

The Phenomenology of Memory*

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To appear in S. Bernecker and K. Michaelian (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Memory*

The most salient aspect of memory is its role in preserving previously acquired information so as to make it available for further activities. Anna realizes that something is amiss in a book on Roman history because she learned and remembers that Caesar was murdered. Max turned up at the party and distinctively remembers where he was seated, so he easily gets his hands on his lost cell phone. The fact that information is not gained anew distinguishes memory from perception. The fact that information is preserved distinguishes memory from imagination. But how do acquisition and retrieval of information contribute to the phenomenology of memory?

This question cannot receive a simple answer, since memory comes in different varieties. One may remember that Caesar was murdered (this is often described as *semantic* memory), a party one attended last week (*episodic* or *personal* memory) or how to play the piano (*procedural* memory). These are unlikely to make themselves manifest in the same way. Consider procedural memory. The phenomenology of procedural memory is that of being engaged in an activity, viz. that of playing the piano effortlessly. To remember how to play the piano is to display acquired know-how, and the way it feels to display know-how differs from the way it feels to fail to do so. In the latter case, attention plays a greater role and with increased attention comes an increased sense of effort. That being said, the phenomenology of effortless action is distinct from the phenomenology of memory – procedural memory explains why the

* I am grateful to Sven Bernecker, Margherita Arcangeli and Julien Deonna for their helpful comments on a previous version of this chapter.

action unfolds effortlessly, yet does not make itself manifest to those who display know-how.

This is why interest in the phenomenology of memory has concentrated on semantic and, even more intensively, on episodic memory – the guiding idea being that, in these cases at least, memory contributes to phenomenology. So, what is it like to remember that Caesar was murdered or a party one attended last week? The exclusive aim of this chapter is to sketch a map of the phenomenology of memory. Since the types of memory denoted by the labels “semantic”, “personal” and “episodic” are not always the same and do not align straightforwardly with distinctions at the level of phenomenology, I shall avoid using them in what follows. What will drive the discussion are rather distinctions and issues that relate directly to what it is like to remember.¹

The chapter is structured as follows. In section 1, I introduce the contrast between content (*what* is remembered) and psychological attitude (*remembering*). This distinction will be helpful in disentangling issues in the phenomenology of memory. Section 2 is devoted to the contribution of memory content to phenomenology, section 3 to the contribution of the attitude of remembering.

1. Attitude vs. Content

It is customary to approach mental states with the help of the contrast between content and attitude. Psychological verbs typically report attitudes, while their complements report the contents of these attitudes. Consider the following examples: Claire believes that Saturn is a Roman deity; Fred hopes that Manchester City will win the Premier

¹ The phenomenology of memory is the way it makes itself manifest from the first-person perspective, and it is of the essence of phenomenological issues that non-introspective evidence (e.g. regarding neuronal activity during different memory tasks) should be used with caution. I will thus rarely leave the armchair in what follows.

League; Tess supposes that the accused is guilty. Believing, hoping and supposing are three distinct attitudes, which here take different propositions as contents. One may also have different attitudes toward a given content, e.g. believe, hope or suppose that Manchester City will win the Premier League. For present purposes, an attitude can be understood as the way a subject is directed toward something. The content of an attitude is what it is directed at.²

Let me now apply the distinction between content and attitude to memory (Urmson 1967, Recanati 2007, Matthen 2010). Taken at face value, reports such as “Anna remembers that Caesar was murdered” and “Max remembers last week’s party” refer to one attitude – remembering – and the diverse contents that it may take. As regards contents, it seems that memory can have propositional or nominal contents³; it is as difficult to provide convincing propositional paraphrases of “Max remembers last week’s party” than of “Greta sees a tree” or “Spencer loves Kathy”.⁴ As regards the attitude of remembering, its central features are a relation to previous cognition (one cognized what one remembers or something closely related to it⁵), actual judgement (one is typically disposed to endorse what one remembers) and knowledge.⁶ Whether this broad-brush characterization should give way to a more fine-grained specification

² Contents can be as fine-grained as necessary and “modes of presentation” correspond in the terminology adopted here to the level of content.

³ Memory is also attributed with the help of wh-clause constructions (“Anna remembers why Caesar was murdered”, “Max remembers who attended the party”). I shall not discuss such constructions here. For a convincing case that they are incomplete propositional attributions, see Bernecker 2010: 20-21.

