

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

The philosophy of memory today

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Why a philosophy of memory handbook? Why now?

Memory is a fundamental cognitive capacity and as such interacts with virtually all other basic cognitive capacities. Given its centrality to the mind, it is surprising neither that theorizing about memory is as old as philosophy itself nor that memory continues to be an active area of philosophical research. Important early ideas about memory were developed by Plato and Aristotle, as well as in the Chinese and Indian philosophical traditions. In the early modern period, key ideas were developed by figures such as Hume, Reid, and Locke. More recently, continental philosophers have made a number of valuable contributions, sometimes drawing on psychoanalytic insights. In the contemporary analytic tradition, research on memory is thematically oriented, clustering around a number of topics in philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics.

Despite this long tradition of inquiry, the philosophy of memory was until recently not recognized as an area of research in its own right. In recent years, however, the situation has changed markedly, and an increasing number of philosophers now count themselves as specialists in or active contributors to the philosophy of memory. The philosophy of memory is now well on its way to taking form as a distinct, coherent area of research, with a recognized set of problematics and theories. Many of the questions that have driven this development stem from a new interdisciplinarity, and philosophers of memory have often interacted as closely with colleagues in other disciplines, particularly psychology, as they have with other philosophers. Crucially, philosophers of memory, particularly those working in the analytic tradition, which is the focus of the present volume, increasingly recognize that they have as much to say to each other as they do to colleagues in psychology and other disciplines.

Philosophers of memory, in other words, increasingly think of themselves *as* philosophers of memory, and the area is in the process of developing its own infrastructure, as books, special issues, conferences, and workshops on all aspects of the philosophy of memory become regular occurrences. The aim of this handbook is to build on and contribute to this trend by providing a critical piece of infrastructure for the field: a comprehensive overview of the key concepts, debates, theories, and figures in the philosophy of memory. The handbook is designed to be a comprehensive reference work, accessible both to researchers and advanced students, that will be of use to the field for many years to come.

The present handbook

The handbook consists of eight thematically oriented parts and one part on the history of philosophy of memory.

- *The nature of memory.* This part covers highly general issues in everyday and scientific thinking about memory. For example, while we tend to take it for granted that memory is a unitary phenomenon, reflection on the variety of things that we can remember – things as different as facts, events, skills, to start with – suggests that it may in fact be irreducibly multiple, a suggestion which receives some support from current psychology and neuroscience. Is memory fundamentally a unified capacity, or is the term ambiguous among a number of essentially distinct cognitive capacities? The chapters in this part deal with this question, the phenomenology of memory, and memory and levels of scientific explanation.
- *The metaphysics of memory.* This part deals with core questions about what memory is. Does memory imply truth? What is it for someone to remember something? Does memory presuppose a causal connection with the past? Does it necessarily involve stored traces originating in past experience? When we remember, do we stand in cognitive contact with the past itself or only with internal representations of the past?
- *Memory, mind, and meaning.* Remembering is intimately bound up with a wide range of other mental phenomena. Consider imagination: the ability to imagine possible events clearly depends on our ability to remember past events (with past events providing the raw materials for imagined events). Recent research, however, suggests that memory itself might be best understood as a form of imagination. The chapters in this part provide a survey of these connections, looking at memory in relation to consciousness, perspective, imagination, images, and emotion.
- *Memory and the self.* The connection between memory and the self has long been appreciated, with memory providing one of the standard answers to the puzzle of personal identity. In recent years, other connections between memory and the self have come to the fore, including the role of memory in constituting the psychological self. The chapters in this part look both at the traditional question of memory and personal identity and at the relationships between memory and self-consciousness and memory and narrativity.
- *Memory and time.* An adequate understanding of memory presupposes an understanding of its relationship to time. The chapters in this part look at a number of connections between memory and time, including memory and the concept of time, memory and the metaphysics of time, and the idea, prominent in current psychology and playing an increasing role in philosophy, that memory for past events amounts to mental time travel, an imaginative process in which the agent projects himself into the past, much as he projects himself into the future when imagining future events.
- *The social dimension of memory.* Social influences on individual memory and remembering as a social phenomenon are key themes of recent research on memory. What is the role of memory in constituting collective identities (for example, a nation's memory for its past)? What impact do cultural practices of remembering have on the shape of the individual's memory? What is the relationship between internal memory and external "memory"? The chapters in this part draw on philosophical and interdisciplinary resources to survey answers to these and related questions.
- *The epistemology of memory.* Epistemologists recognize that memory is a core epistemic source: without memory, we would be deprived of nearly all of our knowledge, both of the past and of things in general. But different epistemological theories (externalist theories,

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as well as internalist theories such as foundationalism and coherentism) account for memory knowledge in different ways, and all theories must deal with certainly highly general questions about the nature of memory knowledge: is memory capable of generating new knowledge, or does it merely preserve existing knowledge? Given that we can't rule out the possibility that memory systematically misleads us about the past, can we really claim to know the past?

- *Memory and morality.* Given its centrality to our mental lives, memory is bound to have an important ethical dimension. There are a number of emerging technologies that promise either to enhance memory (allowing superior recall) or to selectively inhibit it (allowing, for example, the forgetting of traumatic experiences). The chapters in this part will survey the thorny ethical questions raised by these technologies, as well as looking at more general questions: might we have a duty to remember (or to forget) certain people, events, or facts?
- *History of philosophy of memory.* The final part of the volume is devoted to the history of the philosophy of memory, with chapters on figures and currents including Plato, Aristotle, classical Indian philosophy, Indian Buddhist philosophy, Chinese Buddhist philosophy, Augustine, Avicenna and Averroes, Aquinas, Locke, Reid, Hume, Hegel, Freud, Lacan, Bergson, Russell, Halbwachs, Bartlett, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Ricoeur.

Reflecting the diversity of topics that fall under the heading of philosophy of memory, this handbook is long, with 48 chapters (not including this introduction). It could, however, easily have been longer. There are, for example, active programmes of philosophical research on habit memory, nondeclarative memory, working memory, and memory in nonhuman animals, to give but a few examples of topics that, for one reason or another, could not be given chapters of their own here. If the philosophy of memory continues to grow and develop at its present rate, it will not be long before a new edition of this handbook is called for. Hopefully, these topics – and others that have yet to emerge – will be included there.