



Introduction: philosophy of memory

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Introduction

Philosophical theorizing about the nature of memory is becoming increasingly prominent in the recent literature, with the *philosophy of memory* now being recognized as a distinct field of research (Michaelian & Sutton, 2017; Bernecker & Michaelian, 2017). As Michaelian, Debus, and Perrin (2018) note in their introduction to a recent edited collection, this is attested by the large number of articles, journal special issues, books, and edited collections published recently, as well as the various conferences that have been organized in different parts of the world in the past few years. There is, to put it differently, a growing sense of community among philosophers of memory. But what is the philosophy of memory? What sort of questions are philosophers of memory concerned with?

Recent work on memory in the analytic tradition, which is the focus of this issue, deals primarily with a variety of metaphysical and epistemological questions. Questions such as how many types of memory there are, how memory allows us to gain knowledge of the past, and what the relationship between memory and imagination is, have been at the center of some of the most heated disputes in the area (see Michaelian & Sutton, 2017 for an accessible overview). But despite the focus of recent work on metaphysical and epistemological themes, the philosophy of memory is also concerned with key ethical and political questions. For instance, the questions of whether we have a duty to remember the past and how memory shapes the way we think about the social world have begun to be explored by philosophers in more recent work. The importance of memory for these various domains thus makes it a fruitful topic for philosophical inquiry.¹

Taking this as a starting point, this special issue provides authors with a forum to discuss some of the most controversial topics in the recent literature, as well as with a space to explore avenues of research that have not been considered in enough detail so far. The contributions that compose this issue cover a variety of topics, ranging from the phenomenology of memory to the political dimensions of remembering. In the remainder of this brief introduction, I provide an overview of the contributed articles.

The contributions

Experimental philosophy of memory

The past two decades have seen a large increase in works employing the methods of experimental philosophy. As Knobe and Nichols (2017) put it, experimental philosophy brings together “[...] questions and theoretical frameworks traditionally associated with philosophy [and the] ... experimental methods traditionally associated with psychology and cognitive science” (Knobe & Nichols, 2017) to investigate, among other things, the way we ordinarily think about philosophical concepts, as well as to criticize the methodology employed in certain parts of analytic philosophy.

In their contribution to this issue, Michaelian, Dranseika, and Álvarez make the case for applying the methods of experimental philosophy to the philosophy of memory. They begin by providing an overview of some of the main questions in recent philosophy of memory and by outlining the main methodological approaches adopted by philosophers working in the field. They argue that while philosophers take different stances towards the importance of our folk concept of memory in their theorizing—they speak of a

¹ This paragraph was adapted from Sant'Anna, McCarroll, and Michaelian (forthcoming).

'naturalistic' approach and 'conceptual analysis' approach—they seem to agree about what that concept amounts to. However, as the authors point out, very little empirical work has been done to clarify what the folk concept of memory is, thus threatening to bring this consensus into question. This is where Michaelian, Dranseika, and Álvarez think that the methods of experimental philosophy can make an important contribution to the philosophy of memory. They provide a detailed discussion of the different methods that can be employed to make progress on this question, arguing that the results will be of importance to partisans of both the naturalistic and the conceptual analysis approaches. In addition to providing an argument for an experimental philosophy of memory, the authors review existing and ongoing work on the subject, which covers, among other things, questions pertaining to personal identity, the nature of relearning, the factivity of memory, and observer memories. Their contribution thus sets the stage for work on a fruitful domain of inquiry within the philosophy of memory, which promises to have significant impact on future developments in the field.

The phenomenology of memory and its relationship to perception and imagination

What is the phenomenology of memory? How does it relate to the phenomenology of other mental states, such as perception and imagination? These questions have occupied the agenda of philosophers since at least Aristotle and they continue to play a central role in contemporary debates. However, there has been relatively little engagement between philosophers working on memory, perception, and imagination in a contemporary setting. The contributions by Fish and Kind focus on important issues that sit at the intersection of these areas.

Fish considers the phenomenology of memory within a naïve realist framework. According to naïve realists, the phenomenology of perceptual experiences is essentially relational—i.e., it is characterized by a relation of acquaintance to worldly objects. One crucial question for naïve realists is, therefore, how to account for cases of hallucination. Fish appeals to his previous work on the subject to suggest that hallucinatory experiences are characterized by higher-order states of believing that are constituted by first-order perceptual states (see Fish, 2009). This explains why there is something it is like to have those states even if they lack phenomenal character altogether. This brief excursion into the philosophy of perception literature provides the starting point for his positive approach to memory.