⁴ For criticism of the idea that all attitudes are propositional, see Montague (2007) and Crane (2009).

⁵ The relation between the content of memory and that of past cognition is discussed in Bernecker (2010).

⁶ The issue of whether one must know or have known that p in order to remember that p is debated (Naylor 1983 and 2015, Bernecker 2010).

of distinct types of remembering is a complex issue. For the time being, I shall use the content vs. attitude contrast to distinguish two groups of questions regarding the phenomenology of memory.

First, one may investigate the impact memory contents have on phenomenology. How does *what one remembers* contribute to phenomenology? Central issues here are whether there is a phenomenology of content exclusive to memory and whether we can explain the phenomenological differences between perceiving, imagining and remembering via the contents of these attitudes. These are the topics of section 2.

Second, one may investigate the impact the attitude of remembering has on phenomenology. How does *remembering itself*, as opposed to what is remembered, contribute to phenomenology? Do the relations to past awareness and belief make themselves manifest in consciousness? These issues are addressed in section 3.

2. Phenomenology of Content

i. Two types of content

I shall explore the contribution of what is remembered to phenomenology by focussing on two kinds of memory contents, which I shall respectively call *experiential* and *non-experiential* contents.⁷ Since it is difficult to characterize these contents without begging debated questions⁸, the best procedure given our interest in phenomenology is to give illustrations.

⁷ When I speak of experiential and non-experiential memory, this is only as shorthand for the distinction between these two types of content.

⁸ One question is how the contrast experiential vs. non-experiential content maps onto the contrasts between, first, propositional vs. non-propositional content and, second, conceptual vs. non-conceptual content. Let me simply say that, as many examples below testify, reports of experiential memory are

When Anna remembers that Caesar was murdered, it is typically wrong to claim that it is for her “as if she was seeing or hearing” Caesar’s assassination. From her own perspective, it is not as if she was watching the aging general stabbed to death by a group of toga-wearing men and listening to his pathetic address to Brutus. The same is true when we remember mathematical and semantic facts. In these cases, I shall speak of memory as having *non-experiential* content. The traditional idea of “images” fails to get a grip here (on memory images, see chapter 12).⁹

It is more convincing to refer to images in describing other cases of memory, e.g. when Max remembers last week’s party or the first movement of a symphony.¹⁰ From Max’s perspective, what is happening resembles what happened when he perceived the party or heard the symphony. This sanctions “as if” language: it is for the subject as if he was seeing, hearing etc. the relevant objects or events again. More specifically, these contents of memory resemble those of perception¹¹ in the following respects: which properties – forms, colours, pitches, tastes etc. – feature in the content of memory is a function of past perceptual content; both contents are structured around an origin from which things are presented; they are perspectival, objects being presented within a

typically non-propositional. There are also reasons to claim that experiential memory can be non-conceptual (Martin 1992).

⁹ These observations are not meant to suggest that memory for historical, mathematical or semantic facts is never accompanied by memory images – it may for instance be accompanied by images related to the learning context.

¹⁰ For reasons that will emerge below, images have a bad press. In the meantime, reference to them should simply be read as a way of emphasizing that remembering something resembles perceiving it.

¹¹ Given the purposes of this chapter, it will do no harm to speak of perceptual content. While the claim that perception has content is debated (Brogaard 2014), the debate concerns theoretically loaded conceptions of content and not perceptual aboutness as such.

structurally similar field, in which they occlude each other in identical ways as a function of their respective positions.¹² I shall call these contents *experiential*. The fact that these contents resemble those of perception does not mean that they are the same, and we can usually tell straight off from the way objects make themselves manifest whether they are perceived or remembered.¹³ This raises the question of the relation experiential contents bear to perceptual contents. Before turning to this, let me examine the contribution of non-experiential contents to phenomenology.

ii. Non-experiential contents

The *simplest* non-experiential contents of memory include no reference to the subject's past – as when Anna remembers that Caesar was murdered or that eight times eight is sixty-four. Do they contribute in any way to what it feels like to remember? The answer depends on one's opinion regarding the existence of cognitive phenomenology.¹⁴ Since I cannot go into this debate here, I shall make only one observation. Even if there was a cognitive phenomenology to entertaining the contents under discussion, this phenomenology would not be exclusive to memory. Given that one may as well believe,

¹² The similarity here concerns spatial structure. For that reason, both field memories (i.e. memories that preserve the subject's original spatial perspective) and observer memories (i.e. memories that do not) have experiential contents.

