Memory and immunity to error through misidentification

Memory seems to support judgments about the past in two very different ways. One of them is by preserving a judgment that was formed in the past over time. Memory conserves, in this way, the information that we learnt in the past up to the present time. We may call this aspect of memory, ‘semantic’ or ‘factual’ memory. Memory also supports judgments about the past by producing experiences that seem to represent events that we perceived in the past. We may call this aspect of memory, ‘episodic’ or ‘experiential’ memory. Episodic memory is interesting in that episodic memories have certain phenomenological features that semantic memories lack, such as a feeling of pastness. It is more controversial, however, whether judgments about the past supported by episodic memory, as opposed to semantic memory, also enjoy certain epistemically special features. One such feature has come to be known in the philosophical literature as ‘immunity to error through misidentification’ (or, for short, ‘IEM’). In this paper, I will investigate whether those judgments about the past which are formed on the basis of our episodic memories are IEM or not.[[1]](#endnote-1) I will proceed as follows.

In section 1, I will identify the variety of IEM that will occupy us in this discussion, and I will motivate its significance. In section 2, I will discuss the relevance of so-called ‘quasi-memory’ for the issue of whether memory judgments are IEM, and I will eventually argue that resorting to quasi-memory is the wrong approach for tackling this issue. I will suggest that the key to the IEM phenomenon with regards to memory lies, instead, in the nature of mnemonic content. Thus, in section 3, I will begin to explore the issue of whether memory judgments are IEM by asking what the content of our episodic memories is.[[2]](#endnote-2) I will put forward a proposal about the content of episodic memories according to which they represent perceptions of past events. This will lead us, in turn, to a discussion of the content of perceptual experiences in section 4. The outcome of that discussion will be that a perceptual experience always represents the fact that the subject of that experience bears some relation to an event in the external world. The combination of the outcomes from sections 3 and 4 will be, then, that a subject is always an intentional object of her own memories: In episodic memory, one always remembers being the subject whose relations to a worldly event were experienced in some past perception. The way in which this conclusion delivers the result that memory judgments are IEM will be specified in section 5. Finally, in section 6, a lesson regarding self-awareness will be drawn from the fact that memory judgments are IEM by analogy with similar conclusions about the epistemic status of judgments based on proprioception.

1. **Immunity to error through misidentification**

The notion of immunity to error through misidentification is introduced by Sydney Shoemaker in some discussions of self-reference that mainly concern introspection. In those discussions, Shoemaker puts forward several formulations of IEM. In some of those formulations, IEM has to do with knowledge whereas, in others, it seems to have more to do with rationality.[[3]](#endnote-3) Interestingly, though, in some of Shoemaker’s discussions of memory, IEM is introduced in yet a different way; a way that appeals to neither the notion of knowledge nor that of rationality. The following two passages illustrate the type of IEM that concerns Shoemaker when it comes to memory:

Consider a case in which I say, on the basis of my memory of a past incident, ‘I shouted that Johnson should be impeached,’ and compare this with a case in which I say, again on the basis of my memory of a past incident, ‘John shouted that Johnson should be impeached.’ In the latter case it could turn out that I do remember someone who looked and sounded just like John shouting that Johnson should be impeached, but that the man who shouted this was nevertheless not John – it may be that I misidentified the person as John at the time I observed the incident […] But this sort of misidentification is not possible in the former case. My memory report could of course be mistaken, for one can misremember such incidents, but it could not be the case that I have a full and accurate memory of the past incident but am mistaken in thinking that the person I remember shouting was myself. I shall speak of such memory judgments as being immune to error through misidentification with respect to the first person pronouns, or other ‘self-referring’ expressions, contained in them.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Thus if I claim on the strength of memory that I saw John yesterday, and have a full and accurate memory of the incident, it cannot be the case that I remember someone seeing John but have misidentified that person as myself; my memory claim ‘I saw John’ is subject to error through misidentification with respect to the term ‘John’ (for it could have been John’s twin or double that I saw), but not with respect to ‘I’.[[5]](#endnote-5)

In this discussion of memory, the notion of IEM is spelled out in terms of truth or, more precisely, truth-conditions for memory. The issue that seems to concern Shoemaker in the two passages above is the extent to which an accurate memory may leave room for error when a subject judges, on the basis of that memory, that she had a certain experience or performed a certain action in the past.[[6]](#endnote-6) Is it possible for the subject to be wrong in claiming that she had the relevant property because the person who she correctly remembers to have had the experience, or to have performed the action, is someone else and she has misidentified that person as herself? If this is possible, Shoemaker claims, the subject’s judgment that she once had the relevant property is not IEM relative to her memory. Otherwise, her judgment is IEM relative to it. More generally, we may formulate this ‘truth version’ of IEM (or ‘IEMτ’, for short) as follows:

IEMτ For any property P and grounds G:

If I judge that I am P on the basis of G, then that judgment is IEMτ relative to G just in case it is impossible that there is a subject S such that:

1. G correctly represents S as being P.
2. I mistakenly think that I am identical with S.
3. My judgment that I am P is false as a result of (ii).

