we are trying to share mental experiences with one another. All experience is true. The question is what is the proper interpretation of that experience and is the experience shared by others.

Meaning of Membership

Regular membership:
\$35 per year

Contributing membership:
\$70 per Year

Lifetime membership:
\$700

Contact Information

To talk to somebody about Fellowship of Reason call:

Chris at 678-585-0406
Vera at 404-577-7968
Martin at 770-471-9800
Dan at 770-831-3010

In order to enjoy the benefits of the Fellowship of Reason, you need not be a member. All of our activities are free and open to the public. A number of non-members regularly participate with us and are most heartily welcome.

Why then become a member of the Fellowship of Reason?

The Fellowship of Reason exists by virtue of the generosity of its members and friends. People you know contribute money, property, services, and time in order that the value we all enjoy continues to exist. The services by performers at FORum, by executive committee members, by hosts and hostesses, and by planners of events are vital to the existence of FOR. Those volunteer services are, in fact, FOR.

Membership is, simply, a clear statement that you wish the Fellowship of Reason to continue to exist. Membership is not the only way to make this statement. Some non-members are generous contributors of money, property, and services. In fact, we all benefit by the mere attendance of non-members at FOR events.

If you want FOR to continue to exist, won't you clearly say so by becoming a member today?

Call for Submissions

FOR members are encouraged to contribute items for our monthly newsletter, The Eudaimonist. Suggested topics include the use of reason in daily life; personal improvement; ethics and happiness; friendship; and celebrations of heroes, freedom, science, culture and the arts. Essays/articles 750-1,000 words; book/movie/TV reviews 250-500 words; letters 100-250 words. Submissions are subject to acceptance based on quality and relevance, and may be edited for spelling and grammar, or trimmed for space. Poetry, photographs and artwork are also welcome.

Direct all inquires to Martin Cowen, Newsletter Editor, mlcowen@yahoo.com or call 770-471-9800.

Birthdays

July Birthdays

July 1	Eddie F
July 1	Jack H
July 25	David v M
July 26	Steve W
July 31	Linda C

August Birthdays

August 1	Beth H
August 18	Carlos F
August 18	Dunham McA
August 24	Edward C
August 25	Holly L
August 28	Tom W
August 31	Nick W

Letters to the Editor

Write us at:
Fellowship of Reason
P.O. Box 5564
Atlanta, Georgia 31107

Or, E-mail us at info@fellowshipofreason.com.

All letters must be signed to be considered for publication.

We Study Ethics: After the End of Faith

FOR's continuing education program will be on hiatus for June and July because outside commitments will take the coordinator out of town.

Our purpose is to simply state what is our common ethical ground in the Fellowship of Reason, to describe systematically the modern eudaimonist ethics.

Please plan to participate, as we map out our common ground.

Any input to this program should be directed to David Ziebell at dziebell@bellsouth.net.

Special Note: Stay tuned for a new time and place when we resume in August! We will no longer meet at the Crowne Plaza.

July 2006

July 2006							August 2006						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28	29	30	31		
30	31												

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
July 2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1:00pm FORum (NWUUC)		Independence Day 7:30pm NO--Philosophy Club	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)			Still Looking: Essays on Am 11:00am Nonfiction book club (Chris and Allison's house)
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
8:00am FOR-Runners		7:30pm NO--Fiction Book Club	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)	8:00pm Gone to Italy		
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
8:00am No FOR-Runners		7:30pm NO--Philosophy Club	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)			
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
8:00am Deadline for newsletter submissions 8:00am NO-FOR-Runner:	6:00pm Return from Italy	David v M bd	Steve W. bd 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)	8:00pm Pub night		6:30pm Movie night (John's studio)
30	31					
8:00am FOR-Runners	Linda C. bd					

