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Have you ever wondered to yourself if it was possible for you to be right about something if you

simply believed it? Do you consider such statements as “whatever you believe that’s what will

be your reality” (me) to be true? If one is to better understand the answer to such questions one

must examine one of the primary concepts of epistemology, the theory of knowledge, known as

the incorrigibility thesis. This thesis is one of the few concepts at the forefront of philosophical

study not only because of its implicative significance but also because of the controversy

surrounding this topic. First off, the incorrigibility thesis states that one cannot be corrected in

regards to one’s current mental state or experience. This follows directly from the infallibility

thesis which states that one cannot be mistaken or wrong about the current mental experience

they are having. These two thesis’ are tied together as one follows the other for if you cannot be

mistaken or wrong about your current mental state then you can’t be corrected about your current

mental state. This follows essentially off common sense or logic or as Descartes would say

“intuition and deductive reasoning”(Descartes Meditations of First Philosophy) his proclaimed

certain sources of knowledge. Now as stated previously there is much controversy surrounding

this topic with many philosophers giving their take either for or against it as a legitimate claim

since the thesis’ inception. The many bold claims surrounding the incorrigibility thesis will be

analyzed forthcoming including the arguments for and against the incorrigibility thesis as a valid

and true proposition.

Firstly, the arguments for the incorrigibility thesis as a valid proposition range from the

infamous Descartes the so called Godfather of Epistemology and modern philosophy where he

has the famed cogito moment “I think therefore I am,” (Descartes Second Meditation) Paul

Churchland discusses the incorrigibility thesis as what he refers to as the “Traditional View” in

his piece Matter and Consciousness, and David Chalmers in The Content and Epistemology of

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Phenomenal Belief. Furthermore, Descartes goes on to argue that a person cannot be mistaken about their current seeming state. He posits that the mind is infallible in regards to its current seeming states. He further explains this by using the concept of dualism, which states that the mind and the brain are independent substances as the former is a mental substance while the latter is only a physical substance. Furthermore, Descartes considers the mind to be the source of consciousness and self-awareness while the brain is simply an object of matter. Also, for Descartes the incorrigibility thesis collapses the appearance/reality distinction in such that the following statement is held to be true: what you see is what you get. Paul Churchland, on the other hand, discusses the "Traditional View" in his book Matter and Consciousness where he states that there is a basic difference between introspection and any other kind of external perception. He goes on to say that the "Traditional View" regards introspection as a unequivocal and infallible source of knowledge for it is not affected by your unreliable and mistake prone senses. Introspection is therefore an infallible source of knowledge as it is unaffected by the senses, and the purity of the mind remains so for introspection. Alternatively, David Chalmers upholds a version of the incorrigibility thesis which he slightly modifies stating that "Direct Phenomenal Beliefs cannot be false." (The Content and Epistemology of Phenomenal Belief) Chalmers defines a direct phenomenal belief as some basic phenomenal concept that is the constitution of a mental experience. Furthermore, he goes on to say that when someone has an entirely new and unique experience they cannot be mistaken about it as it doesn't have any set defined characteristics or identity conditions, per say. Since the person doesn't have any set identity conditions regarding this experience they cannot have an error or make a mistake in applying the direct phenomenal concepts involved. Therefore, direct phenomenal beliefs are an infallible and incorrigible source of knowledge. Unfortunately, most beliefs, according to

Chalmers are not direct phenomenal beliefs as some beliefs are only phenomenal beliefs due to them having set identity conditions. An example would be the phenomenal beliefs surrounding the taste of ice cream, as because I have had ice cream before and therefore tasted it is not a new experience with new concepts involved and therefore would have set identity conditions and wouldn't be a direct phenomenal belief. Furthermore, the works of Descartes, Churchland and Chalmers all set forth arguments in favor of the incorrigibility thesis, the statement that one cannot be corrected for their current mental state or experience.

On the contrary, some philosophers reject the incorrigibility thesis as a valid and true proposition such as Jack Crumley whom lists his objections to the incorrigibility thesis in his book An Introduction to Epistemology, and Paul Churchland's objection to the incorrigibility thesis in his piece Matter and Consciousness. Furthermore, Crumley in his piece qualifies the claim that introspection is a kind of mental process using concepts and is therefore prone to fallibility and consequently corrigibility. He argues that introspections use of concepts is a source of fallibility because the use of concepts brings the possibility of error by either misapplying or misidentifying a concept. Additionally, he claims that introspection involves the usage of unconscious inferences which have the possibility of being based on false premises. All of these he argues account for why introspection is not an incorrigible source of knowledge, and since introspection is a prime source of incorrigibility to those who support the thesis Crumley feels this deals a major blow to the validity of the incorrigibility thesis as a proposition. Additionally, Paul Churchland takes a stab at the incorrigibility thesis in his piece Matter and Consciousness where he states how people can make mistakes about their current mental states and contents. In further detail, he states that people can make mistakes regarding sensations if they are anticipating a particular sensation to occur and they get something that should in fact cause an

opposite sensation. The best example is that if some is expecting a burning sensation but in reality is touched by an ice cube they end up for the first few seconds thinking that the ice cube caused a burning sensation even though it probably should have caused a cold sensation. Another example is in the case of orange and lime sherbets, if one were to blindfold someone and give them some orange sherbet to taste if they were expecting the lime sherbet they would mistakenly think they tasted a lime sherbet even though they were in reality tasting an orange sherbet. The reason for this is because the two sherbets have very similar tastes and so when someone expects one and gets the other to taste they will mistakenly think they are tasting the other flavor. Churchland also points out that the person expecting a burning sensation and receiving the touch of an ice cube will within a few seconds change their mind regarding the sensation he or she had to something of a cold sensation. This refutes the claim from Descartes that the person was actually having a burning sensation since they change their mind after a few seconds to the correct sensation but initially make a mistake regarding their sensation. Churchland also contests that a person who has never had a particular sensation before can be fallible and therefore corrigible regarding the content of that sensation because they cannot correctly identify and apply the associated concepts upon their first experience of it. Furthermore, pretty much all philosophers whom object to the validity of the incorrigibility thesis hold the following idea to be true, if there is a manner in which something is then someone can be mistaken about it and therefore be corrected. This all compiles for a very compelling case against the incorrigibility thesis as a valid proposition.

In summation, there are many persuasive claims from philosophers both for and against the incorrigibility thesis as a valid propositional account for knowledge, whether it's Churchland's arguments both for and against it, Descartes argument for it as well as Chalmers, and

contrastively Crumley's argument against the incorrigibility thesis. Moreover, if one is to understand the essence and true meaning of the incorrigibility thesis one must tally all the arguments surrounding it both for and against it as a valid proposition. It is no wonder this thesis is at the forefront of epistemological discussions for it is a powerful thesis to suggest that something is true via virtue of simply being believed or experienced. Ultimately, what you give from the incorrigibility thesis is like most things, what you get, and by breaking the appearance/reality distinction the incorrigibility thesis can be simply known as what you see is what you get.

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