What is meant by ‘impossible’ in this formulation of IEM? In discussions of IEM concerning introspection and proprioception, Shoemaker distinguishes two varieties of IEM. Judgments made on the basis of proprioception are meant to be IEM because, in the actual world, one’s proprioceptive experiences will always provide one with information about one’s own body. This rules out, as a matter of fact, the possibility that one mistakenly thinks of a different person (a person whose body one is experiencing through proprioception) as being oneself. But it does not rule it out in principle, since it remains logically possible for one’s brain to be appropriately connected to someone else’s body in such a way that proprioception provides one with information about that body. By contrast, judgments made on the basis of introspection are supposed to be IEM in a stronger sense. It is meant to be logically impossible for one to mistakenly think of a different person, a person whose mental states one is introspecting, as being oneself. Thus, Shoemaker writes:

In being aware that one feels pain one is, tautologically, aware not simply that the attribute *feels pain* is instantiated, but that it is instantiated in *oneself*.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Following the literature on IEM, we may refer to the former type of IEM as ‘de facto’ IEM and to the latter type as ‘logical’ IEM. This distinction yields two varieties of IEMτ depending on how one chooses to specify the modal force of ‘impossible’ in the formulation offered above. If the circumstances in the actual world guarantee that I will never make the mistake specified in (i-iii) when I judge that I have property P on the basis of grounds G, then my judgment is de facto IEMτ relative to G. By contrast, if there is no possible world in which I make that mistake, then my judgment is logically IEMτ relative to G. In this paper, I will concentrate on the question of whether memory judgments are logically IEMτ relative to our episodic memories.

The philosophical interest of logical IEMτ with regards to memory concerns the topic of self-awareness. If memory judgments are logically IEMτ, then that suggests that there is some sense in which, in memory, one is aware of the subject who is remembered to have instantiated such-and-such properties as being oneself.[[8]](#endnote-8) In that case, it seems important to examine what that form of self-awareness consists in.[[9]](#endnote-9) By contrast, if memory judgments are not IEMτ, then that suggests that, in memory, there are some criteria that one uses to conclude that one is the subject who is remembered to have instantiated such-and-such properties. In that case, it seems important to determine what kind of ‘identification criteria’ one uses to perform such inferences, since criteria of that sort could arguably make up a concept of oneself.[[10]](#endnote-10) Let us consider, then, what type of approach we should pursue to determine whether memory judgments are logically IEMτ or not.

1. **Q-memory and IEM**

The debate on whether memory judgments are logically immune to error through misidentification has concentrated on the notion of ‘quasi-memory,’ or ‘q-memory.’ In this section, I will argue that, ultimately, this is an unproductive approach. However, the reason why the appeal to the notion of q-memory is fruitless will eventually turn out to be illuminating. Let us turn, therefore, to the role of q-memory in discussions of IEM.

A q-memory is a mental state that is intended to be phenomenologically indistinguishable from a memory. In that sense, it is an ‘apparent memory’ or, equivalently, a state wherein it appears to the subject that she is remembering something, whether or not she actually is. A q-memory is also supposed to be causally derived from an earlier experience (typically, a perceptual experience). This causal connection is stipulated to be similar to the causal connection normally involved in memory, except for the fact that it is consistent with the possibility that the subject of the original experience is not the subject of the q-memory. Thus, on this construal of q-memory, all memories are particular instances of q-memory; instances in which the subject of the q-memory and the subject of the earlier experience happen to coincide. We may refer to those instances of q-memory which are not memories as ‘mere q-memories.’ What is, then, the relevance of mere q-memories for IEM?

The possibility of having mere q-memories may be used to motivate the view that memory judgments are not logically IEMτ. Thus, Sydney Shoemaker argues that, in a situation in which an apparent memory qualifies as a mere q-memory, the subject would be wrong in judging that she is the person who had the q-remembered property even if her mere q-memory was accurate, and she was forming her judgment on the basis of it. The fact that such a situation is logically possible, Shoemaker claims, suggests that memory judgments are not logically IEMτ:

Now whereas I can remember an action from the inside only if it was my action, a world in which there is quasi-remembering that is not remembering will be one in which it is not true that any action one quasi-remembers from the inside is thereby an action he himself did. So –assuming that ours may be such a world- if I quasi-remember an action from the inside, and say on this basis that I did the action, my statement will be subject to error through misidentification; it may be that my quasi-memory of the action is as accurate and complete as it could be, but that I am mistaken in thinking that I am the person who did it.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Derek Parfit makes a similar remark in the context of a discussion of a non-circular psychological criterion for personal identity. Parfit claims that, when a subject judges that she had a certain experience in the past on the basis of one of her memories, the identity between her and the subject of the remembered experience is not, strictly speaking, part of what she remembers. Nevertheless, she is justified in assuming such an identity in her judgment because, as a matter of fact, we do not have mere q-memories:

When I seem to remember an experience, I do indeed seem to remember *having* it. But it cannot be a part of what I seem to remember about this experience that I, the person who now seems to remember it, am the person who had this experience. That I am is something I automatically assume. (My apparent memories sometimes come to me simply as the belief that *I* had a certain experience.) But it is something that I am justified in assuming only because I do not in fact have *q*-memories of other people’s experiences.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Parfit’s remark could be used to argue that the possibility of having mere q-memories shows that memory judgments are not logically IEMτ in an analogous way to that in which Shoemaker argues for that view. Suppose that Parfit is right in claiming that, when I judge that I had some experience in the past based on one of my memories, the fact that I was the subject of that experience is not, strictly speaking, part of what I remember. Then, it seems that if the memory on the basis of which I form my judgment was a mere q-memory, my judgment would be incorrect even if my mere q-memory was accurate. But it seems logically possible for any of my memories to be a mere q-memory. Thus, this line of reasoning suggests, once again, that our memory judgments are not logically IEMτ.

