


## COMMENT TO “MEMORY AND REFLECTION”

Guadalupe Reinoso<sup>1</sup>

Commented Article: MI, Chienkuo. Memory and Reflection. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, vol. 44, Special issue in honor of Ernest Sosa, p. 151-168, 2021.

I suspect, however, that he was not very able to think. Thinking is forgetting differences, generalizing, abstracting. In the overly replete world of Funes, there was nothing but details, almost contiguous details (my translation. J. L. Borges, Funes the Memorious)<sup>2</sup>

Many thinkers, both Western and Eastern, have thought about the importance of memory for human life. Memory plays a very important role in the way we build our identity, our self. It is vital for the way we reflect and we have knowledge about ourselves and our environment. On the other hand, it is very important for our agency: if, for example, we understand that we are temporary agents, memory has a key role in planning over time. In this sense, memory is related not only to the past but also to the future. All these cases show memory as a positive or virtuous aspect of our lives. The counterpart of this way of thinking about memory is to think of forgetting as something opposite and negative. Then, if forgetting is lack of memory -a

<sup>1</sup> Professor at the National University of Córdoba (UNC), Córdoba – Argentina. Director of the Research Group named *Pyrrhonism and neo-Pyrrhonism. The Influx of Antique Skepticism in Contemporary Philosophy (Pirronismo y neo-pirronismo. El influjo del escepticismo antiguo en la filosofía contemporánea)*, Secretariat of Science and Technology (SeCyT), UNC.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0003-5732> E-mail: [guadareino@gmail.com](mailto:guadareino@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> “Sospecho, sin embargo, que no era muy capaz de pensar. Pensar es olvidar diferencias, es generalizar, abstraer. En el abarrotado mundo de Funes no había sino detalles, casi inmediatos”.

<https://doi.org/10.1590/0101-3173.2021.v44dossier2.11.p169>



This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License.

malfunctioning, an epistemic vice-, forgetting does not seem to help in our lives. However, as Borges said, if we do not forget, we cannot think. Beside it can be added: we cannot act either.

A contemporary virtue epistemology is a heterogeneous approach that can be broadly described as a perspective centered in the epistemic evaluation of agents' and communities' intellectual virtues and vices. One general characterization of intellectual virtues can be offered: they are features that promote agents' and communities' intellectual flourishing, or which make for excellent cognizers (TURRI, ALFANO & GRECO, 2019). Especially in Sosa's proposal of virtue epistemology, reflection plays a main role in the way of understanding knowledge and action. The article "Memory and Reflection" (MI, 2021) proposes, based on the *Analects of Confucius*, a refreshed conception of Sosa's notion of reflection through two components, a *retrospective* component and a *perspective* component. The former is related to past and memory; the latter, to future and forward looking. From different quotations by Western and Eastern writers, the author of the article shows the importance of memory. Notoriously, through references to contemporary psychology and philosophy, they indicate the importance of forgetting, too. If forgetting is accepted in this positive and virtue sense (that is, not just as a phenomenon opposed to memory), it means a serious challenge both for epistemology in general and for virtue epistemology in particular. The author proposes a way to face the challenge by suggesting reflection as metacognition in a *bi-level* virtue epistemology that arises from the complementation of Sosa's virtue epistemology and Confucian thought. To achieve this, the author gives "The Password Case" example:

Ernie receives a message from his bank in which a long series digit password, say, RSbh#49835TG, is set and given to him for his e-banking account. Apart from this long series digit password for e-banking account, he has several other long series digit passwords for email accounts, journal author accounts and internet access accounts. It would be very difficult for him to remember all the different passwords. Instead of remembering the e-banking account password, Ernie decides to "forget it" and save the number on his secret pocket book (so he can reach it anytime when he needs it).