¹³ It would moreover be unfaithful to how we think of memory to describe it as the perception of past events – a perception does not turn into a memory simply on account of the fact that it is about an event (e.g. the implosion of a star) that happened long ago (Martin 2001, Matthen 2010).

¹⁴ Friends of cognitive phenomenology appeal to a variety of phenomena (understanding, seeing as, etc.) to support the claim that there is a phenomenology characteristic of conscious thought. Critics deny that this is the case and try to describe the phenomena without reference to cognitive phenomenology. For an introduction to the debate, see Bayne and Montague (2011).

imagine or entertain these contents, their phenomenology would actually spread over most mental states. The reason is that these contents are disconnected from the central aspect of memory, which consists in making previously acquired information available.

In order to convey the idea that the preserving role of memory is sometimes phenomenologically salient, many scholars use the metaphors of “mental time travel” and “temporal decentring” (on mental time travel, see chapter 9). These expressions cannot, of course, be read literally, since memory does not take us back in time. The point of the metaphors is not simply to emphasize that memory carries information about the past, or even that it preserves previously acquired information. It is rather to emphasize that, in memory, we are sometimes *aware* that we do not acquire information in the way we acquire it in perception. The main challenge posed by memory phenomenology is to explain in non-metaphorical terms how previously acquired information makes itself manifest as such, and different attempts will be examined in what follows.

At this juncture, let us consider accounts in terms of *more complex non-experiential contents* that include, as opposed to the simpler contents discussed above, a reference to the origin of available information. These accounts differ regarding how non-experiential content should be enriched so as to capture the phenomenology of previously acquired information. Here are two representative accounts.

According to the first, enrichment consists in a specific *thought about one's past experience*. Previously acquired information makes itself manifest when memory content includes the relation between available information and a past experience (Owens 1996, Perner 2000, Tulving 1985). This is the case when Anna remembers that

[Caesar was murdered and this information is available to me because I learned this at school].

According to the second account, enrichment consists in a specific *thought about the kind of process explaining why information is available* (Fernandez 2008). There is a phenomenology of previously acquired information when Anna remembers that [Caesar was murdered and the representation of this event is available because it stands at the end of a specific causal chain].

Although they are popular, these accounts face substantial problems. First, they do not explain why the time travel metaphor feels right. One may after all realize that a piece of information is available because of a past learning event or that it is at the end of a causal chain without feeling as if travelling into the past. Such accounts imply that the preserving role of memory makes itself manifest in the phenomenology of these cognitive contents. Since this phenomenology is quite elusive, this makes it a poor candidate to meet the present explanatory need. Second, these accounts are demanding: they require the subject to deploy a rich theory of mind. Previously acquired information would make itself manifest only to subjects capable of understanding that mental states stand in explanatory relations to one another or that memory is underscored by causal chains. As a result, memory would not constitute a privileged source for understanding pastness. If previously acquired information makes itself manifest in memory only conditional on such complex thoughts, this suggests that memory is a by-product of the capacity to entertain such thoughts rather than an original source for them. Third, these accounts presuppose a simpler access to previously acquired information. Representing a relation between available information and a past learning event or the fact that this learning event is at the end of a causal

chain depends on an access to that very event, which is often provided by experiential contents. So, to capture the phenomenology of memory, should we not switch focus and concentrate on these simpler mnemonic phenomena rather than on complex cognitive elaborations on them (Hoerl 2001)?

iii. Experiential contents

It looks indeed more promising to elucidate the metaphors of time travel and decentring in terms of experiential contents. After all, as Holland puts it, the initial model “is of the mind gazing into the past and picking out features of the landscape there: looking back across an expanse of time, analogously with the way we see across an intervening physical space” (1954: 483). So, it is reasonable to assume that the metaphors get a grip when it is, from the subject’s perspective, as if she perceived again. So, how does the contribution of experiential content to phenomenology compare to that of perceptual content? Does experiential content reveal something exclusive about how it feels to remember? Let me take these issues in this order.

