

EXAMINING SOME IMPLICATIONS OF LOCKE'S SPECULATION ON *SIXTH SENSE ORGAN*

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Abstract

Knowledge of the world is acquired through the cumulative information from the individuations of the five main sensory organs. These sensory organs undergird the plausibility of our knowledge of the mundane world. The absence or deficiency of an organ, in principle, bears significant effects on our cumulative knowledge of the world. Consequently, Locke speculation of the sixth sense organ appears as directly challenging the adequacy of our knowledge system of the mundane world. This paper engages the assumption that the possibility of the sixth sense organ raises some issue about the adequacy of our epistemic system. However, the possibility of the sixth sense organ, undoubtedly, seems to affect our imagination and then the entire faculty of knowledge. What this means is that no statement may, perhaps, be absolutely necessary or synthetic. However, what appears as against analytic-synthetic distinction is asymmetrical to the viewpoint and argument of Duhem-Quine naturalism. Duhem-Quine restrict their view to the existential and real experience, whereas this supposition actually appears to challenge the adequacy of the foundation of that experience. This paper found out that valid as this assumption might appear, the speculation does not seem to foreclose the possibility of further philosophical enquiry as it seems to suggest.

Keywords: Sixth Sense, Epistemic System, Knowledge, Adequacy, Certainty

Introduction

There is no doubt that, weird as it might appear, (Science News, Volume 115 Number 24, (1979), Morris R. J. and Sveum, R. J. (1994), Allen, R. (1983), different kinds of empirical research are on-going on the possibility of the sixth sense organ. The main question is: in the supposition of the sixth sense organ, what effect(s) would this have on epistemic claims and eventually on the knowledge system about the world? Of course, it appears that scientists are not yet very clear about how to approach the question. This is because it yet seems inconceivable what the enquiry is supposed to reveal. Well, we can only be optimistic while we refrain from making any premature conclusive judgment. However, for philosophers of the analytic bent, speculating about such supposition is not, at all, out of place, especially when, given the evidences around, there is a probability that it is the case. Philosophers such as Hilary Putnam and Willard Van Orman Quine based their theorizing upon such spectacular suppositions and or assumptions.

Let us tag the sixth sense organ as X, it appears that our epistemic claims about the world will be inadequate without X. Therefore, given this supposition, there is a sense in treating our epistemic system as though it were just minus X. Given this supposition, our mundane knowledge will be treated as incomplete. It may suggest that our epistemic claims about the world are irredeemably contingent, the truths of which are to be accepted as relative and tentative. This, again, is based on the empiricist belief that our judgment about the world is ultimately made possible by our sensory capacity.

“Tentative” in the sense that there is a possibility of some other information (evidence) from the sixth sense organ to affect our tentative knowledge. “Tentative” again, until it is finally proved whether or not evolution could produce another sense organ in man. However, tentative all the same. This sense of tentativeness is incongruous with the sense in which synthetic statements are contingent upon the possibility that a denial does not result in mutual exclusivity. In this sense therefore, it might be asked whether a tentative knowledge is a knowledge claim.

This research argued that suppose we uphold the speculation, that is, suppose we have the sixth sense organ, (1) it appears to be the case that the adequacy of our epistemic claims is challenged, but (2) does the assumption in (1) appear as a palpable threat to our epistemic system? The paper intends to address these two issues.

Background to the Speculation

The background to this assumption is situated on Locke’s supposition on the possibility of a sixth sense organ as presented.

Only the qualities that affect the senses are imaginable. – This is the reason why – though we cannot believe it impossible to God to make a creature with other organs, and more ways to convey into the understanding the notice of corporeal things than those five, as they are usually counted, which he has given to man – yet I think it is not possible for any man to imagine any other qualities in bodies, howsoever constituted, whereby they can be taken notice of, besides sounds, tastes, smells, visible and tangible qualities. And had mankind been made but with four senses, the qualities then which are the objects of the fifth sense had been as far from our notice, imagination, and conception, as now any belonging to a sixth, seventh, or eighth sense can possibly be;- which, whether yet some other creatures, in some other parts of this vast and stupendous universe, may not have, will be a great presumption to deny...I have here followed the common opinion of man’s having but five senses; though, perhaps, there may be justly counted more;- but either supposition serves equally to my present purpose. (Locke 1961: 16-17)

