

RELIABILISM'S MEMORY LOSS

Abstract

Generativism about memory justification, stated simply, is the view that memory can generate epistemic justification. Process reliabilists have resisted generativism, typically because they think memory may only, or must, preserve past justification of some kind. Roughly, process reliabilism explains the justification of beliefs in terms of the reliability of the processes they result from. Reliabilists laud their theory for explaining the alleged intuition that a belief's current justificatory status generally depends on its past. Some advocates of reliabilism deny various forms of generativism (Senor 2009). Other reliabilists reject or remain neutral about only the more extreme forms (Goldman 2009, Lackey 2007, Lyons 2009, Michaelian 2011, and Senor forthcoming).

In this paper I argue that reliabilism *entails* an extreme form of generativism, which I call *hyperradical generativism*: memory can generate justification (prima facie, ultima facie, propositional, and doxastic) for any otherwise unjustified belief in memory. Because reliabilism is sometimes oversimplified in a way that masks its relation to generativism, I state these views carefully (in Section 2) before arguing (in Section 3) that reliabilism entails hyperradical generativism. A careful statement of reliabilism reveals that if it is true and if seeming recollection is a reliable, belief-independent memory process, then memory can generate justification for any otherwise unjustified belief in memory. I argue at length that seeming recollection is indeed a reliable, belief-independent memory process. So, reliabilism entails hyperradical generativism. I address (in Section 4) objections to my argument that concern cognitive penetration, belief individuation, and reliabilism's generality problem.

My argument leaves reliabilism with a dilemma. Either hyperradical generativism is true or false. If false, then reliabilism is false, since reliabilism entails hyperradical generativism. If true, then reliabilism's standing suffers, since it no longer explains the alleged intuition about a belief's justification depending on its past; if hyperradical generativism is true, then memory can generate justification of any kind for any belief in memory irrespective of its history. Reliabilist doubters of hyperradical generativism must pick their poison: embrace hyperradical generativism, renounce reliabilism, or invite incoherence.