

WHAT MAKES MEMORIES EPISODIC?

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Episodic memories are generally thought to be memories of token perceptions. This leads some philosophers to claim that they provide non-inferential warrant for beliefs about the past, just like perception provides warrant for beliefs about the present. I examine the scope of that epistemological claim. I argue that in everyday empirical reasoning about the very recent past, episodic memories reliably justify beliefs in a non-inferential way because in those cases their contents are implicitly restricted to contexts. Beyond such contexts, in long-term recall, episodic memories may or may not warrant beliefs about the past non-inferentially. They provide a form of entitlement only if a substantial empirical assumption turns out to be true, namely: that long-term recall reliably preserves perceptual content from single perceptual episodes (that is, an act of recall cannot draw on several past perceptual episodes). What if that assumption turns out to be false? I make a proposal about what kinds of states long-term recollections would be in that case. A long-term recollection would be a thought whose reference is specified semantically, but which also consists of perceptual imagery, potentially drawn from many past perceptions. The upshot would be that long-term recollection, which is considered a key feature of episodic memory, exploits both the semantic and the episodic memory systems.