

10-21-2010

Memory and True Lies

Editor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>

 Part of the [Cognition and Perception Commons](#), [Defense and Security Studies Commons](#), [Ethics and Political Philosophy Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), [Other Psychology Commons](#), [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#), [Personality and Social Contexts Commons](#), and the [Terrorism Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Editor (2010) "Memory and True Lies," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 17 : Iss. 9 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol17/iss9/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact commons@erau.edu, wolfe309@erau.edu.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Memory and True Lies

Author: Editor

Volume: 17

Issue: 9

Date: 2010-10-21

Keywords: Ethics, Memory, Morals, Repression, Subliminal Perception

Abstract: This article discusses the concept of memory, its relation to culture, and three hypothetical phenomena associated with it.

Alan and Marilyn Bergman wrote the lyrics to the pop standard *The Way We Were*, performed in the eponymous 1973 film by Barbra Streisand. It's about the memories of memory. But do memories "light the corners of [the] mind?" Are memories as "misty watercolor" and "scattered pictures?" Can memories be "too painful to remember" so we "simply choose to forget?" And is it only "the laughter we will remember when we remember?"

There have been many other pop/rock songs about memory. From *Memories* by the band Weezer, "All the memories make me want to go back there...I want be there again." In the *Memories* performed by Elvis Presley, memories are "pressed between the pages of my mind" and "sweetened through the ages just like wine." From Nirvana performance of *Come As You Are*, "I want you to be as a friend...as a known memory." From Guns N Roses' performance of *You Can't Put Your Arms around a Memory*, "Can't put your arms around a memory, Don't try" but also "Johnny, you're me, Yeah, you're memory, I wanna put my arms around your memory." From Duran, Duran performance of *Careless Memories*, "So easy to disturb, with a thought, with a whisper, with a careless memory, with a careless memory...Look out." From Elvis Costello's performance of *Just a Memory*, "Losing you is just a memory, memories don't mean that much to me... Now you're here...I'm here too, Can be this easy for me and you." Neither rock nor pop but the sung psalms of David, the second King of Israel according to Hebrew scripture, sing the praises of Yaweh partially based on memories of what Yaweh has accomplished. The chorus of the classical Greek tragedies of the 5th century BCE were sung and based on memory and memories, as were the Hindu Vedas of 1000 BCE and the Qawwali from the Sufi tradition even before the birth of Islam in the 7th century CE.

Yes, memory has been integral to culture, and also to our very sense of self. Or so writes the philosopher John Locke in the 17th century who opines that the self itself—the very essence of our identity—is and/or constituted as memory (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*)! With the construct of memory so important, it should not be surprising that it has been the font of hypothesized phenomena with equally hypothesized impact on morals, ethics, and their adjudication through the law. And in three significant cases, the phenomena and impact are suspect.

One hypothetical phenomenon is that memory is something static with discrete boundaries. It may be more or less difficult to access memory, but it's there just waiting. Occasionally, maybe in very traumatic situations, it can be totally expunged from something called the mind. This is quite different from contemporary theory based on empirical research suggesting that memory is dynamic and ever changing. It continuously affects and is affected by other memories as well as current sensations, perceptions, and all other psychological constituents. (See Lindsay et al, 2004 and Tang et al, 2010 below). An implication might be that perjury is all but impossible to psychologically validate and perjury traps all but impossible to successfully spring. After all, what I am saying or writing now may be expected to be much different than a previous statement or seemingly conflicting information. And in

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

social adjudication, beliefs about the love and hate and respect from others might need to be continuously validated.

Another hypothetical phenomenon is classical Freudian repression. One of repression's many denotations is motivated forgetting. There are two versions of this. One version is that one forgets something because that something is too pleasurable or too painful to perceive consciously. If it were to be perceived consciously any longer, the pain of this pleasure or pain from perception could not be psychologically tolerated. And this motivated forgetting to avoid the pain of pleasure or pain occurs unconsciously. That is, one is not aware one is engaged in motivated forgetting. One also does not remember that one at one time actually perceived that which one is now seemingly unable to perceive. The second version of repression is similar except that which is intolerable to be perceived has never been perceived consciously but has always been kept from conscious awareness to avoid the pain that would ensue if conscious perception were to occur. In both versions neither the something to be repressed and awareness of that which is repressed can be conscious through repression. However, one can be influenced even by what is unconscious. Sometimes, even more by what is unconscious than what is conscious. Or so hypothesized Freud in many variations through his long publishing career on repression and psychoanalysis. (See as examples Freud 1915a, 1915b, 1920, 1926 below). The upshot can be a rationale for being unfit to stand trial, know right from wrong, or have the capability to act on what is right and not act on what is wrong.

A third hypothetical phenomenon is that of subliminal perception. A common denotation is being influenced in psychological and behavioral functioning by something of which one is not consciously aware but has sensed for a period of time too rapid for conscious awareness. In its hypothetically pure form, one might be visually exposed to a stimulus for mere micro-seconds. Then, one might remember the stimulus for longer periods of time or more quickly when exposed to it for much longer periods of time compared to other stimuli to which one is exposed for equal amounts of time but was never previously exposed. Notions of subliminal stimuli leading us to buy unnecessary commercial products and vote for and kill people are still with us even if without acceptable scientific support. (See Dixon, 1971, Merkle & Daneman, 1998, Moore, 2008 below).

Bergman & Bergman wrote *The Way We Were*. But as we consider the way we are, maybe always have been, memory is all about what we are not—maybe never, maybe now

References. Dixon, N. F. (1971). *Subliminal perception: The nature of a controversy*. New York: McGraw-Hill; Freud, S. (1915a). Repression. In *Standard edition*, 14, 143–158; Freud, S. (1915b). The unconscious. In *Standard Edition*, 14, 161–215; Freud, S. (1920). Beyond the pleasure principle. In *Standard Edition*, 20, 3–64; Freud, S. (1926). Inhibitions, symptoms and anxiety. In *Standard Edition*, 20, 77–174; Lindsay, D. S., Hagen, L., Read, J. D., Wade, K. A., & Garry, M. (2004). True photographs and false memories. *Psychological Science*, 15, 149-154; Merkle, P. M., & Daneman, M. (1998). Psychological investigations of unconscious perception. *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 5, 5-18; Moore, T. E. (2008). Subliminal perception: Facts and fallacies. In S. O. Lilienfeld, J. Ruscio, & S. J. Lynn (Eds.). *Navigating the mindfield: A user's guide to distinguishing science from pseudoscience in mental health*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books; Tang, H., Li, H., & Yan, R. (2010). Memory dynamics in attractor networks with saliency weights. *Neural Computation*, 22(7), 1899-1926.