The Claim and Model to the Speculation

Situating the assumption on Locke’s speculation, the question which the research intends to grapple with is: if we possessed the sixth sense organ, what magnitude of significance will this addition makes our knowledge claims and systems about the world and existence? These are the fundamental questions which shall guide the focus of this speculative research. This research is premised upon Kant’s attempt at situating the ultimate source of knowledge of the external world upon experience. “That all our knowledge begins with experience there can be no doubt” (Kant, 25). Although the rationalists to the contrary. Kant’s position is, however, to mediate between empiricism and rationalism, though he was a notable thoroughgoing rationalist.

If this speculation is plausible as it appears, then some situations are possible. First, the statement “it is not raining now” if it is indeed relatively true, is judged true by the aggregate of the available perceptual evidences gathered by the all the senses available. By this speculation, it is not impossible that this statement is not eventually true. It is possible that the truth-value of the statement could be somewhat different

should an additional sensory organ be involved in the judgment. Second, it is also plausible that the statement “All bachelors are unmarried males” may turn out not to be necessarily true; if “necessity” is defined as that which could not possibly be otherwise. This is because, judging from Kant (25) “necessity” is conventionally determined by the conclusion on the nature of the information from the senses and reason. This might be the case as the jurisdiction of the sixth sense organ could not be definitely ascertained at present. Nevertheless, the possibility of the sixth sense organ, undoubtedly, must seem to affect our imagination and then the entire faculty of knowledge. What this means is that no statement may be absolutely necessary or synthetic.

Let it be stated here again that the case against analytic-synthetic distinction is different from the viewpoint and argument of Duhem-Quine naturalism. Duhem-Quine restrict their view to the existential experience, whereas this supposition is actually challenging the adequacy of that experiential judgment. In that sense it means, no statement may be accepted as certain; where “certainty” is defined in terms of universality, necessity, infallibility and indubitability. The truth status of statements and the meaning of concepts are, therefore, held “contingently tentative.” The ensuing question is: can a statement about tentative phenomenon or state of affairs count as expressing genuine knowledge? For instance, can a tentative knowledge claim at a particular time T1 be acclaimed a knowledge claim? If P tentatively knows that Q at time T1, can it be endorsed that P actually knows Q? For instance again, if I claim that I tentatively know that “ $2+2=4$ ”, can it be said that I actually know that $2+2=4$? One assumption is that P might claim to Q at TI where the totality of his knowledge is measured within the jurisdiction of TI. However, the question is, from the viewpoint of epistemologist looking for what constitute knowledge in general, does knowledge include tentativeness in its nature? If it appears that it does, should it? It seems that it does since it is permitted to say, “I know that the Sun rose from the East this morning”. When, in fact, if the supposition stands, then it is yet to be sufficiently ascertained whether what is said is actually true. Again, is a tentative truth true? It appears much more complex, but on the one hand, though if the supposition stands, something will still remain true, even though it might not be clear what that will be. On the other hand, given the supposition, it is not impossible that our linguistic system might also be affected. Arguably, whatever affects our linguistic system will have a corresponding effect on our knowledge system. However, given the supposition and the possible implications, truth might have to be retained.

The Sketch of the Model for the Speculation

The following is the sketch of the model for this speculation. Suppose there are more than five sensory organs that composed of the human bodily system through which the knowledge of the external world is acquired. Suppose further that some new sense organs are either going to be activated in about 10 years or more. If this is true, then obviously this awareness will put all our epistemic claims within some check. We would readily be careful about the judgment we make from some evidences: the anticipated information might keep cautioning or disproving us. Reasoning would proceed with the possibility that everything we claim to know now might turn out to be augmented, different or at most entirely challenged. One certain thing is that there would be lack of certainty or assurance in our conclusions. Whatever we claim to know now would be held very tentative, perhaps, not awaiting a superior argument, but

awaiting a probably different information or knowledge of the world confirming or disconfirming our judgment perhaps through the possibility of hypothetical sixth sense. This research actually confronts our epistemic system with such speculation and contend that the possibility of the sixth sensory organ raises a strong question against “necessity” and “certainty” and by implication, all that we claim to know at present.