Experiential content appears to occupy “a halfway house”¹⁵: it contrasts with perceptual content, yet resembles it in many phenomenologically salient respects. Can we elucidate the nature of experiential content and recruit it to explain the differences between *perceiving* and *remembering* something? Since the relevant accounts have been primarily developed for imagination, I shall examine memory together with imagination in what follows.

The classical attempt is David Hume’s, according to whom the difference between ideas and impressions – which more or less corresponds to that between perceptual and

¹⁵ I borrow this expression from Noordhof (2002), who uses it in a slightly different context.

experiential contents – is one of degree.¹⁶ Experiential contents are “faint copies” of perceptual experiences with a lower “degree of force or vivacity”. Much ink has been spilled trying to make sense of this idea, and the consensus today is against Hume’s account. In particular, it is often rejected for its failing to do justice to phenomenology. Hume’s proposal that we understand how it feels to *remember an event* in terms of how it feels to *perceive a copy or image of it* indeed raises worries.¹⁷ First, the account predicts that remembering an event is more similar to seeing it in dim light than seeing it in plain sunshine, a claim Byrne rightly finds unconvincing (2010: 18). Second, remembering an event is not like perceiving an image of it: it is not as if we were aware of something that stands in for the event. In this respect, remembering contrasts with the perception of images, which make themselves manifest as intermediaries.

For these reasons, contemporary approaches try to circumvent reference to images in accounting for experiential contents. Instead, they appeal to a specific relation between what perceptual and experiential contents respectively represent. This seems like the way ahead. Consider two visual experiences, one representing a red circle on a dark background, the other a red square on a light background – these experiences resemble one another insofar as they represent redness. Similarly, experiential contents strike us as being (dis-)similar as a function of the properties they represent. Why not generalize so as to encompass additional phenomenological (dis-)similarities, and in particular those between perceptual and experiential contents?

¹⁶ Regarding Hume’s (1739/1985) exact position, which I shall leave aside here, see Owen (2009).

¹⁷ Sartre (1940) is a classic examination of Hume’s account, which is nicely set out in Kriegel (2015). See also McGinn (2006: 7-41).

As a start, observe that accounts of the contrast between perceptual and experiential contents should confine themselves to properties that can be included in these contents. This means that they have less room for manoeuvre than the accounts in terms of non-experiential contents discussed above. Consider the property of a piece of information to originate in a past event or, more generally, the property of being past. Do experiential contents include such properties? If properties enter into these contents on the condition that they were or could be represented in perception, the answer is negative: one cannot perceive pastness or the causal origin of one's experience.¹⁸ In addition, it is difficult to get one's mind around the idea that experiential contents represent these properties: is the idea that they come with a date stamped on them or with a subtitle stating that they originate in a given experience?

Given this constraint, we can distinguish two contemporary accounts of the contrast between perceptual and experiential contents. According to the first account, it corresponds to the contrast between determinable and determinate properties (Byrne 2010). Being red is a determinable property of which being burgundy, crimson and Indian red are determinates. Now, observe that a surface cannot be red *tout court*, it is always of a (more) determinate shade. By contrast, the representation of something as red ("There is a red towel on the bed") does not entail the representation of a determinate shade. The first account champions an understanding of the contrast under

¹⁸ The point is emphasized in Matthen (2010). Searle's account of perceptual experience (1983) goes against these observations, which is why it has been the target of recurrent criticisms (e.g. Bach 2007).

discussion in terms of this feature of representations: it claims that experiential contents are less determinate versions of perceptual contents.¹⁹

The main worry here is this. Given that the representational power of peripheral vision is very limited as compared to that of central vision (e.g. Wassle et al. 1989), the account implies that the phenomenology of experiential memory (and imagination) is that of peripheral vision. Memory would make its object manifest in the way it is manifest when indistinctly perceived. This should be challenged: it goes against the fact that, in memory, it does not seem to us that information is acquired in the way it is acquired in perception. This fact is not acknowledged if we assimilate experiential contents to indeterminate perceptual contents.²⁰

The second account explains the contrast between perceptual and experiential content by claiming that the latter represents the former: while the content of experiential memory includes a *past* perceptual experience, the content of imagination includes a *possible* perceptual experience. Following Peacocke (1985), Martin (2001, 2002) defends this *Dependency View* and contends that the distinctive phenomenology of experiential content is explained by its including a perceptual experience. Some of the properties of representations, one may insist, are explained by the properties of what they represent. For instance, many spatial properties of a map are explained by the

¹⁹ This claim applies to each property featuring in experiential content. A distinct (and compatible) claim is that experiential content remains silent about many aspects of the scene that would be filled in in perception.

