RHV, 2025, No 28, 1-3 eISSN 0719-4242
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22370/rhv2025iss28.5542
Monographic section /Philosophy of memory / Presentation

Presentation of the monographic section of RHV on the philosophy of memory

Cesar Schirmer*

*Federal University of Santa Maria
cesar.santos@ufsm.br
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7105-0118

Philosophical reflection on memory is probably as old as philosophy itself. Plato developed metaphors of memory that still guide us. Aristotle created a blueprint for discussing the intentionality of memory content. Modern thinkers like Descartes and Hobbes examined the relationship between memory and imagination by investigating the body. Hume deepened this discussion by linking remembering with the vividness of mental imagery. William James, Dorothy Wrinch, and Bertrand Russell advanced debates about feelings connected to the act of remembering. Yet, despite this rich tradition, only recently some philosophers have begun to self-consciously identify themselves as philosophers of memory. As recently as 2010, philosophy of memory remained largely embedded within philosophy of mind and epistemology. By 2020, it already was a distinct and coherent research area with recognized questions and theories, often grounded in interdisciplinary work. What caused this transformation? This monographic section of the *Revista de Humanidades de Valparaíso* (RHV) reflects on the first years of this emerging field.

The monographic section comprises seven articles: four from invited authors and three from open submissions. I summarize their contributions below.

Sven Bernecker's "Remembering Memory" traces his philosophical work on memory back to his earlier research on self-knowledge and semantic externalism. As a philosopher of memory, Bernecker developed a constructive causal theory of, rejecting the Xerox model of memory. Bernecker connects his views on self-knowledge to his theory of memory: just as we lack privileged access to our mental attitudes, we lack privileged access to markers that supposedly distinguish memory from imagination or dreaming. Thus, a person may be mistaken about whether they are remembering or imagining. "Whether I genuinely remember p

or whether it only seems to me that I remember p, I cannot tell just by reflection." Instead, memory operates by a normative criterion—it aims at truth. "[…] memory is distinguished from dreams and imaginings by its aiming at truth. Memory is underwritten by a cognitive mechanism that has the proper function of tracking the truth."

Felipe De Brigard's "A Trip Down Philosophy of Memory Lane" reflects on his personal trajectory and the emergence of philosophy of memory as a distinct field. De Brigard starts from his undergraduate studies in philosophy and neuropsychology in Bogotá, where experience at the Clínica de la Memoria taught him that "Memory, whatever it was, did not seem to be a simple 'fuse'; it did not seem to be a unified process associated with a single brain structure". For the philosophers of memory, one of the most surprising elements of De Brigard's anamnese is the rather complex and bumpy history of the publication of his paper "Is Memory for Remembering?", which is one of the founding texts of current-day philosophy of memory.

Several research centers in Europe, Asia, and the Americas are contributing to the development of the philosophy of memory. Among these, the Centre for Philosophy of Memory (CPM) at Université Grenoble Alpes, directed by Kourken Michaelian and Denis Perrin, stands out. In "The Centre for Philosophy of Memory: The first seven years", they reminisce on the first seven years of the CPM and give us plenty of reasons to "[…] hope that the CPM will continue to contribute to the growth of the field for the next seven years and beyond".

André Sant'Anna and James Openshaw's "The Shifting Explananda of Philosophical Theories of Remembering" examines how rapid growth in philosophy of memory has created confusion by obscuring that different theories of remembering pursue distinct explanatory projects. Recent literature has applied "remembering" to at least four explanatory targets: phenomenological accounts focused on the experiential character of remembering, epistemological views concerned with memory's role in delivering justified true beliefs about the past, semantic theories addressing how memory representations refer to past events, and psychological models examining the cognitive mechanisms that produce memory states. They recommend that future research clearly articulate the theoretical agendas underlying different accounts of remembering and distinguish genuine first-order disputes from apparent disagreements rooted in divergent frameworks.

Tzofit Ofengenden's "Rethinking Memory and Imagination: A Philosophical and Neuroscientific Perspective" argues that memory and imagination lie on a continuum rather than constituting sharply distinct cognitive processes. She adopts the constructive view of memory, which holds that remembering is not passive retrieval of stored information but

active reconstruction. Against this backdrop, Ofengenden revisits historical attempts to distinguish memory from imagination. She concludes that the difficulty in distinguishing memory from imagination explains how memory can give us a coherent and integrated sense of ourselves, even though constructing a memory does not differ from constructing an imagination.

In "Kant on the Problem of Knowing the Past", Zachary Sawyer argues that Kant's first-edition Transcendental Deduction of the *Critique of Pure Reason* contains a substantive, though largely unrecognized, account of memory that addresses how one can objectively know one's own past. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant treats memory not as a psychological faculty but as a transcendental condition for cognition. Memory can be objectively verified to the extent that it conforms to the a priori categories, such as causality, that structure experience. Sawyer argues this interpretation anticipates contemporary themes in philosophy of memory: a constructivist understanding of remembering, a causal dimension grounded in synthesis rather than trace storage, and a reconciliation of representationalist and relationalist elements, since memory involves both representation and an active connection to one's past actions.

Hilan Bensusan's "When Remembering Gets It Wrong: Memory Assemblages and the Content of What Is Retained" reads Felipe De Brigard's model of episodic memory as a variety of pan-mnemism. For a pan-mnemist, memory phenomena are ubiquitous in the world, from biological to geological processes: to be is to be a memory, and "remembering" results from an assemblage composed of retained elements (archives) and subsequent additions (addends). Because everything is memory-like, misremembering is not a distinct kind of event but a normal case of assemblage formation that may later be revised through new additions.

These seven articles document a field that has matured rapidly. The constructive turn in memory theory appears across multiple contributions, challenging the Xerox model. Interdisciplinary engagement with neuroscience and psychology has become standard rather than exceptional. Yet, as the critical article by Sant'Anna and Openshaw makes clear, fundamental questions persist: What exactly are we explaining when we theorize about remembering? Are we analyzing psychological mechanisms, describing phenomenological character, or establishing normative standards for memory's relationship to truth?