Several authors have taken issue with an aspect of the notion of q-memory that seems to be implicit in the use of it that we have just contemplated. The relevant aspect is the presupposition that q-memories do not present the properties that are quasi-remembered by a subject as being the subject’s own. Gareth Evans, for example, points out that it has not been shown that, in the scenario depicted by Shoemaker, my q-memory of the past action is accurate or correct. We may stipulate, Evan concedes, that a q-memory does not need to causally originate in a property that is the subject’s own (in Shoemaker’s example, an experience of a past action). And yet, despite our stipulation, the content of the q-memory may still carry the commitment that the quasi-remembered property was the subject’s own:

Given the notion thus introduced, we are able to say that a subject q-remembers an event that he did not witness, and in consequence that he q-remembers witnessing an event, being in front of a tree, etc., when he did not witness the event, was not in front of a tree, etc. (Of course introducing such a definition leaves the question of the content of memory states quite untouched; it can still be right to say, as I have, that an apparent memory of ϕ-ing is necessarily an apparent memory of oneself ϕ-ing.)[[13]](#endnote-13)

Interestingly, John McDowell makes essentially the same point in response to Parfit. Parfit’s appeal to the notion of q-memory is intended to show that, when I remember one of my past properties, the fact that I, the person who seems to remember it, am the person who had the remembered property is not part of what I remember. It is, in that sense, an assumption that we can separate from the content of my memory. But q-memory can only do the work of separating that assumption, McDowell claims, if a q-memory is a state whose content is silent on the identity of the subject of the q-remembered property. And this aspect of q-memory does not follow from the characterization of q-memory as an apparent memory that may originate in a property of a different subject:

Once one has the notion of mere quasi-memory, made intelligible in terms of suitable abnormal aetiologies for memory impressions, one can entertain the supposition that an apparent memory is a mere quasi-memory, thereby distancing oneself from the belief that it was oneself who lived through the recalled state or occurrence. In that sense the belief is indeed ‘separable.’ But this does not equip the memory impression with an identity-neutral content: The supposition one would be entertaining is that an impression whose content is not identity neutral, because it is that of an ordinary memory, is illusory in respect of that aspect of it is content.[[14]](#endnote-14)

I side with Evans and McDowell in this controversy. To illustrate what is problematic about arguing that memory judgments are not logically IEMτ by appealing to q-memory, it may be useful to spell out the argument for that view condensed in Shoemaker’s passage above. Let M be a memory, and let P be the property instantiation that is remembered in virtue of having M. Let us suppose, furthermore, that, on the basis of M, I form the judgment that I had P. The argument seems to have the following structure:

1. If we can have mere q-memories, then M can be a mere q-memory.
2. If M can be a mere q-memory, then M can be an accurate mere q-memory.
3. If M is an accurate mere q-memory, then M has been caused by the fact that a subject S, other than myself, was P.
4. If M has been caused by the fact that a subject S, other than myself, was P, then it is false that I had P.

Therefore,

1. If we can have mere q-memories, it is possible for M to be accurate, and for the judgment that I have formed on the basis of M to be false.

Given the generality of the premises, conclusion 5 suggests that, for any memory judgment, it is logically possible for clauses (i-iii) in the characterization of IEMτ to be fulfilled, which renders the relevant judgment not logically immune to error through misidentification in the IEMτ sense. Shoemaker’s argument seems *prima facie* compelling. If we can have mere q-memories, then there seems to be no reason to rule out the possibility that M itself might originate in the past experiences of a different subject while it appears to me to be a memory. Which suggests that premise 1 is correct. And if mere q-memories can be either accurate or inaccurate (which appears plausible enough once we accept that memories, in particular, can be either accurate or inaccurate), then there seems to be no reason to rule out the possibility that M itself might be accurate. Which suggests that premise 2 is correct. Premise 3 seems to hold true just in virtue of our definition of ‘mere q-memory.’ Finally, premise 4 seems quite plausible as well. For if M was not caused by my being P, then I am not the subject who had the q-remembered instantiation of P, which makes my judgment false. Thus, each of the premises in the argument seems quite reasonable on the face of it. What is wrong with this argument, then?

The concern raised by Evans and McDowell can be expressed in the form of a dilemma. The characterization of q-memory as an ‘apparent memory’ leaves open the issue of what exactly one apparently remembers when one has a q-memory. And the argument above seems to trade on this ambiguity. Either a q-memory is a state wherein one apparently remembers *having* a certain property, or it is a state wherein one apparently remembers *the having of* a certain property. In the former case, a difficulty for premise 2 arises. If what I apparently remember in virtue of having M is having P, then, in order for M to be accurate, it must be the case that I myself had P in the past. But if M also qualifies as a mere q-memory, then I am not the person who had P; someone else was the bearer of it. Thus, mere q-memories are never accurate, and premise 2 turns out to be false. In the latter case, a difficulty for premise 1 arises. The reason why premise 1 initially seemed plausible is that memories and mere q-memories were only meant to differ in their causal origins. However, once we stipulate that, in virtue of having a q-memory, a subject only appears to remember the having of a certain property, it is no longer clear that any memory can be a mere q-memory. It is not clear, that is, unless we also assume that subjects who have memories only appear to remember the having of certain properties as well (in which case the only difference between memories and mere q-memories will indeed be a difference in causal origin). The trouble with making that assumption, though, is that the question of whether memory judgments are logically IEMτ precisely hinges on whether memories are silent on the ownership of remembered properties or not. Let me explain.

Suppose that, on the basis of my memory of this morning’s walk with my dog, I form the judgment that I saw a brown dog catching a ball in the air at the local park this morning. If what I remember, strictly speaking, is having a certain perceptual experience this morning, then it seems that my memory judgment will be IEMτ relative to my memory of this morning’s walk. For if my memory is informing me that I was the owner of the remembered perceptual experience, and it is doing so accurately, then it seems logically impossible for me to go wrong when I judge, on the basis of it, that I had the remembered experience. By contrast, if what I remember, strictly speaking, is that someone had that perceptual experience, and I somehow infer that the person in question was me, then it seems that my memory judgment will not be logically IEMτ relative to my memory of this morning’s walk. For if my memory is neutral on who the owner of the remembered experience was, then, even if my memory is accurate, there is still room for the logical possibility that I am wrong in judging that the person who had the remembered experience was me.[[15]](#endnote-15) It seems, therefore, that the issue of whether my memory judgment is IEMτ relative to my memory of this morning’s walk hangs on whether the content of my memory is neutral on who the bearer of the past perceptual experience was. Thus, it would be question-begging to assume, first, that memories are neutral on the ownership of remembered properties and, then, to use that assumption about the content of memories in order to argue that memory judgments are not IEMτ.