²⁰ In his defence of this account, Nanay (2015) emphasizes that the subject is aware that she has to do different things to make the content more determinate in peripheral vision and in imagination. This may be right. But it is unlikely to explain how the two types of contents differ, as the phenomenon seems rather to speak to the level of the attitude.

spatial properties of what is mapped. This may suggest that experiential contents occupy a “halfway house” because they represent perceptual experiences. The phenomenology of a given perceptual content would explain the phenomenology of the experiential content that represents it in the same way as the spatial properties of a represented region explain the spatial properties of a map.

There are two related reasons to doubt that this can be made to work. First, the explanation at hand does not hold for all representations – a detailed linguistic description of a region possesses none of its spatial properties. In light of this objection, the account might be toned down to say that experiential contents represent perceptual experiences *in a format* that preserves part of the phenomenology. The problem with this move is that it abandons the explanatory ambitions and makes the account indistinguishable from the main alternative to the *Dependency View*, the so-called *Simple or Similar Content View* (Williams 1966, Noordhof 2002). According to the latter view, the phenomenological similarities between perceptual and experiential contents only support the claim that perception, experiential memory and imagination have similar contents. These similarities do not support the more ambitious claim that the contents of experiential memory and imagination include past or possible experiences. The failure to explain content similarity by including such experiences into experiential content appears to confirm this diagnosis.

This is perhaps too quick. There may still be a difference between experiential contents that represent a scene from a perspective and *more complex experiential contents* that represent the perspective as being occupied.²¹ If so, we may recruit the

²¹ In a movie, one may similarly distinguish the representation of a scene from a point of view from its representation from a point of view occupied by a character (Noordhof 2002).

Dependency View to account for this difference within the sphere of experiential content. The second objection is that drawing such a contrast between two types of experiential contents is not faithful to phenomenology. Experiential content is characterized by transparency (Harman 1990): when we remember or imagine, no past or possible experience pops up – none makes itself manifest as mediating awareness. Moreover, it is difficult to understand how perception, insofar as it is transparent, could make itself – as opposed to what it is about – manifest in experiential content. Something can feature in the latter, you will remember, on condition that it was or could be perceived.²²

If this is along the right track, then the Dependency View doesn't explain the phenomenology of experiential content. We have reached a deflationary conclusion: while a substantial part of memory phenomenology is traceable to experiential content, its phenomenological similarities to perceptual content may have to be taken as basic (McGinn 2006).

iv. Exclusive experiential content?

The final issue regarding content is whether the phenomenology of some experiential contents can be exclusive to memory and not shared by imagination. We already put aside a likely candidate, pastness, in maintaining that it is beyond the ambit of experiential content. Moreover, in discussing the Dependency View, we have just emphasized how difficult it is to draw the distinction, within experiential content, between representing a scene from a perspective and representing this perspective as

²² Alternatively, if perception is opaque, we would need to know more about which of its properties contribute to phenomenology.

being occupied. This means that appealing to the phenomenology of the past perception (as opposed to what it is about) is not an option either.

At this juncture, the only promising option is to maintain that experiential memory is distinct from experiential imagination because it incorporates a phenomenology of *particularity* (Martin 2001).²³ There is indeed something intuitive in the idea that it is not up to us which object we remember and that this has to do with the dependency of memory on past perception. As opposed to this, it seems that it is always up to us to fix the identity and degree of particularity of what we imagine.

That being said, the idea should be carefully handled. Suppose Philip imagines his mother travelling to Mars. In such a case, experiential content makes the particularity of his mother manifest to him – it would be a mistake to insist that particularity must be traceable to other factors, such as the specific project in which the experiential content is embedded.²⁴ Moreover, experiential memory encompasses memory of objects (Philip remembers his mother) and event-types (June remembers swimming in the pool); manifest particularity in memory does not here go beyond the manifest particularity available in imagination.