The Arguments to Support the Speculation

The argument to support the speculation is presented as follows. Suppose nature had produced man without one of the principal sense organs, let us say, nose; which is the organ of smell. In other word, suppose human beings are deficient of sense of smell, it would be supposed that knowledge of the world would not have been what it is. However, we could still have had human societies running their daily routines with human beings without a sense of smell. We would still have acquired remarkable and diverse knowledge about nature, and existence as it is today. However, it is undeniable that whatever amount of knowledge that man would have acquired, some important corpus would have missed; the information acquired through sense of smell and knowledge of what it is to smell. How much would this have affected the entire knowledge system? This means that some statements expressing this knowledge would have been entirely missing in our epistemic system. We would have missed not only statements expressing all manners of information about, but also what odours, smells and aroma from external world are. We would have missed the information from the aroma of a rose to odour of a yash! Essentially, the point made in this exposition is that robust as the knowledge of the world and existence without sense of smell might have been, it is obvious that there are some truths that it would not have acquired, though it is possible those truth existed in nature; the truth about smell. The question which arises from this is; suppose some of these sense organs are lacked then what consequence(s) is (are) this (these) likely to have on the entire epistemic system?

The point may be confronted in another dimension. Nature, by sheer naturality, produced man with sense of taste. There is an organ which is saddled with this assignment; the tongue. We were informed by the biologists that a tongue consists of various parts for different taste. For instance, there are the sweet, sour, bitter, and salty tastes as determined by respective and corresponding taste buds. Now, suppose that the tongue lacks a part which senses a particular taste; say bitter, or any of the tastes as the case may be. One thing which is clear is that there would still be the knowledge of the world through sense of taste, i.e, other tastes minus bitter or whatever absent taste. You can still acquire relevant information from the remaining active parts of the tongue for taste. You will perceive other tastes except that which is lacking. But correspondingly, we would lack the knowledge associated with the deficient taste. If the sense of bitter taste is deficient, then the information and knowledge of being bitter would be lacked. The world may still have appeared normal if we had been deficient of a particular sense of taste. We would have judged our knowledge of the world, based on the available information, as, perhaps, adequate. But, now we understand that if that had been the case, all the knowledge of the world excluding the knowledge of being bitter would have been incomplete and therefore, inadequate. It follows that all the knowledge of taste in such a world would have been incomplete. All our epistemic claim and judgement concerning taste would have been far from being sufficient. This, as it were, could also have rendered our linguistic system inadequate.

This point is buttressed in the pattern of experience of those who lack the sense of smell. They adjust to life and live based on the information their senses permit and could supply. Since those people live with those whose senses of smell are active; so we suppose, we can easily determine that the knowledge that the people with deficient sense possess is inadequate. The point which arises from this understanding is that in the discussion of the nature of knowledge of taste, the judgment or understanding of the person who lacks a particular sense organ is definitely deficient. The reason is that he lacks a main sense which could have made a difference in his knowledge. It is for this reason that it is very difficult, if not impossible to teach a blind person what colour red is, or a deaf person the sound of music! Whoever is deficient in a sense organ will definitely be deficient in the corresponding information and knowledge associated with the organ. The suggestion which arises from this supposition is that the totality of our knowledge may be deficient. This is because had we possessed the sixth sense organ, there would have been additional information which may have augmented the adequacy of our judgment. This, again, is situated upon the belief that there are much more to know in and about the world which is not known (Allen 1983: 938).

This paper speculates the possibility of the sixth sense organ through which more and, perhaps, fundamental information about the world, required to make an informed epistemic judgment might be available. The fear of the possibility of a sixth or nth sense is not a discouragement to the speculation. It is a possibility affirmed in the speculation.

