

**Work reviewed:** De Brigard, Felipe. (2023). *Memory and remembering*. Cambridge University Press.

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This brief book (part of the Cambridge Elements in Philosophy of Mind series) by a leading philosopher of memory is an important contribution to a field to which, due simply to its youth, few introductory texts have so far been devoted. Indeed, the one introductory book that philosophers of memory have so been able to give to their students is Senor's excellent *Critical introduction to the epistemology of memory* (2019). De Brigard's book, since it approaches memory from the perspective of philosophy of mind rather than that of epistemology, nicely complements Senor's. Indeed, given that both books are relatively brief, they might effectively be assigned together in a single course. Naturally, this book, like Senor's, might also be assigned on its own (in an undergraduate-level course) or in combination with more advanced readings (in a graduate-level course). Having myself used it in the latter manner, I can confirm that the book does an outstanding job of introducing students who have no prior familiarity with the field to the central concepts, debates, and theories in the philosophy of memory, getting them up to speed to an extent sufficient to enable them to navigate the increasingly voluminous and technical professional literature without getting hopelessly lost.

De Brigard begins, in section 1 of the book, by providing a short introduction. In section 2, he focusses on the nature of memory understood as a capacity, its relationship to other cognitive capacities, and the relationships among different kinds of memory. The section begins with an overview of the history of philosophical attempts to distinguish between memory and other capacities in terms of the content of the former. The central problem for this approach, as De Brigard sees it, is that it either fails to include some instances of memory—the content of memory is, for example, not always about past events—or, if different kinds of memory are introduced, corresponding to different kinds of content, leads to an implausible multiplication of kinds of memory. The section then turns to recent attempts to distinguish among kinds of memory in linguistic terms, pointing out that these likewise

encounter problems. The view that memory is factive, for example, has been challenged in a variety of ways, and there are reasons to suppose that linguistic considerations do not distinguish cleanly between remembering that and remembering how. Turning next to empirical distinctions, De Brigard reviews the standard taxonomy of memory, which distinguishes between declarative memory, including episodic and semantic memory, on the one hand, and a variety of forms of nondeclarative memory, on the other hand. Though it remains influential, there is accumulating empirical evidence against the standard taxonomy, including the distinction between episodic and semantic memory. After a brief review of attempts to distinguish among kinds of memory in phenomenological terms—by, for example, invoking the notion of auto-noetic consciousness—this section of the book concludes with a mixture of pessimism and optimism: De Brigard is pessimistic about our ability to develop a workable taxonomy of memory but optimistic about our ability to make progress by focussing on paradigmatic instances of the kinds of memory in which we are interested even absent such a taxonomy.

Section 3 of the book sets aside the nature of memory understood as a capacity to consider the nature of remembering understood as a process. Readers familiar with the philosophy of memory will expect this section to introduce standard philosophical theories of episodic remembering, including the epistemic, causal, and simulation theories. While the section does indeed cover these theories, it begins, somewhat surprisingly, by introducing the distinction between representationalism and nonrepresentationalism—including direct realism—and goes on to treat the epistemic, causal, and simulation theories as species of representationalism. This is the one point at which the book might arguably have been better organized. Representationalism and nonrepresentationalism, on the one hand, and the epistemic, causal, and simulation theories, on the other hand, answer different questions, the former concerning the direct objects of memory or the nature of the relationship between

memories and their objects, the latter concerning what it is to remember, and, while standard versions of the epistemic, causal, and simulation theories do take representationalism for granted, it is not obvious that they are bound to do so. It would thus perhaps have been more useful clearly to distinguish the debate between representationalists and nonrepresentationalists from the debate among epistemic, causal, and simulation theorists. It likewise would have been useful clearly to distinguish these debates from debates over memory traces and memory markers, with which the section sometimes runs them together. Nevertheless, the section provides a helpful overview of the epistemic, causal, and simulation theories and of the major problems for these, pointing out that the epistemic theory problematically treats memories as being propositional in character, that the causal theory is challenged by empirical evidence pertaining to the constructive character of remembering and to the relationship between episodic remembering and episodic future thinking, and that the simulation theory faces a variety of objections by causalists. The section concludes with a welcome discussion of recent approaches to the function of memory, a topic that has been receiving increasing attention, observing that it is not obvious that the function of memory can straightforwardly be identified with remembering.

Section 4 of the book focusses on the question of what we remember, a question that De Brigard interprets as primarily concerning memory traces. Following a review of debates over the very existence of traces and the need to invoke these in a philosophical theory of remembering, the section provides detailed discussions of more specific debates, including the debate among partisans of different ways of understanding the relationships between traces, perceptual experiences, and memories in light of the constructive character of remembering, the debate between partisans of local and distributed conceptions of traces, and the debate between partisans of explicit and implicit views of the content of traces. Finally, in a subsection that will be of particular interest to researchers, the section articulates a view of

memory traces intended to be congenial to simulationism. De Brigard concludes, in section 5, with a brief summary.

Writing a volume of this sort—which must cover a great deal of ground in very little space—is no mean feat, but De Brigard has pulled it off wonderfully, selecting key issues and introducing them to students in a manner that consistently manages to remain accessible while avoiding oversimplification. He has thus contributed a key element to the developing infrastructure of a new field. I have no doubt that I—and many others—will continue to teach from the book regularly for many years to come.

### **References**

Senor, T. D. (2019). *A critical introduction to the epistemology of memory*. Bloomsbury.