

MEMORY

A Self-Referential Account

ABSTRACT

This book offers a philosophical account of memory. Memory is remarkably interesting from a philosophical point of view. Our memories interact with mental states of other types in a characteristic way. They also have some associated feelings that other mental states lack. Our memories are special in terms of their representational capacity too, since we can have memories of objective events, and we can have memories of our own past experiences. Finally, our memories are epistemically special, in that beliefs formed on the basis of our memories are protected from certain errors of misidentification and justified in a way which does not rely on any cognitive capacity other than memory. The aim of the book is to explain these features of memory. It proposes that memories have a particular functional role which involves past perceptual experiences and beliefs about the past and suggests that memories have a particular content as well; they represent themselves as having a certain causal origin. The book then accounts for the feelings associated with our memories as the experience of some of the things that our memories represent; things such as our own past experiences, or the fact the memories originate in those experiences. It also accounts for the special justification for belief afforded by our memories in terms of the content that memories have. The resulting picture is a unified account of several philosophically interesting aspects of memory.

KEYWORDS

memory
remembering
causation
self-reference
ownership
immunity to error
time

epistemic justification

1 Problems of Memory

ABSTRACT

Chapter 1 sets up the discussion that will lead to an account of memory and addresses some preliminary methodological issues. It specifies the kind of memory to be accounted for, as well as the features of memories of that kind which require explanation. These include one feature concerning the metaphysics of memory, one feature concerning its intentionality, two features concerning the phenomenology of memory, and two features concerning its epistemology. The chapter then distinguishes several ways in which those features can be approached, depending on which of them are taken to be basic. Finally, one of the possible approaches is selected for the book. According to this approach, the facts in virtue of which a mental state qualifies as a memory, and the content that the memory has, are fundamental aspects of that memory. The phenomenological and epistemological aspects of the memory are to be explained in terms of them.

KEYWORDS

episodic memory
semantic memory
metaphysics of memory
intentionality of memory
content
phenomenology of memory
epistemology of memory

2 The Metaphysics of Memory

ABSTRACT

Chapter 2 offers a proposal about the facts in virtue of which a mental state qualifies as a memory. According to this proposal, a mental state qualifies as a memory in virtue of the functional role that it plays within the cognitive economy of the subject. The chapter outlines two alternative proposals about the nature of memory. According to the causal theory of memory, a mental state is a memory in virtue of the fact that it has been caused by a perceptual experience of some fact. According to the narrative theory of memory, a mental state is a memory in virtue of the fact that the subject is using the mental state to construct a story of their life. It is argued that the functionalist proposal enjoys the virtues of each of the two theories, and it avoids the difficulties which threaten the two theories as well.

KEYWORDS

metaphysics
causation
causal theory of memory
narrative
reconstruction
functionalism

3 The Intentionality of Memory

ABSTRACT

Chapter 3 offers a proposal about the kind of content that memories have. According to this proposal, memories are self-referential in that they represent their own causal origin. A memory represents that it causally originates in a perception of an objective fact. The chapter outlines three alternative proposals about the content of memories; the proposal that memories only represent objective facts in the past, the proposal that they only represent past perceptual experiences of those facts, and the proposal that they represent both things. It is argued that the self-referential proposal enjoys the virtues of each of the three views, and it avoids the difficulties which threaten the three views as well.

KEYWORDS

content
intentionality
truth-conditions
intuitions
self-reference
John Searle

4 The Experience of Time

ABSTRACT

Chapter 4 offers an account of two feelings in memory. One of them is the awareness of what it was like for one to experience, in the past, what one is remembering in the present. An attempt to explain this feeling in terms of the notion of mental time travel is considered, and dismissed on the grounds that it presupposes a misguided conception of mental time travel. The other is the feeling of pastness; the feeling that what one is remembering is in the past. Two attempts to explain this feeling in terms of the content that memories have are considered, and dismissed on the grounds that they presuppose wrong conceptions of mnemonic content. Eventually, both feelings are explained through the causally self-referential content that memories have. It is argued that memories have both feelings because they represent perceptual experiences and a causal relation between those perceptual experiences and themselves.

KEYWORDS

content
intentionality
truth-conditions
intuitions
self-reference
John Searle

5 The Experience of Ownership

ABSTRACT

Chapter 5 offers an account of the feeling that one has, when one remembers something, that the memory that one is having is one's own. The chapter discusses the case of patient R.B., who claims to have memories which do not feel to him as if they are his own. A hypothesis about the experience that this patient is undergoing is considered. According to it, patient R.B. lacks the feeling of being identical with a past person. It is argued that this hypothesis is in tension with some details in patient R.B.'s reports. An alternative hypothesis is proposed, according to which patient R.B. does not experience his memories as matching the past. It is argued that, more generally, a memory is experienced as one's own just in case it is experienced as fitting. This idea is generalized to states of other types, such as thoughts and actions.

KEYWORDS

feeling of mineness
ownership
patient R.B.
delusions
anarchic hand
utilization behavior
thought insertion
schizophrenia

6 Immunity to Error through Misidentification

ABSTRACT

Chapter 6 offers an account of an epistemic feature of memories; their immunity to error through misidentification. When one judges that one experienced something, based on a full and accurate memory, it is not possible for one to be wrong because one has misidentified the person who one remembers to have had the experience as being oneself. Two challenges to the idea that memories have this feature are considered. One employs the notion of quasi-memory. The other one appeals to the phenomenon of observer memory. It is argued that neither challenge is successful and that the self-referential content of memories does suggest that memory judgments are immune to error through misidentification. The key to this immunity concerns the presence of the self in the content of memories. And that presence, in turn, is due to the nature of perceptual content and the relation between perceptual content and mnemonic content.

KEYWORDS

immunity to error through misidentification
quasi-memory
observer memory
perspective
point of view
perception
Sydney Shoemaker

7 Memory as a Generative Epistemic Source

ABSTRACT

Chapter 7 discusses the question of whether memory only preserves epistemic justification over time, or can also generate it. Three defenses of the view that memory generates epistemic justification are considered. These three defenses appeal to the notions of attention, abstraction, and reconstruction in memory. It is argued that none of the three defenses succeeds in showing that memory generates epistemic justification. However, it is also argued that memory does generate epistemic justification. This is due to the self-referential content that memories have. What one may believe on the basis of a memory, if that memory has a self-referential content, includes things that one was not in a position to believe before one utilized that capacity. In that sense, memory produces new grounds, or evidence, for belief through the process of remembering.

KEYWORDS

epistemic justification
generative source
preservative source
generativism
preservativism
attention
abstraction
reconstruction