To the author, this example shows that forgetting can be a source of justification or ground to acquire knowledge: “Ernie knows his e-banking password, in this case, because he has the epistemic virtue of forgetting the password number”. Under this description, forgetting has a positive epistemic meaning. Thereby, since forgetting has a double possible description, as an epistemic vice and as an epistemic virtue, it is a challenge for virtue epistemology. The next step of the article is the developed explanation of how “The Password Case” example is handled. This example shows that Ernie has learned and developed a well-balanced competence of “memory” and “forgetting” (ignoring/recycling). In this sense, forgetting can have many different faces depending on whether it is a first-order capacity (automatic or passive) or a second-order capacity (reflective or attentive or active). As the author warns, *bi-level* virtue epistemology should not be understood as a proposal of different types of knowledge, but as a distinction between different types of competencies that can help us to acquire knowledge.

Beyond their interesting way of articulating Sosa’s and Confucius’s the ideas of understanding and facing the “forgetting” phenomenon, the author’s example could be understood as a case of *omission*. The given example can be described as follows: he *refrains* from remembering, he *omits* to remember the password. Many omissions are examined through the notion of negative action or absence of action. Subsequently, one question arises: which absences of action are omissions and which ones, forgetting? On the other hand, it seems that Ernie’s “forgetting” does not fall under this negative description, as it was an intentional act of not memorizing. However, some omissions could be connected with actions, since they are intentional. In other words, there are omissions that can be interpreted under intentional descriptions as “positive” action (CLARKE, 2012). In the example, Ernie deliberates about the difficulties to remember a lot of different passwords. Ernie has practical reasons to forget; consequently, in some way, he is taking action. Thus, it seems necessary to describe better what makes the example an example of intentional forgetting instead of one of intentional omission. On the other hand, the possible crossovers between omissions and forgetting are interesting to evaluate different kinds of agency. Distinguishing cases of intentional omissions from those of intentional forgetting can contribute to better detection of several types of forgetting, what their cognitive level (first or second order) is, and what relationship they may have with the agency and moral responsibility.

On the other hand, “The Password Case” focuses on intentional forgetting and it can be interpreted as self-regarding intellectual virtues, which promote the individual’s own intellectual flourishing. At an interpersonal level, cases of intentional forgetting have been thought of in negative terms due to the adverse and undesirable consequences for some communities. The so-called “polices of memory” (the struggle against intentional and no intentional forgetting) in the cases of the Holocaust or the Military Coup in Argentina has been of enormous importance in promoting people’s acquisition of knowledge and intellectual flourishing. Not only do these policies against forgetting (which take various forms in the public arena: trials against the guilty, commemoration, exhibitions, the creation of memory museums, specialist books about the topic, congresses to discuss these experiences, etc.) seek to promote individuals’ flourishing but mainly to develop better democratic communities. Neither are the abovementioned examples of memory policies intended to be a counterargument to the objective pursued in the article nor to eliminate certain virtuous forms of forgetting. Rather, they seek to draw attention to a possible *asymmetry* that could take place between cases of forgetting which can be understood as virtues (for example, as forgetting traumas to have a better life) at an individual level, but which could work in a negative or undesirable way at the social or community level. If forgetting has a paradoxical character - it is not only a vice but also a virtue-, the *asymmetry* between the role of forgetting at its individual level and its role at a social level seems to be an important aspect to be added to the development of the *bi-level* virtue epistemology.

## REFERENCES

BORGES, J.L. **Ficciones**. Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1944

CLARKE, R. What is an omission? **Philosophical Issues**, 22, Action Theory, p. 127-143, 2012.

TURRI, John, ALFANO, Mark, and GRECO, John. Virtue Epistemology, **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy** (Fall 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2019/entries/epistemology-virtue/>>.

MI, Chienkuo. Memory and Reflection. **Trans/Form/Ação**: Unesp journal of philosophy, vol. 44, Special issue in honor of Ernest Sosa, p. 169-172, 2021.

---

Received: 28/3/2020

Approved: 05/4/2021