All in all, the claim that a phenomenology of particularity is distinctive of memory is attractive only if it is restricted to the memory *of particular events*. For the particularity of events we imagine appears to be always traceable to the project in which experiential

²³ Schellenberg (2010: 22-23) helpfully distinguishes *phenomenological* particularity (the fact that “particularity is in the scope of how things seem to the subject”) from *relational* particularity (the fact that one is related to a particular object).

²⁴ The distinction between experiential content and project is made salient by the fact that the experiential content involved in imagining a suitcase and imagining a cat behind a suitcase may be the same (Noordhof 2002).

content is embedded, never to experiential content as such. In other words, “as if perceiving” language is sanctioned in the case of experiential memory of particular events not only because of the aforementioned similarities between perceptual and experiential contents (which do not tell apart memory from imagination), but also because of phenomenological event particularity (which does).

Let me recapitulate the foregoing discussion of memory content. We have seen that memory can take non-experiential and experiential contents. Non-experiential contents are not exclusive to memory and unlikely to illuminate its phenomenology. Experiential contents have an “as if perceiving” phenomenology sometimes possessed by memory. When experiential contents are about particular events, they have a phenomenology distinctive of memory: it’s being for the subject as if she perceived particular events again.

3. Phenomenology of the Attitude

Discussions of the remembering attitude have by and large focussed on the existence of a “memory indicator” (Holland 1954), viz. of a phenomenological signature apt to distinguish remembering from imagining and other psychological attitudes. It is indeed a striking fact that, despite far-reaching similarities in the content of memory and imagination, we are almost always capable of telling whether we are remembering. The self-attribution of attitudes under discussion is supposed to be non-inferential, since a subject’s capacity to tell whether she is remembering or imagining is typically not based on reasoning.²⁵ This is not to say that the capacity is infallible – we are prone to error in claiming that we remember – but rather that it does not rest upon the assessment of

²⁵ Self-attribution of memory does sometimes result from reasoning, as when we consider alternative explanations and conclude “I must have learned this somewhere”.

evidence. There would indeed be something odd with a subject who could only self-ascribe attitudes by, say, observing the behavioural consequences of a given content or its role in her mental life (e.g. O'Brien 2005).²⁶ The immediacy characteristic of the capacity to self-ascribe memory is a traditional reason for claiming that there is a memory indicator.

i. Against the memory indicator

This inference can be challenged, however, and I wish to address two lines of thought before exploring some accounts of the phenomenology of remembering. According to the first line of thought, the capacity to self-ascribe memory is *groundless* in the sense that it does not rest on cues accessible at the personal level (e.g. Naylor 1985, Bernecker 2010). This amounts to saying that, from the subject's perspective, she simply finds herself with a brute inclination to state that she remembers. This is not very convincing. There is a contrast between finding oneself with a brute inclination to self-ascribe memory and being in a position to give a first-person explanation of this inclination. Advocates of the memory indicator insist, rightly in my opinion, on this contrast – in the second sort of situation, we often use the expression “I seem to remember”, in which “seem” takes its phenomenological sense (Audi 1995, Chisholm 1957).²⁷

The second line of thought attacks the idea of a memory indicator by arguing that it assumes an inappropriate observational model. Urmson (1967) and, more recently,

²⁶ These observations tell against a variety of accounts of memory self-ascriptions along behaviourist and functionalist lines, which are discussed in Teroni (2014).

²⁷ Confronted with a comparable issue, Campbell (1984) criticizes the reduction of perception to non-inferential judgements by drawing attention to the contrast between judging because one sees and having non-inferential judgements pop in one's mind. I wish to insist on a similar contrast regarding the capacity to self-ascribe memory.

Hoerl (2001, 2014) emphasize that the first-personal explanation of the capacity to self-ascribe memory is not supported by observation of happenings in the stream of consciousness. It would rather be supported by authorship of the relevant decisions: we are in a privileged position to discriminate remembering from imagining, say, because these attitudes differ as regards the constraints we intend our mental activity to be answerable to.²⁸ Anna can tell straight off that she remembers that Caesar was murdered because she intends her mental activity to be answerable to what happened in Rome in 44 BC, as well as to conditions in her past life. She would be imagining if she left her mental activity free from any such constraint.

