

Christopher McCarroll. *Remembering from the Outside: Personal Memory and the Perspectival Mind*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. 240 pp. ISBN: 9780190674267, \$74.00

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The idea that observer memories are inauthentic is endorsed by a great number of philosophers. In *Remembering From the Outside*, Chris McCarroll provides an ambitious and philosophically stimulating discussion of observer memories by arguing that they are authentic. Chapter 1 starts by setting the stage for the book. Observer memories are defined as memories in which “I view myself as if from the position of an observer, and ‘see’ myself as if from-the-outside, from a third-person perspective” (p. 2), whereas field memories are memories in which one views “the remembered scene as one originally experienced it, from one’s original point of view—a field perspective” (p. 3). McCarroll then proceeds to consider arguments to the effect that observer memories are not authentic because they deviate from the content of experience, which adopts a field perspective. He criticizes these arguments by claiming that they are too restrictive due to their reliance on a strict preservationist view of memory. As an alternative, he suggests that understanding how observer memories can be genuine requires acknowledging the constructive character of memory. Distancing himself from current constructive approaches (e.g., Michaelian 2016), which give excessive emphasis to construction at retrieval, McCarroll proposes an alternative view. The *Constructive Encoding* approach, he says, “stresses how constructive processes at encoding influence the content of memory” (p. 20), and as such it is more appropriate to explain the authenticity of observer memories.

Chapter 2 develops the Constructive Encoding approach in more detail and also introduces what is arguably the most controversial claim made in the book, that is, the claim that there are observer perspective *experiences*. McCarroll starts by arguing that understanding how observer memories can be authentic requires considering the reconstructive aspect of memory at retrieval *and* its constructive aspect at encoding. This is because focusing solely on reconstruction at retrieval will always give us a mismatch between the perspective of experience and the perspective of observer memory. Thus, the suggestion put forward by McCarroll is that the information responsible for generating “observer” representations can be encoded at the time of experience, making it possible for there to be a match of perspectives between experience and memory without losing authenticity. However, saying that those elements are already present at the time of encoding requires acknowledging the possibility of observer experiences, which to many will seem absurd. Despite the initial counter-intuitiveness of this idea, McCarroll firmly embraces it. In an attempt to soften the blow, he carefully notes that observer experiences are not necessarily *visual* observer perspectives—the elements responsible for generating an “observer” representation can be agentive, emotive, and so on. So, you do not need to *see* yourself from the outside to have an observer experience.

The idea that observer representations can be formed from non-visual information at the time of experience requires an account of what it means for the self to be represented in memory. Chapter 3 provides such an account. McCarroll argues that self-representation in memory is the result of the integration of multimodal information present at the time of experience. The idea is that experiencing the world involves not only processing visual information, but also agentive, emotive, and other forms of sensory information. For instance, when giving a public speech, we visually experience the scene from a field perspective, but that experience also

involves emotive representations of the self from an observer perspective—i.e., we wonder what people are thinking of us, and so on. The presence of multimodal information at the time of experience thus make it possible for experiences to contain representations of the self from an observer perspective without requiring *visual* observer perspective representations. While a full account of observer perspective experiences would be a topic of its own, I find McCarroll's suggestion to consider the presence of multimodal information at the time of experience an important one, for it has been overlooked in philosophical theorizing about memory. When it comes to discussions about authenticity, the focus has almost exclusively been on visual information, and acknowledging that experiencing is more than seeing provides a promising and novel way to look at the question.

While Chapter 3 focuses on how the self is represented in memory, Chapter 4 attempts to explain how the account of self-representation from Chapter 3 allows us to explain the visual imagery involved in observer memories. McCarroll's main thesis here is that observer memories are represented from an *unoccupied of view*. To motivate this claim, McCarroll targets discussions of visual imagery in imagination to make similar points about memory. In particular, he criticizes Zeno Vendler's (1979) account of imagery in observer imagination as involving occupied points of view, i.e., as requiring a representation of oneself occupying the point of view from which the target event is imagined. This is a crucial point for, as McCarroll points out, Vendler uses these considerations to deny the authenticity of observer memories due to a mismatch of perspectives occupied in experience and in observer memories. For McCarroll, however, remembering from the outside does not require occupying a point of view. This is where the notion of unoccupied points of view becomes relevant. Unoccupied points of view are like the perspective of the cameras used to film a movie: they do present us with visual information, but that information does not typically reflect the point of view of any of the movie's characters. If this is right, then the experience of seeing is not necessarily a part of the content of observer memories, which eliminates any mismatch between the content of experience and the content of observer memories in terms of points of view taken in each.