Fish considers two possible ways in which naïve realists might account for the phenomenology of memory, arguing that the most promising one is to conceive of the phenomenology of memory as lacking phenomenal character altogether and trying to make sense of it in terms of states that do have phenomenal character. Drawing a parallel to his account of the phenomenology of hallucinatory experiences, which employs a similar strategy, Fish argues that the main task for a naïve realist who endorses the second option is to provide an account of the relevant higher-order attitude that characterizes remembering. He considers a few alternatives and argues that the most suitable one is to think of such an attitude as being an attitude of 'belief-like imagining' (Currie & Ravenscroft, 2002). On this view, when I remember an event or object, such as Cologne's cathedral, I belief-like imagine seeing that event or object. Because this higher-order attitude is constituted by a first-order state with phenomenal character (i.e., a state of seeing), we can explain what it is like to remember even if memory lacks phenomenal character altogether. Moreover, as Fish points out, this way of thinking about the phenomenology of memory has the important advantage that it is not at odds with the continuity between memory and imagination, for an explanation of the phenomenology of imagination can be offered on similar grounds (see Martin, 2002). Fish's naïve realist approach departs significantly from current naïve realist approaches to memory, which have attempted to account for it in terms of acquaintance. Thus, his contribution is a much welcome addition to discussions on a topic that has been underexplored in the contemporary literature.

Kind discusses the nature of the 'feeling of familiarity' and considers its prospects in distinguishing the phenomenology of remembering from the phenomenology of imagining. She situates her discussion in the context of Russell's (1921) account of the phenomenology of memory, who takes memory to be characterized both by a 'feeling of pastness' and a 'feeling of familiarity'. Kind finds this proposal to be problematic, for neither the 'feeling of pastness' nor the 'feeling of familiarity' are exclusive to remembering, being exhibited by some imaginings too. Despite these problems, Kind argues that we should not give up on the feeling of familiarity altogether. She provides a detailed discussion of different contexts in which the feeling of familiarity can take place beyond memory—e.g., when you are watching your favorite episode of a TV show—arguing that it has a multi-layered and multi-dimensional structure. She then argues that acknowledging this multi-dimensionality of the feeling of familiarity is crucial for any attempt to account for the phenomenology of memory. That is, rather than treating the feeling of familiarity as 'atomic' or 'indivisible', which, as Kind

successfully argues, fails to distinguish remembering from imagining, the task of those engaged in descriptive phenomenological enterprises is that of teasing apart the various layers and dimensions of the feeling and then trying to figure out whether any of those layers is proprietary to remembering. While Kind remains neutral on whether there is such proprietary dimension or layer, her account of the feeling of familiarity provides us with important insights into the phenomenology of memory and points to promising avenues for future research on the intersection between the philosophy of memory and the philosophy of imagination.

The phenomenology of memory and metacognition

Recent attempts to account for the phenomenology of memory have emphasized its metacognitive nature (see, e.g., Dokic, 2014; Michaelian, 2016; Mahr & Csibra, 2018; Perrin, Michaelian, & Sant'Anna, 2020). While proponents of metacognitive accounts share a common motivation, they still disagree about important aspects, such as what the scope of metacognitive accounts is supposed to be and the nature of the metacognitive processes that are responsible for the phenomenology of memory. The contributions by Dokic and Caravà consider different aspects of the relationship between the phenomenology of memory and metacognition.

Dokic builds on his previous work to provide an account of the phenomenology of memory in terms of metacognitive feelings. According to him, episodic memory is two-tiered, involving a first-order representational state and a second-order metacognitive feeling—which he calls the ‘episodic feeling’—responsible for monitoring the source of information represented in memory—i.e., that it originates in a past experience. To make the case for the episodic feeling, Dokic considers rival accounts of the phenomenology of remembering that attempt to explain the episodic feeling in terms of the content or the attitude of first-order states, arguing that these attempts are ultimately unsuccessful. He also considers recent challenges raised to his view by a competing metacognitive approach developed by Perrin et al. (2020) and argues that the problems raised by these authors can be resolved within the framework of the two-tiered account. Dokic concludes by exploring the interesting possibility of there being feelingless episodic memories—memories that lack the relevant metacognitive feeling—such as the famous painter case described by Martin and Deutscher (1966). He argues that, as long as the failure to identify the source of a memory is not due to a capacity deficit, but rather to a performance error, the two-tiered view is compatible with the existence of episodic memories happening in the absence of episodic feelings. Dokic’s contribution is thus a welcome addition to an exciting and emerging literature on the relationship between metacognition and the phenomenology of memory.