We should certainly want to avoid a purely passive view of memory. Remembering is something we often try to achieve and memory can be accompanied by a phenomenology of mental effort. By contrast, in imagining, mental activity is spontaneous and not channelled to attaining an aim.²⁹ Still, Urmson and Hoerl fail in my opinion to give its due weight to the contrast between *trying to remember* and *remembering*. Trying to remember is an activity that differs from imagining in being governed by the aforementioned intentions. Remembering is the goal of this activity and need not be preceded by it.³⁰ The present line of thought against a memory indicator trades on an ambiguity between remembering and trying to remember – it should for

²⁸ Contemporary approaches to self-knowledge along these lines (e.g. Moran 2001) descend from Anscombe's (1957) seminal discussion.

²⁹ The contrast cannot be pushed too far, as one may try and fail to imagine what something looks like. An issue that I shall leave aside is how implication of the will relates to the sense of objectivity that accompanies memory and these exercises of imagination (see O'Shaughnessy 2000: 352).

³⁰ Moreover, it would be unconvincing to maintain that, when remembering occurs without trying, the capacity to self-ascribe memory traces back to the awareness of being in a state that the relevant activity could have aimed at.

this reason be resisted. The memory indicator is a phenomenological signature of the attitude of remembering and we have been given no reason to deny from the outset that there is one.

ii. Positive accounts of the indicator

Having addressed two lines of thought against the idea of a memory indicator, we are still a long way from the conclusion that remembering feels a distinctive way. Which are the options? Accounts of the attitude of remembering can be divided into two groups, depending on whether the indicator is elucidated in terms of a *relation to the will* or a *feeling*. I shall consider them in this order.

According to the first account, the phenomenological signature of remembering consists in the awareness of “not making it up”, which would contrast with the awareness of “making it up” characteristic of imagining. The main obstacle here is the difficulty to understand what this awareness amounts to. Suppose we grant that imagining comes with the suggested phenomenology of agency. Is remembering accompanied by a negative correlate phenomenology? Should we not more simply claim that remembering is never accompanied by the phenomenology of agency characteristic of imagining? The simpler alternative is more convincing.³¹ If so, there is no phenomenology of agency characteristic of remembering. We should look elsewhere.

Scholars often distinguish various epistemic feelings that are supposed to monitor our cognitive activities (Koriat 2000). I shall concentrate on three feelings that deserve attention because of their role in contemporary discussions: feelings of *knowing*,

³¹ One may think that Martin and Deutscher’s (1966) case of a person who paints a scene from her own childhood while being convinced that she makes it up tells even against this idea. I cannot go into this complex issue here. Suffice it to say that, if it did, this would strengthen the conclusion that remembering cannot be distinguished from imagining by reference to a phenomenology of agency.

pastness and *familiarity*. In contrast to the phenomenology of agency we discussed just above, these feelings relate to memory's role in preserving and making information available. For this reason, accounts based on them hold the promise of revealing something distinctive about the phenomenology of remembering.

There are two interpretations of the expression "feeling of knowing" and neither leads to an attractive account. First, one may understand the expression as referring to a feeling that often drives memory searches and "signals to us that the sought-after information is indeed available in store and worth searching for." (Koriat 2000: 150). Since we have already insisted on the distinction between trying to remember and remembering, let me give this interpretation short shrift. As important as it is in supporting and guiding memory searches, the feeling of knowing cannot constitute the phenomenological signature of the attitude of remembering – this attitude attaches to contents that are remembered, something that need not result from a memory search.³²

Alternatively, one may understand the expression "feeling of knowing" as referring to a felt confidence or certainty that a content is true that would accompany the attitude of remembering. As a matter of fact, we frequently feel certain that a content is true when we seem to remember it, and we typically endorse it provided we are aware of no defeater. Still, there are reasons to doubt that felt certainty is what we are after. First, the feeling is plainly not specific to memory and is as likely to accompany perception, rational intuition, etc. Felt certainty may help explain how we discriminate remembering from imagining, which never goes with this feeling. But it will not help in

³² Ironically, if Koriat is right, scholars like Urmson and Hoerl who insist on the activity of remembering are too quick in rejecting the observational model. Feelings of knowing may play a central role within this activity.

accounting for the capacity to self-attribute memory as opposed to other attitudes that are accompanied by this feeling. Second, the relation between felt certainty and seeming to remember is one of explanation rather than identity: one feels certain *because* one seems to remember. Another way to make the same point is to observe that memory content is seldom self-evident and that there must be an explanation of our felt certainty or confidence that it is true. On pain of concluding that no such explanation is available at the first person level, we should explain it by reference to the memory attitude. In sum, the feeling of knowing cannot account for the phenomenology of remembering.