The argument in this chapter is a bit puzzling considering the previous attempt to motivate the Constructive Encoding approach and the idea that there are observer experiences. While Chapter 4 argues for the possibility of observer experiences, which seems to suggest that a match between the perspective taken in experience and the perspective taken in observer memory is important, Chapter 5 seems to suggest otherwise, for now the argument is that, while experience requires occupying a certain point of view, observer memories need not occupy any point of view. However, this tension does not seem to affect the overall argument that observer memories can be authentic; both arguments seem to independently lead to that conclusion.

While the goal until Chapter 4 was to address worries about authenticity, Chapter 5 starts a new thread in the book. Building on the previous discussion, McCarroll now attempts to provide a more precise characterization of representation in observer memories and draw the implications of this to discussions about representation in personal memory more generally. More specifically, Chapter 5 builds on the discussion in Chapter 4 and explores the multiplicity of perspectives involved in remembering. Observer remembering, according to McCarroll, can involve a mix of *internal* forms of imagery (e.g., kinesthetic and emotional) and *external* forms of imagery (e.g., visual). This mixture is supposed to explain why, despite seeing ourselves from the outside, observer memories still seem to be *our* memories. The idea is that, while visual imagery provides us with an *external* perspective of the remembered event, kinesthetic and emotional imagery provides us with an *internal* perspective of the event, thus explaining the sense of self-presence often associated with observer memories. Moreover, acknowledging that personal memory more generally can involve a mix of perspectives also helps to explain a wide range of empirical data. As McCarroll points out, it helps us make sense of the possibility

of memories that involve both field and observer perspectives (Rice and Rubin 2009), as well as the fact that traumatic experiences tend to be remembered from an observer perspective. Besides, given its focus on self-representation in memory, one potential domain in which this account could be developed further is to explain autoevident consciousness (Tulving 2005), or the “sense of ownership” (Klein and Nichols 2012), associated with personal memory.

Chapter 6 takes a step further in the project of providing a more precise characterization of representation in personal memory. The suggestion is that field and observer memories consist of different modes of presentation of a past event. Modes of presentation were traditionally introduced in discussions in the philosophy of language to express the particular way in which an object—what philosophers call a “referent”—is made cognitively available to a subject in a sentence. For instance, the same object or referent “Venus” can be represented under the different modes of presentation “Evening Star” and “Morning Star”, each of which single out different aspects or properties of the object or referent. Thus, the idea is that remembering is defined by a tripartite structure involving an *act*, an *object*, and a *content* or *mode of presentation*. More specifically, the act corresponds to the mental state in question, that is, remembering or thinking about the past, the object corresponds to the event that is remembered, and the content or mode of presentation corresponds to the *way* in which the event is remembered. The difference between field and observer memories thus corresponds to the different modes of presentation involved in each. This adds an important element to the account of the authenticity of observer memories. What changes in remembering from the outside is the mode of presentation, and not the object. In other words, the mode changes *how* one remembers, and not *what* one remembers. Since the latter is what is important for authenticity, there is no difference between field and observer memories in this respect. I find the proposal to use modes of presentation to account for personal memories a very interesting one. However, one important question that needs to be addressed in this project is the question of the metaphysics of modes of presentation. Modes of presentation have been traditionally thought to be abstract objects—the so-called “Fregean senses” or “concepts”—and the question of “how those abstract objects can play a significant part in the description of the empirical mental states of thinkers” (Peacocke 1991, p. 525) is an important one for any account that relies on them. One need not, of course, endorse the traditional account, so one may deny that modes of presentation are abstract objects and opt for a more naturalistically-inclined account—for instance, an account based on the mechanisms involved in the production of perspectival representations—in which case one would need to motivate and develop this alternative properly. It is understandable, however, that given the scope of the book, this question was not given priority, but an engagement with it by the author in future works would be a welcome addition to the literature.

Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the argument of the book by reviewing the main ideas and drawing a more explicit connection between them. Overall, *Remembering From the Outside* is a welcome addition to the philosophy of memory literature not only because it provides the first book-length treatment of observer memories in philosophy, but also because of the novel and ambitious attempt to provide a rigorous philosophical treatment of an important topic in memory research.

References

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