Caravà considers the question of whether states of forgetting involve a literal experience of absence. Drawing on the approaches developed by Barkasi and Rosen (2020) and Farennikova (2013) to, respectively, the phenomenology of memory and the phenomenology of experiences of absence, Caravà asks whether states of forgetting, in which we are unable to recall an episode from our past, could be plausibly explained in terms of us becoming genuinely aware of absences. On this view, genuine awareness of absences in forgetting would occur when there is a mismatch between our expectations related to the outputs of recall and the actual unfulfillment of those expectations. Caravà considers the prospects of this view in detail, arguing that it fails as an account of the experience of absence in forgetting. As she points out, the mismatches that the view associates with experiences of absences can happen in experiences where no awareness of absence is involved—e.g., when we remember a series of related events, but all of a sudden, we remember a completely unrelated event. Since those experiences seem to involve the same phenomenology as states of forgetting, Caravà argues that it cannot be that this phenomenology is due to awareness of absences. She builds on this problem to suggest a metacognitive account of the experience of absence in remembering. On this view, the experience of absence is an affective state that results from the metacognitive monitoring of retrieval processes that identify a mismatch between our expectations for recall and the actual content of recall. Since such a mismatch can happen both in cases where we fail to recall an event and in cases in which we remember an unrelated event, she argues that the metacognitive approach offers a more plausible account of the experience of absence. Caravà’s contribution is one of the first ones to consider the phenomenology of forgetting in the recent literature. By linking it to recent discussions of the phenomenology of memory and metacognition, a topic that enjoys more prominence in the literature, she provides us with important insights into questions that have not been addressed so far.

Memory and the self

What is the relationship between memory and the self? How do we become aware of the self through episodic memory? These and other related questions have been central for attempts to explain the sense of personal identity in the history of philosophy and also for debates unfolding in a contemporary setting. The contributions by Schechtman and Lin make progress on important issues pertaining to the relationship between memory and the self.

Schechtman considers the status of treasured memories and how they contribute to our sense of personal identity. Treasured memories, she argues, are memories that have value for us, such that we treat them as possessions worthy of preservation. Although these memories are autobiographical and involve a rich experiential dimension, Schechtman notes that they are not restricted to events, but can also have physical objects or periods of our lives as their intentional objects. An important question that Schechtman discusses in her paper is what makes treasured memories valuable for us. She focuses on their relationship to affect and considers a 'naïve view' of the value of such memories, according to which this value derives from the recall of an affective state that has a positive impact on our current states. However, she finds this view problematic, for some treasured memories are cherished precisely because they have a negative valence—e.g., when one remembers the last days with a loved one who has died. Thus, while Schechtman thinks that the value of treasured memories is importantly linked to how they relate past affective states to current states, she argues that this is only part of the explanation. Drawing a parallel to research on nostalgia, Schechtman argues that we value treasured memories because they produce a sense of personal identity and continuity. Against standard accounts of the sense of personal identity, Schechtman suggests that treasured memories do not just provide us with means to recognize our current selves as being the same as past remembered selves, but they also allow us to bring those past selves to feel and act in the present, which yields a much stronger sense of identity and continuity. While Schechtman acknowledges that there is still much work to do to fully account for the nature of treasured memories, her contribution makes important progress towards enhancing our understanding of the relationship between memory, affect, and value, which is going to be of great interest to philosophers working on those topics.