The upshot is that tackling the issue of whether memory judgments are logically IEMτ by appealing to the notion of q-memory is not a promising approach. In order to show that the judgment that one instantiated a certain property in the past, made on the basis of an episodic memory, is not IEMτ relative to it, one needs to show that it is possible for the judgment to be false even though the memory is accurate. The fact that it is logically possible for any of our memories to be a mere q-memory does show that it is possible for one’s judgment to be false. But it does not show that, in the situation in which one’s judgment is false, the apparent memory on which it is based is accurate. To make a case for this, one needs to frame the discussion in terms of a notion of q-memory that makes a substantial assumption about the content of memories. And, as we have just seen, the nature of mnemonic content is that on which the IEMτ phenomenon seems to be grounded in the first place. Thus, the strategy of appealing to q-memory to determine whether memory judgments are IEMτ is bound to prejudge the issue under discussion. The moral that can be drawn from our discussion of q-memory, then, is that a more promising approach should tackle the question of whether memory judgments are IEMτ by addressing the more fundamental question of whether a subject is present in the content of her own memories or not.

1. **The contents of episodic memory**

The purpose of this section is to determine what the intentional objects of memory are. That is, what kinds of objects, properties and events, are the entities that we, strictly speaking, remember? The question that we will pursue here is therefore analogous to a traditional question in the philosophy of perception, namely, whether perception directly puts us in cognitive contact with entities in the world, or it only puts us in direct cognitive contact with entities in our own minds. Let us consider the two analogous possibilities for memory in order.

Perhaps the most natural position about the intentional objects of memory is the view that the objects of our memories are worldly events. What we remember, when we claim to remember objective events in the world is exactly those events, and not past perceptual experiences of them. Thus, the basic tenet of this view is that, in memory, we are always aware of events that are independent from the mind of a perceiver in the past. Let us accordingly refer to this position as the ‘objective’ view.

The objective view is, on the face of it, quite reasonable. Notice that, when we form judgments about past objective events on the basis of our episodic memories, we do not seem to be required to infer those judgments from further judgments about the perceptual experiences that we had in the past, and the reliability of our senses at the time.[[16]](#endnote-16) Consider, for instance, my above-mentioned memory of this morning’s walk with my dog; a walk during which I saw a brown dog catching a ball in the air at the local park. Now suppose that, on the basis of that memory, I form the judgment that a brown dog caught a ball in the air at the park. When I do this, it does not seem that I need to infer my judgment from the premise that I had a certain visual experience this morning, and the premise that my vision was reliable at the time. The objective view can account for this fact. For if the objective view is correct, then, in remembering, we are presented with past objective events. Thus, by having my memory of this morning’s walk, I precisely remember a brown dog catching a ball in the air. It is no wonder, then, that I do not need to derive my judgment that a brown dog caught a ball in the air from further judgments about my past perceptual experiences and the reliability of my senses. After all, on the objective view, all I need to do when I form that judgment on the basis of my episodic memory is to take the content of my memory at face value.

The difficulty for the objective view is that worldly events do not seem to be the only things that are presented to us in memory when we remember episodically. Notice that, once I episodically remember some objective event, the question of whether or not, in the past, I seemed to experience the relevant event taking place is no longer an open question for me. If I episodically remember that a brown dog caught a ball in the air, for example, then I am thereby aware of the fact that, in the past, I seemed to perceive a brown dog catching a ball in the air.[[17]](#endnote-17) This suggests that my memory of this morning’s walk does not only present to me a dog which, as a matter of fact, perceptually appeared to me in a certain way this morning, but it also presents to me the very fact that I had that perceptual experience at the time. The objective view, however, does not factor our past perceptual experiences into the contents of our episodic memories and, for that reason, it cannot account for this fact.

An alternative position about the intentional objects of memory is that the objects of our memories are mental events. What we remember, properly speaking, when we claim to remember objective events in the world is not those events, but past perceptual experiences of them. Thus, the basic tenet of this view is that, in memory, we are always aware of subjective events; events in the mind of a perceiver in the past. Let us accordingly refer to this position as the ‘subjective’ view.[[18]](#endnote-18)

The subjective view enjoys the converse advantages and disadvantages to those of the objective view. On the one hand, the subjective view can explain why, once I episodically remember a brown dog catching a ball in the air by having my memory of this morning’s walk, I am thereby aware of the fact that, in the past, I seemed to perceive a brown dog catching a ball in the air. For if the subjective view is correct, then the very fact that a dog perceptually appeared to me in that way is, properly speaking, what I remember by having that memory. On the other hand, if the subjective view is correct, then it turns out that our episodic memories do not really present past objective events to us; only past perceptual experiences of those events. Which suggests that, when we form judgments about the past state of the world on the basis of our episodic memories, we are required to infer those judgments from judgments about the perceptual experiences that we had in the past and the reliability of our senses at the time. And yet, as we have seen, it does not seem that it is necessary for us to perform such inferences.