Some Evidences to Buttress the Argument

What evidence could have compelled this kind of speculation? Thinking through all the philosophical problems raised from Plato through to the mediaeval and middle ages and to those facing man today, one could not but be concerned about the reason for man's inability to settle some of them. Of all the philosophical questions, at least there are two which are directly cited as relevant to this speculation. The first is Hume's charge that because there is no means of demonstrating, identifying or verifying the notion of necessary connection, it follows that the possibility of the entire gamut of knowledge of the world could not be justified. However, that conclusion is only based on the limit of information from the sense organs, which Hume carefully narrowed to experience. Perhaps, through the existence of the sixth sense organ, an additional information might either have revealed some further truths about what counts as knowledge and then move us closer to the answer or even confuse us the more. The plausibility of this speculation challenges or renders Hume's conclusion inadequate. David Hume set experience up as the foundation of all knowledge. Experience as the source of knowledge relies upon the sensory organs for confirmation.

For Quine "The verification theory of meaning ... is that the meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming and infirming it" (Quine 1961: 37). That the five sensory organs have failed to furnish us the truth inherent in nature calls for the sixth sensory organ. Jack Marshall bemoans the lack of but a tiring struggle to give birth to this sixth organ. This he passionately expressed in "so, age after age? how long, Lord? under the revolving knives of nature and art our spirit cries out, the flesh shrivels, as they sweat to bring an organ of the sixth sense to birth?" (Marshall 1976:9). However, we say again, proliferating and varying what this sixth organ could be not a minus to the claim. Neither is the allegation of a regression of more negative impact to the speculation.

The second evidence is traced to Gettier's, (1963) question against the hitherto accepted definition of epistemology. This is popularly referred to as Gettier's problem. He challenged the traditional definition of knowledge as justified true belief; JTB for short (Gettier 1963: 121-123, Chisholm 1957: 16, Ayer 1976)). For Gettier, while JTB are only necessary as epistemic criteria for knowledge, they are insufficient. For him, it is possible to satisfy the criteria without actually knowing that P, where P is the knowledge coefficient of the propositional claim. Reconsidering this problem, it is observed that what we refer to as knowledge is largely dependent and determined by the elemental experiential data as a necessary ingredient. (Kant 1978: 25). This is variously described as either sensation or impression. Kant argued that knowledge is constrained on sensory data. Given that, it is plausibly conceivable that were there the sixth sensory organ, the pattern of process which gives rise to knowledge might have been different. The point, then, is that the speculation of the sixth sense enables a conception that Gettier's problem could actually have been differently perceived or even resolved. In other words, Gettier's question is a lament of the deficiency and actual unavailability of the sixth sense to shed more epistemic light. The point pushed and defended here is that our knowledge of the world could have been considerably different should there be an addition of the sixth sense organ.

Is this Speculation Actually A Challenge to Epistemic System?

Is this speculation a challenge to the epistemic system? If by "to challenge" here means rendering it false, then this speculative research is not intended to render our epistemic system false or inconsistent. Our epistemic system is not false neither do we think it can be falsified without engaging in a circular reasoning. But the speculation thus affects our epistemic system in the sense that whatever strength or truth status it enjoys now is accepted only tentatively. But, obviously, that does not raise a very strong skepticism against the adequacy of the knowledge and epistemic system. It only raises a caution alert! I think the speculation is philosophical, it signals that the possibility of the sixth organ which might disconfirm, further confirm, or even challenge our existing fabric of knowledge. On a lighter mood, being philosophical, it may not be easily jettisoned. It is capable of raising the need for a research into the discovery of the sixth sense. That it is thus capable implies that this speculative research does not foreclose further scientific and or philosophical enquiries.

There is a more pressing question waiting to be answered. How can this speculation be justified as a challenge to the adequacy of the epistemic system? There may be two cosmogonical accounts of the world. By "cosmogonical" we mean the account of the origin of the world. The religious and the scientific accounts. This speculation could be justified in each of the accounts. First, evolutionary theorists hopefully believe that nature still unfolds the evolutionary process. It is hoped that things in nature continues to evolve; whatever that means. However, the universe is no longer the way we met it. From climate change to global warming. Next is the increase in the number of planetary bodies in our solar system. Now, we are told that our universe is capable of expanding. All these, in one way or another, have their effects and consequences upon our existence and being. The point for this discussion is that the process does not exclude a sudden or gradual appearance of the newly budded gene in human being, which may eventually make all the whole difference. In fact, the claim that it is not possible may seem more anti-science in today's understanding.