August 2006

August 2006						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

September 2006						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		August 1	2	3	4	5
		Beth H. bd 7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)			
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1:00pm FORum (NWUUC)		7:30pm NO--Fiction Book Club	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)			11:00am Nonfiction book club (Chris and Allison's house)
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
8:00am FOR-Runners		7:30pm Philosophy Club (Sally's house)	7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)		Carlos F. bd Dunham McA. bd	7:30pm Potluck
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
8:00am FOR-Runners			8:00am Deadline for newsletter submissions 7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)	Edward C. bd 8:00pm Pub night	Holly bd	6:30pm Movie night (John's studio)
27	28	29	30	31		
8:00am FOR-Runners	Tom W. bd		7:30pm Invisible College (Greg Johnson's house)	Nick W. bd		

Events

For detailed info on all upcoming events, visit
<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/calendar.htm>

FOR Runners: Sunday 8 a.m.

We meet every Sunday morning at 8 a.m., except FORum Sundays, at the Flying Biscuit at 1655 McClendon Avenue, Atlanta, GA 30307 <http://www.flyingbiscuit.com/> for a run through Candler Park and along Freedom Parkway. Breakfast at Flying Biscuit follows at 9 a.m. Walkers and joggers welcome! Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800.

Philosophy Club: 1st/3rd Tuesdays 7:30 p.m.

Philosophy tapes are played to a small private audience in the living room of a volunteer on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. Free. Sally Hull coordinator: 404-257-0454

Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday 7:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 2nd Tuesday of every month at John and Beth's house. For book selections and more information, go to:
www.fellowshipofreason.com/fiction.htm.
 Beth Holley coordinator: 404-754-7519.

Non-Fiction Book Club: 2nd Saturday 11 a.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet 11 a.m. on the 2nd Saturday of every month at Chris and Allison's house.. For book selections and more information, go to:
www.fellowshipofreason.com/nonfiction.htm.
 Allison Byrd coordinator: 404-372-4089

FOR Symphony: Our participation in the ASO Concert Season for 2006-2007 will begin in September.

Martin Cowen coordinator: 770-471-9800.

Potluck: 3rd Saturday, 7:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet monthly for a potluck supper. Bring something good to eat or drink to share. Our next potluck is currently unscheduled.

David Ziebell coordinator: 678-591-1510

Movie Night: 4th Saturday, 6:30 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR enjoy a monthly movie night at John's studio using his extraordinary equipment. Arrive at 6:30 p.m. Doors will be locked for safety! Movie starts at 7:15 p.m. Free.

John Grover coordinator: 404-754-7519

Pub Night: 4th Thursday, 8 p.m.

Members and friends of FOR meet on the 4th Thursday of every month at Manuel's Tavern at 8 p.m. for adult beverages and adult conversation.

Scott Carper coordinator: 404-964-6697

Join us at FORum:

1st Sunday at 1 p.m.
 (Meet, Greet at 12:30)

July 2, 2006

"IS PATRIOTISM
RATIONAL?"

Celebration of Freedom by
Chris Snider

Celebration of Talent by Jerry
Pease

Potluck Schedule

Thanks to the many hostesses and hosts for the potlucks over the years.

Here's your chance to sign up to join this esteemed group. Please contact David Ziebell at 678-591-1510 if you wish to host potluck on one of the open dates in 2006 below.

July 15 - open

Aug 19 - open

Sept 23 - taken! The fifth straight year...

**THE FELLOWSHIP OF REASON'S
BOZART FESTIVAL**

Oct 21 - open

Nov 18 - open

Dec 16 - Taken - Martin and Linda Cowen

Celebratory Announcements

Do yourself a favor and remember a good thing that happened to you this month:

Please, write it down: _____

Now do the membership of FOR, Inc. a favor by relating this fact during FORum next month!



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Fellowship of Reason

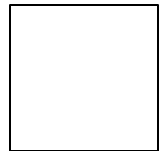
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Promoting personal flourishing
through reason.

FELLOWSHIP OF REASON, INC.
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We're on the Web!
See us at:

fellowshipofreason.com