Where does this leave us? The main lesson to draw from our brief discussion of mnemonic content is that, on the one hand, making past perceptual experiences the intentional objects of memory provides us with a straightforward account of why, in memory, past objective events are presented to us as having been perceptually experienced in some way. But this account comes at the cost of cognitively separating us from the past state of the world. On the other hand, making past objective events the intentional objects of memory accounts for why our memory judgments about the past do not need to be the result of an inferential process. But this account comes at the cost of leaving the fact that, in memory, past objective events are presented to us as having been perceptually experienced unexplained. What we need, then, is a proposal about the contents of memory that accommodates, on the one hand, the intuition that the past state of the world is presented to us in memory while, on the other hand, preserving the intution that the past state of our own minds is presented to us in memory as well.

The proposal about the intentional objects of memory that I wish to put forward is that the objects of our memories are always events that involve factive mental states, thus engaging the world as well as our own minds. More precisely, my contention is that memory experiences have past perceptions (that is, veridical perceptual experiences) as their intentional objects. Thus, what we remember when we have a memory experience is a perception of a certain event; the objective event that we claim to remember in virtue of having that memory experience. Let us call this position, the ‘factive view.’ What can be said in support of this view?

The factive view incorporates the features of both the subjective view and the objective view which are worth preserving. The factive view is similar to the subjective view in that if it is correct, then memory does give us cognitive access to perceptual experiences that took place in the past. What happens is that those perceptual experiences are always presented to us as having been veridical. The former point allows the factive view to explain why remembered events always appear to us to have been perceived in some way whereas the latter point allows it to explain why memory judgments do not need to rest on an inferential process. Let us take these two matters in order.

The factive view can account for why, once I episodically remember some objective event, the question of whether or not, in the past, I seemed to experience that the event in question was taking place is no longer an open question for me. According to the factive view, when it seems to us that we remember an objective event episodically, our memory is actually putting us in cognitive contact with a perception of that event. That is, properly speaking, what our memory is a memory of. It therefore seems natural that, when we have a memory, we are aware not only of the objective event having happened, but also of what perceiving the objective event was like. If the factive view is correct, we should indeed be aware of the qualities of a past perceptual experience of that event. For a veridical perceptual experience of the objective event is, according to the view, what we are remembering when we claim to remember that event. Thus, the factive view explains why remembered events are presented to us in memory as having been perceived in essentially the same way as that in which the subjective accounted for it.

The factive view can also account for why, when we form judgments about the past state of the world on the basis of our episodic memories, we do not need to infer those judgments from judgments about the perceptual experiences that we had in the past and the reliability of our senses at the time. For if the factive view is correct, then, in remembering, we are presented with past objective events as well as perceptual experiences of them. Thus, by having my memory of this morning’s walk, I remember, properly speaking, a veridical perceptual experience of a brown dog catching a ball in the air. It is not surprising, then, that I do not need to derive the judgment that the brown dog caught a ball in the air from some judgments about the perceptual experiences that I had during my walk, and the reliability of my senses during that time. After all, if what I remember by having my memory of this morning’s walk is really a veridical perceptual experience of a brown dog catching a ball in the air, then it would seem that all I need to do in order to form that judgment is to take the content of my memory at face value. Thus, the factive view explains why memory judgments do not need to rest on an inferential process in essentially the same way as that in which the objective view explained this aspect of memory.

The factive view has an important corollary for our discussion of IEMτ. Suppose that, as the factive view states, the intentional object of an episodic memory is always a veridical perceptual experience. Then, there is an interesting relation that the content of the memory bears to the content of the remembered perceptual experience, namely, the former includes the latter. This is an outcome of the fact that, when we seem to remember what it was like to perceptually experience some event, what we seem to remember is in fact a perception of that event. As such mental states require their contents to have actually obtained, the factive view yields the result that, when we have an episodic memory of what it was like to perceptually experience some event in the past, the content of the perceptual experience that is being remembered as having been veridical becomes part of what we remember by having that memory. An episodic memory inherits, as it were, part of its content from the perceptual experience at which it is directed.

Why is this corollary important for determing whether memory judgments are IEMτ? Recall that the reason why we were originally interested in specifying the contents of our memories was the following. At the conclusion of section 2, we noted that the issue of whether memory judgments are IEMτ turns on the question of whether memory presents those experiences that one remembers to have been instantiated in the past as having been one’s own or not. Determining whether one is an intentional object of one’s memories seemed to be a promising way of approaching that question. Now, the moral that we should draw from the discussion in this section is that this issue may hinge, in turn, on whether one is an intentional object of one’s perceptual experiences, since memories inherit part of their contents from the perceptual experiences at which they are directed. Let us consider, therefore, whether one is present in the content of one’s perceptual experiences or not.

1. **The self in perception**

A hypothesis about the intentional objects of perceptual experiences should respect and, ideally, account for two features of such experiences. These features concern the, so to speak, input side and output side of perception. The first feature involves a phenomenal aspect of perceptual experiences that varies depending on the environmental circumstances in which those experiences are generated. The second feature has to do with the actions that those perceptual experiences are then disposed to generate.

Consider, first of all, the fact that perception is perspectival. If one seems to perceive some event, then that event is presented to one from one’s perspective, or point of view. The point of view in question depends on the spatial position that one occupies with regards to the perceived object, so it changes as one changes that relation to the object. Right now, for example, I seem to see a wall and a window to my right, I am aware of the smell of coffee coming from the cup in front of me, I feel the air around me being warm; and so on. Buf I turn 180 degrees, then I will seem to see a wall and a window to my left, and I will be aware of the smell of coffee coming from behind me.