In case one is inclined towards the dominating and advancing technology, it is more convenient to show the possibility of the sixth sense. For instance, one is alarmed at the rate and speed at which science and technology is conquering, exploiting, and revealing nature. That technology may one day discover or invent the sixth sense organ is now a belief so comfortable with us. As a matter of fact, the thought that it would do it is becoming sharper by the day. It is an undeniable fact that what technology would have discovered in 50 years more shall almost surely be more challenging than the disparity between the 19th, and 21st centuries definition of solar system. That there are only nine planets in our solar system is being declared inaccurate at present. What could be more!

Turning to religion, it is to be noted that whatever occupies the position of the supernatural entity, across religious beliefs, is endowed with omni potence and omni science. He is accorded the power to know all what, all where, and all when. He possesses all the powers imaginably and unimaginably possible. He can desire to increase the scope of what we know by adding another organs to the next generation of births. If he indeed exists, he might empower nature to begin to reveal something new and also enable the sentient being a transformed means of knowing. Nothing should be impossible with him! This speculation becomes necessary in spite of the ignorance which covers us as water covers the sea. However, this raises some unsettling questions about being and existence in general. It seems humanity is so constrained by chains of the two available prisons. Science and religion held us so tightly into ransom. We want to break loose; we wish we are free from these bonds! What other way out do we have? It is either your thought is scientific or religious. However, if the speculation is plausible, as I strongly think it is, then this justification itself may be vulnerable.

Attending to Some Possible Objections against the Speculation

It is important to consider some plausible objections to this speculation. First, it might be objected that even if humanity suddenly develops another sense organ nothing much may be added to the already established linguistic or epistemic systems. Therefore, the speculation means very little even if plausible. I shall say that what it means is so fundamental to the overall knowledge and language and it is worth addressing. What it means is the kind of truth that Mary discovers when she was released from her black and white propositional room (Jackson 1995). What it means is what someone born blind discovers having suddenly got his eyes restored. What it means is that all that we claim to know at present may be insufficient or perhaps inconsequential to the truth which is yet to be discovered. Therefore, what we claim to know now may be judged deficient.

Again, it might be objected that nature is made absolutely perfect (Royce 1968: 442), and there is nothing more to be known. In other words, there is no sense organ which shall develop. Therefore, there is no additional information or knowledge which shall disprove or challenge those already established. This objection shall have its strength on the position that all that is to be known is already known. But, apparently, this is false. The premise that nature is perfect might be true. But, that all that could be known is already known is questionable. For instance, 50 years ago, there were so many things about the workings of this world not known. While all that is known now is obviously part of nature 50 years ago, they are just being discovered. The same argument goes for the information about the world yet to be known. Of course, it is

highly probable that what may be discovered in the world in the next 100 years may strongly challenge our present epistemic system. A further objection to this position can only rely upon *argumentum ad ignorantiam*; an appeal to ignorance. That is; because P has not been proven to be true, it follows that P is false or because P has not been proven to be false, it follows that P is true.

It might also be objected that even if the sixth or seventh sensory organs are available, some perennial philosophical problems are still going to persist. For instance, the question of the nature of mental states is not a problem about the presence or absence of a particular sensory organ. No sensory organ is needed in that enquiry. The same might be thought of the nature of time, space, and others. They are metaphysical problems which have transcended the realm of the sensory organs. To this objection we say, perhaps this is correct, then at that level, there must still be some problems and questions. In fact, granting the plausibility of the speculation, we can begin to identify some of the attendant questions that would be raised. Yes, new problems and questions would arise, but we shall know differently and perhaps better.

Conclusion

How much of certainty do we possess of what we claim to know? This question is significantly addressed within the speculation on the possibility of the sixth sense organ. What is found out is that going by the possibility, even, of the multiplicity of sense organs, knowledge claim is weaker and more uncertain than being certain. This is proved through the examples drawn from the possibility of a deficiency in any of the existing sensory organs. These examples show that had we lacked one of the existing sense organs, then the bulk of our knowledge system would have been significantly deficient. Consequently, any attempt to question or affirm the position is equally subject to the speculation. This, uncomfortably, spells human epistemic limitation about the world. This is the case, in view of the speculation on the sixth sense organs. This, in a way, resuscitates the traditional question from skepticism.

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