Lin addresses an important question in the philosophy of mind, which is whether there can be totally selfless states of consciousness (TSSC). Lin begins by introducing the debate on TSSC, noting that the primary source of evidence for such states are reports made on the basis of memories of those experiences. She then discusses skeptical arguments that have been levelled against TSSC. These arguments state that reports of TSSC based on memory seem to give rise to a paradox. If memories are, as many philosophers have defended, states where we are necessarily aware of our selves, then reports of TSSC based on memory will necessarily involve self-awareness. Thus, it appears that memory-based reports of TSSC are based on cases of misremembering or confabulating. Against this backdrop, Lin sets out to evaluate the claim that memory-based reports of TSSC are a result of misremembering or confabulating from the perspective of recent developments in the philosophy and psychology of memory. She considers a few ways in which one might try to account for the possibility of memory-based reports of TSSC based on recent memory research, arguing that none of them is without problems. Lin then argues that given the difficulties associated with providing an explanation of the involvement of the self in memories of TSSC, it becomes methodologically problematic to rely on those reports to argue for the existence of TSSC. Thus, while Lin does not take a stance on whether there are TSSC, the arguments provided by her from the perspective of the philosophy and psychology of memory are bound to have several key implications for this important debate in the philosophy of mind.

Memory and causation

The question of whether a causal connection is necessary for remembering is a central one in recent debates in the philosophy of memory. While most philosophers have given a positive answer to it, recent 'post-causal' theories have attempted to deny the necessity of causation for remembering (see Michaelian & Robins, 2018 for an overview).

Taking this dispute as a starting point, Andonovski argues for a distinction between two related but independent theses accepted by causal theorists of memory: the thesis that individual memories need to be appropriately caused by past events (NECESSITY) and the thesis that the reliability of memory is explained in causal terms (CAUSAL RELIABILITY). He notes that despite being independent of one another, NECESSITY and CAUSAL RELIABILITY are rarely distinguished by those involved in the debate. More importantly, he

argues that a failure to make such a distinction has important implications for how we assess the general debate between causalists and post-causalists. To make the case for his view, Andonovski focuses on a recent causalist argument offered by Werning (2020), which tries to dismiss post-causal theories by showing that CAUSAL RELIABILITY is true. He argues that Werning's argument only works against strong forms of post-causalism, which reject both NECESSITY and CAUSAL RELIABILITY, but is unsuccessful against weak forms of post-causalism, which only reject NECESSITY.

Andonovski appeals to probabilistic considerations to support these claims. He argues that the existence of a probabilistic correlation between memory and experience, which accounts for the reliability of the former, and which is central for Werning's (2020) argument, does not imply that every individual memory will be, as a matter of necessity, caused by an individual past experience. In other words, CAUSAL RELIABILITY is concerned with a type-level relation between memory and perception, whereas NECESSITY is concerned with a token-level relation between the two. So, Andonovski argues that even if the former turns out to be true, it does not secure the latter. Since the dispute between causalists and post-causalists is a central one in recent debates, the important and overlooked distinction identified by Andonovski is bound to have crucial implications for future work in the philosophy of memory.

Memory and political myth

The way we remember the past is clearly important for how we conceive of the political world. It helps us understand the origin and development of various political issues of interest in the present. But do current political structures and relations also have an impact on how we remember the world? Barash's contribution addresses this question, arguing that mass media allow for the emergence of a new form of political myth that shapes the way we remember the past in society.

Barash begins by discussing how memories are based on direct encounters with the world, where not only an object or event is encoded, but also the plenitude of the context that surrounds it. He argues that this context gives significance to those memories, which is built upon the values and ways of thinking of the groups that we belong to. However, Barash notes that individuals in contemporary society rarely encounter events in such a direct manner. Rather, such encounters are often indirect and mediated by mass media. Because the contextual dimension is no longer given in experience, Barash argues that the significance we attribute to our experiences, and consequently the way we remember those experiences, is now provided by the representational format characteristic of mass media. The problem with this, according to Barash, is that mass media uniformize the perspective from which we apprehend and remember events. And this, he suggests, creates the context for the emergence of new forms of mythical elaboration in political contexts.

Building on this analysis, Barash argues that it is no surprise that there is an ever-increasing preoccupation with collective memory in contemporary society, exemplified by the proliferation of commemorations, museums, monuments, etc. Because our experience of the world is increasingly mediated by mass media, and as such, is stripped of the context and significance it would otherwise have if we were to encounter the world directly, the political myths that result from this 'gap' open up the space for questioning the reality of the past. Thus, Barash argues that this incompatibility between the reality of the past and political myths can only be remedied by refocusing our attention to physical traces of the past in the public sphere, which allows us to regain the contextual significance that is lost in our contact with the world through mass media. Barash's contribution is thus a welcome addition to the literature, giving us important insights into the relationship between memory and political discourse, a topic that has been underexplored in recent discussions about memory in the analytic tradition.

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