Secondly, perception directly feeds into action. A subject who has a perceptual experience will be poised to perform certain actions just in virtue of the fact that she has that experience. Thus, if one apparently sees a large object approaching at a high speed, then one will step out of its way. Likewise, if one seems to see the object flying at one’s face, then one will duck; and so on. Perception is immediately salient to action in the sense that one does not need to form any particular judgment about one’s spatial position in order to start moving. Admittedly, unless one has a background of beliefs and desires, such as the belief that there is no reason to distrust one’s vision and the desire not to get hit or run over, one might not be poised to move when one sees the approaching object. Nevertheless, it does not seem that any specific judgment regading one’s spatial location is required in order to initiate one’s movement.

What must be true of the intentional objects of perceptual experiences for them to have those two interesting features? Consider what we may call the ‘extrinsic’ view of perception. According to the extrinsic view, for any event E and subject S, if S has a perceptual experience that she would express by saying that she perceives E, then there is an extrinsic property R such that R is a property of S, and the object of S’s perceptual experience is S’s being related through R to E.[[19]](#endnote-19) Thus, if I have a perceptual experience that I would express by saying that I see a small cup of coffee being dropped on my hand, my experience makes me aware of the fact that the cup is small by making me aware of the difference between my own size and that of the coffee cup. Likewise, if the coffee then spills on my hand, and I have a perceptual experience that I would express by saying that the coffee from the cup is hot, my experience makes me aware of the temperature of that liquid by making me aware of the difference between the temperature on the relevant region of my skin and the temperature of the portion of the liquid in contact with it. The basic thought in the extrinsic view of perception, then, is that the intentional object of a perceptual experience is always the subject of the experience having a certain extrinsic property. In perception, we are aware of objective events; objective in that they take place independently of our existence and our perceiving them. However, we are only aware of those events by being aware of the relations in which we, the perceivers, stand to them.

If the extrinsic view of perception is correct, then it seems natural that, on the one hand, perception is perspectival and, on the other hand, it directly feeds into action. Firstly, if perceptual experiences always put one in cognitive contact with an event by putting one in cognitive contact with an extrinsic property of one’s own that involves that event, then it makes sense that events are always perceived from one’s perspective. The reason for this is that the perceptual awareness of an event from one’s perspective just is the awareness of the relations between our own properties (properties such as our spatial position, size or temperature) and those of the object involved in the relevant event. That is all there is to perceiving the event ‘from one’s point of view.’ Hence, the reason why the perspectivity of our perceptual experiences varies as we change some of our relations to the objects involved in the events that we claim to perceive is simply that perceiving those events from our perspective and perceiving those relations is one and the same thing.

Secondly, if it is the case that, when I perceive an event, I am aware of some of the relations that hold between my properties and those of the objects involved in the relevant event, then it also makes sense that perceptual experiences are immediately salient to action. Recall the scenario in which one seems to see a large object approaching at a high speed, and the scenario in which one seems to see an object flying at one’s face. If the extrinsic view is correct, then, if I am in either of the two scenarios, what I am aware of is the relation between my own spatial position and that of the object. After all, I seem to see an object flying *at me*, or an object *approaching me*. This means that my own spatial location relative to that of the object is directly presented to me in perception. It is not surprising, then, that I do not need to form any particular judgment about my own location in order to duck, or step away. If the extrinsic view is correct, then, when I start moving, I am just trusting perception, or taking at face value what I seem to see.

There seem to be some considerations, therefore, that lend support to the idea that, in perception, one is aware of objective events in the world by being aware of the fact that one bears certain relations to the objects that are involved in those events. The upshot of our discussion in this section, then, is that there is a sense in which one is always an intentional object of one’s perceptual experiences.[[20]](#endnote-20) What we perceive, when it appears to us that we are perceiving an objective event, is always the fact that we are instantiating a certain extrinsic property, namely, a relation in which we stand to an object involved in that event. With this outcome in mind, let us now return to the issue of whether memory judgments are IEMτ.

1. **Perception as the source of IEM in memory**

Let us take stock. In section 3, we have seen an account of the contents of episodic memory. An outcome of this account has been that the intentional object of a perceptual experience becomes part of what we remember to have existed in the past when we have an episodic memory of what having that perceptual experience was like. Furthermore, in section 4, we have encountered some reasons to think that one is always an intentional object of one’s perceptual experiences. The combination of these two points yields an interesting result. If one is indeed an intentional object of one’s perceptual experiences, and part of what one remembers when one has an episodic memory is the intentional object of a past perceptual experience, then it seems to follow that what one remembers, when one has an episodic memory, is partly oneself.[[21]](#endnote-21) The conclusion, in other words, is that one is always an intentional object of one’s episodic memories. How does this conclusion help us resolve the issue of whether memory judgments are IEMτ or not?

Let us return to the example in which, upon remembering my morning walk, I form the judgment that I saw a brown dog catching a ball in the air at the local park. The crucial question for the issue of whether my judgment is IEMτ relative to my memory, we observed in section 2, is whether I remember that I had a certain perceptual experience this morning or, by contrast, I only remember the occurrence of that perceptual experience, and I somehow infer that I was the bearer of it. In the former case, my judgment will be IEMτ relative to my memory whereas, in the latter case, my judgment will not be IEMτ relative to it. Let us now see how the outcomes of our discussion in the last two sections allow us to make a case for the view that, when one has an episodic memory of a past perceptual experience, what one remembers is having that perceptual experience (as opposed to the occurrence of that perceptual experience).