Next on the list are *feelings of pastness* and *familiarity*. In his seminal discussion of memory, Russell (1921) appeals to feelings of both types – memory contents would feel past and familiar. His suggestion has not proven popular and most scholars nowadays agree with Byrne’s observation that, “while the ‘feeling of familiarity’ is, well, familiar, surely the ‘feeling of pastness’ is not.” (2010: 23) Since I share these misgivings, I shall focus on feelings of familiarity. Interestingly, these feelings can merge with experiential and non-experiential contents. So, why not maintain that the preserving role of memory makes itself manifest in a phenomenology of familiarity characteristic of the attitude? This would not only allow for a cognitively undemanding and unified account, it would also explain typical mistakes of self-attribution, which are often due to illusions of familiarity. The final verdict should of course await a clear account of what feelings of familiarity are. I’ll bring this chapter to a close by exploring whether they are affective.

There are indeed similarities between emotional experiences and feelings of familiarity. First, both vary in intensity: one may feel more or less afraid of a dog, as a content may feel more or less familiar. Second, feelings of familiarity depend on a specific type of appraisal. An influential theory not only claims that appraisals are key to

understanding the emotions, but also that the typical sequence of appraisals in emotions starts by considering whether the stimulus is novel (Scherer 2001). We might thus insist that a similar appraisal process underscores emotions and feelings of familiarity; in the latter case, content is appraised as old.

That being said, these similarities do not add up to a strong case for assimilating feelings of familiarity to emotional experiences, and there may also be basic dissimilarities between them. A distinctive feature of emotional experience is its *valence*, which is often cashed out by saying that emotions feel either good (admiration, joy) or bad (shame, sadness). Do feelings of familiarity feel good or bad? Second, emotional experience is often claimed to relate to *evaluative properties*: fear relates to danger, amusement to the funny, etc. (Deonna and Teroni 2014). If this is regarded as a defining trait of emotions, it may constitute another reason to think that feelings of familiarity do not qualify: to describe something as familiar is not to evaluate it. In light of these considerations, the likely conclusion is that familiarity has a *sui generis* type of phenomenology.

This may be too quick, however. One may still try to assimilate feelings of familiarity to emotional experiences. The claim that the feeling of familiarity is not valenced is disputable. Titchener, for one, describes it as a “glow of warmth, a sense of ownership, a feeling of intimacy” (1910: 410), hardly the hallmarks of a neutral experience. A significant body of empirical data supports this idea.³³ In the same spirit, we may insist that feelings of familiarity are subtended by evaluations, which may indicate “the

³³ Zajonc (1968) has given some support to the idea that mere exposure towards an object tends to elicit positive attitudes towards it. More directly relevant to the present issue are Garcia-Marquez and Mackie’s (2000) conception of the feeling of familiarity as a positive attitude and Winckielman and Cacioppo’s (2001) data that support the idea that processing facilitation elicits positive affect.

availability of appropriate knowledge structures to deal with a current situation” (Winkielman and Cacioppo 2001: 990). These indeed look like positive evaluations. We may perhaps go even further and maintain, with Frijda, that familiarity and unfamiliarity have, in and of themselves, different consequences regarding the capacity for coping (1986: 350). Familiarity would manifest itself in a positive feeling reflecting one’s capacity to cope with the relevant content, unfamiliarity in a negative feeling manifesting one’s difficulty in coping with it. Feelings of familiarity may after all turn to be emotional experiences.

Conclusion

I distinguished two groups of issues in the phenomenology of memory. As regards the contribution of various memory contents, we saw that non-experiential contents are unlikely to illuminate the phenomenology of memory. Amongst experiential contents, contents that are about particular events include a phenomenology distinctive of memory: it’s being for the subject as if she perceived particular events again. As regards the contribution of the attitude of remembering, we explored a variety of candidate feelings and concluded that this attitude makes itself manifest in feelings of familiarity, which may be specific affective experiences.

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