Consider what happens when I see the brown dog catching a ball in the air at the park and, hours later, I have an episodic memory that I would express by saying that I remember a brown dog catching a ball in the air. If our discussion in section 3 is correct, then I am aware of a past perceptual experience as having been veridical. What perceptual experience is that? A perceptual experience of a brown dog catching a ball in the air in front of me. Now, as a result of its being presented to me as veridical, when I remember that perceptual experience, I also remember its intentional object. And if our discussion in section 4 is correct, the intentional object of that experience is the fact that I instantiate one of my extrinsic properties, namely, my spatial position relative to the dog. Thus, just like, this morning at the park, I perceptually experienced a certain spatial position relative to the dog as being mine, when I have my episodic memory hours later, I remember that spatial position as having been mine. I remember, in other words, being the subject whose spatial position relative to the dog was perceived in that experience. But if I remember being the subject whose spatial position relative to the dog was perceived in a certain experience, then this suggests that I remember being the subject of that experience. And it seems relatively uncontroversial that if I remember being the subject of a certain perceptual experience, then I must remember that perceptual experience as having been my own. It therefore seems that, in this example, I am remembering the perceptual experience of a brown dog catching a ball in the air as having been my own.

This outcome puts us in a position to finally determine whether memory judgments are IEMτ relative to our episodic memories or not. For it means that if I judge, on the basis of my episodic memory, that I saw a brown dog catching a ball in the air this morning, then it is logically impossible for my judgment to be false while my memory is still accurate. It seems that if my judgment happens to be false because the person who actually saw the dog turns out to be someone else, then we should no longer consider my memory to be accurate. For the discussion above suggests that it is a memory of my perceiving that event, and not merely a memory of a perception of that event. Thus, if my judgment that I saw a brown dog catching a ball in the air this morning is indeed based on that episodic memory, then my judgment is logically IEMτ. As this line of reasoning generalizes to any judgment based on an episodic memory, the broader conclusion is that memory judgments do enjoy the logical IEMτ feature.

1. **Self-awareness in memory**

If the account of why memory judgments are logically IEMτ above is correct, then the moral that can be drawn from the fact that our judgments based on episodic memories are logically IEMτ is that this feature of memory judgments reveals a fact about our faculty of episodic memory. It reveals the fact that, in memory, we are presented to ourselves in a certain way, namely, as the bearers of extrinsic properties that were perceived in the past; properties such as occupying a certain spatial position or having a particular size relative to that of another object. After all, if the considerations above are right, then we always remember being the subjects whose extrinsic properties were represented in some past perceptions. What is the significance of this fact?

Consider our ‘first-person conception’ of ourselves. This is the conception of ourselves that we form through our use of faculties such as introspection, proprioception or memory; faculties the deliverances of which are only available to ourselves. It seems that certain epistemically special features of the faculties that contribute to our first-person conception might reveal some interesting facts about that conception. Thus, Gareth Evans suggests that the immunity to error through misidentification of judgments based on proprioception, for example, shows that, by exercising that faculty, we are presented to ourselves in a certain way, namely, as the bearers of properties such as having a body and occupying space. And this, in turn, is meant to tell us something important about our first-person conception of ourselves. According to Evans, it tells us that this conception not only includes the fact that we are thinking things, or the bearers of mental properties, but it also includes the fact that we are the bearers of physical properties:

The considerations of this section tell against the common idea that our conception of ourselves ‘from the first-person perspective’ is a conception of a thinking, feeling, and perceiving thing, and not necessarily a physical thing located in space. …Thus the cases of immunity to error through misidentification that we have considered…reveal that our conception of ourselves is firmly anti-Cartesian: our ‘I’-ideas are Ideas of bearers of physical no less than mental properties.[[22]](#endnote-22)

Now, if the reason why memory judgments are logically immune to error through misidentification is that we always remember being the subjects whose extrinsic properties were perceived in the past, then we may draw an analogous lesson from the fact that those judgments enjoy such an immunity. The lesson is that our first-person conception of ourselves does not only include the fact that we are thinking things, or bearers of mental properties (as Descartes may indeed have suggested upon reflecting on the nature of introspection). And it does not only include the fact that we are the bearers of physical properties, such as being extended in space (as Evans suggests upon reflecting on the nature of proprioception) either. It also includes the fact that we are the bearers of temporal properties. Our first-person conception of ourselves, in other words, is the conception of an object that is extended in time as well as in space. Ultimately, that is the significance of the immunity to error through misidentification phenomenon in memory.[[23]](#endnote-23)

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1. For the sake of brevity, hereafter I will refer to judgments about the past formed on the basis of episodic memories as ‘memory judgments.’ Also, since our investigation will only concern episodic memory, I will often talk of episodic memories simply as ‘memories.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. I will talk of the ‘content’ and the ‘intentional object’ of an episodic memory indistinctly. What I will mean by this is an event, or property instantiation, which constitutes what the subject remembers in virtue of having that memory. There are at least three different strands in the notion of what is being remembered, of which I am availing myself here: Suppose that an event constitutes what the subject remembers by having an episodic memory. Then, that event would, first of all, make the memory accurate, or correct, if it took place. Furthermore, that event constitutes what the subject is aware of (or, equivalently, what she is being presented with) in virtue of having that memory. And, finally, the event in question constitutes what the subject is in a position to refer to, and think about, by having the memory. Thus, I will be operating with a general notion of content which is meant to incorporate a truth-making aspect, a phenomenological aspect and a cognitive aspect. I acknowledge that the issue of what counts as a component of the content of a memory will depend on whether, and how, the different strands in this notion of content are pulled apart. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. For formulations of immunity to error in terms of knowledge and rationality, see (1968, 557) and (1996, 210) respectively. According to Shoemaker (1968, 556), the latter is meant to capture a criterion used by Ludwig Wittgenstein to distinguish two uses of the first-person pronoun (1958, 66-67); a use ‘as subject’ and a use ‘as object.’ There may be other interesting notions of immunity to error through misidentification to be found in Shoemaker’s work. Thus, James Pryor’s (1999) distinguishes two varieties of immunity to error involving the notion of epistemic justification which, Pryor argues, can be attributed to Shoemaker; ‘immunity to which-object-misidentification’ and ‘immunity to *de re* misidentification.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In (1970, 269-270). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. In (1970, 270). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. We seem to have episodic memories that are, in some way yet to be specified, about our own past propositional attitudes, experiences, sensations, actions and physical states such as being in a certain location, or moving in a certain direction. For the purposes of this discussion, it will be helpful to use an umbrella term that refers to states of all of those kinds. Thus, I will be referring to those states as ‘properties.’ [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. In (1968, 563-564). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Notice that the same cannot be said about de facto IEMτ regarding memory: The fact that one’s memories will always originate, as a matter of fact, in properties that one had in the past seems to suffice for one’s memory judgments to qualify as being de facto IEMτ. But that fact is also consistent with the possibility that, in memory, one is only aware that certain properties were instantiated in the past (as opposed to being aware of who, in the past, was the bearer of those properties). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. This seems to be, for example, part of the project in which Gareth Evans is engaged in his (1982, 205-267) discussion of self-identification. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. The possibility of such criteria is discussed in chapter 4 of Shoemaker’s (1963) as well as in (1987, 111). [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. In (1970, 273). [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. In (1971, 15). [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. In (1982, 248). [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. In (1997, 241). [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. There is an approach to IEM according to which what protects a judgment that has been formed on the basis of a mental state from any error of misidentification is that the subject is not a component of the content of that mental state. Francois Recanati (2007), for example, argues that, when a subject’s judgment about the position of her limbs which has been formed on the basis of one of her proprioceptive experiences is IEM relative to that experience, it is not because the content of the proprioceptive experience is that the subject herself instantiates a certain property; having limbs in a certain position. The content of the proprioceptive experience is only that a certain property is being instantiated; the having of limbs in a certain position. But the subject’s judgment is IEM relative to the experience because the domain of properties experienced through proprioception only includes properties of the subject who is exercising that faculty. Thus, when my judgment is based on a proprioceptive experience, my judgment that my limbs are in a certain position is IEM relative to that experience because any information gained through proprioception can only be about my limbs; not anybody else’s. Now, the point I have made with regards to q-memory suggests that, even though the view that the subject is not present in the content of her memories might yield the result that memory judgments are de facto IEMτ, it falls short of establishing that those judgments are logically IEMτ. For it does not seem logically necessary that the domain of properties experienced through memory only includes properties of the subject herself. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. There are at least two reasons to think that we do not need to infer the judgments that we form on the basis of our episodic memories from further judgments about the perceptual experiences that we had in the past and the reliability of our senses at the time. For one thing, the view that we do need to perform such inferences commits us to the claim that subjects who lack, for example, the concept of reliability are not able to form judgments on the basis of their episodic memories; a claim that seems highly implausible. For another, the view that we need to perform such inferences in memory seems to lead to a regress problem. The regress is triggered by the fact that the judgment that our senses were reliable at the time at which we had certain perceptual experiences in the past is itself a memory judgment. For discussion, see [deleted]. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. A number of authors have taken notice of this aspect of memory. See, for example, Aristotle (1972, 69), Locke (1975, 83), and James (1890, 648-652). [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Versions of the subjective view can be found, for example, in Von Leyden (1961, 61) and Meinong (1973, 256). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. The view is not new. It is similar to James Gibson’s ‘ecological optics’ in (1979). To be precise, the view offered here is that if a subject has a perceptual experience that she would express by saying that she is perceiving a certain event, then the intentional object of her experience is her being related in some way to a certain constituent of that event, namely, an object. For the sake of convenience, however, I will sometimes talk of the properties that, according to the extrinsic view, are the intentional objects of our perceptual experiences as relations to events, and I will sometimes talk of those properties as relations to objects that are constituents of events. Hopefully this will cause no confusion. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. What is the relevant sense? If the extrinsic view is right, then the subject is an intentional object of her perceptual experiences in the sense that, through those experiences, the subject perceives certain extrinsic properties as being her own. Otherwise, the extrinsic view would not be able to construe some of the examples mentioned above as cases in which a subject sees a wall and a window *to* *her* right when she occupies a certain spatial position in the room, or cases in which a subject is going to duck because she sees an object flying *at her*. What allows the extrinsic view to account for the perspectivity of perception and its immediate salience to action is precisely the fact that, according to the extrinsic view, if a subject has a perceptual experience that she would express by saying that she is perceiving a certain event, then the intentional object of her experience is her being related to that event through one of her extrinsic properties. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. An anonymous referee has raised the following concern about this inference. Suppose that one grants that (i) episodic recollection involves the recollection of a past veridical perception, and (ii) one is always an intentional object of one's perceptual experience. Someone who holds that mere q-memories are possible may maintain that, although claims (i) and (ii) are correct, it is nonetheless possible to recollect the past perceptions of a different subject. I believe that the considerations about the notion of q-memory discussed in section 2 address this concern. I agree that if mere q-memories are possible, then it is possible for one to have a mere q-memory that originates in a perception that a different subject had. But I fail to see how this type of causal origin has any bearing on the content that one’s mere q-memory has in the possible situation considered. Assuming that all q-memories (whether genuine memories or mere q-memories) have the same content, and provided that (i) and (ii) are granted, this seems to be a situation in which one’s mere q-memory is inaccurate; not a situation in which its content is different from the kind of content that memories have. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. In (1982, 224). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. A version of this paper was presented as part of the workshop ‘Connecting philosophy and psychology on episodic memory’ at theUniversité Pierre Mendès, in Grenoble. I am grateful to the audience there for their feedback; especially Stéphane Rousset and Denis Perrin. Denis also provided many useful comments on an earlier draft of this paper, as did two anonymous referees for this journal. Many thanks to all three of them for their help while revising the paper. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)