As a psychologist, when I think about memory, I think about questions such as the following: How do people—and other species—remember the past? What neurological or cognitive mechanisms are involved? What are its properties? Is there one form of memory or many different forms of memory? If more than one, how does one characterize them? To some extent, the philosophy of memory tackles at least some of the same issues, but it appears on the surface to involve much more. As a cursory examination of the Table of Contents of The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory indicates, there are concerns about the metaphysics and epistemology of memory and the morality of memory. When are you, for instance, morally obligated to remember? But then, when should you feel the obligation to forget? Questions such as these remain largely either unexplored or unrecognized by psychologists and neuroscientists, and one could reasonably argue, rightly so. One could equally argue, however, that psychologists have a great deal to learn about memory from philosophers. This volume is a good place to start. The editors—Sven Bernecker and Kourken Michaelian—have masterfully found articulate and authoritative contributors who address these topics and many more. I particularly welcomed the section on the history of the philosophy of memory. There are separate chapters on Plato (Chapter 30), Aristotle (Chapter 31), Augustine (Chapter 35), Indian Buddhist philosophy (Chapter 33), Hume (Chapter 39), Hegel (Chapter 40), Bergson (Chapter 42), Halbwachs (Chapter 44), and Ricoeur (Chapter 48), to name just of a handful of the 18 separate historical chapters. These will serve as a ready guide for anyone who wants to understand the contributions of different scholars to the study of memory.

As I read through the altogether 48 chapters in this volume, I found myself thinking back to my graduate school days. After a year or two studying the psychology and neuroscience of memory, I decided that I needed to know something about the philosophy of memory. At the time, at Cornell, the formidable Wittgensteinian philosopher Norman Malcolm was teaching a course on memory. I distinctly remember being hopelessly confused from the start. At least in the beginning of the course, Malcolm appeared to treat a memory as a memory only if it captured “truthfully” the past. As Bernecker states in his entry on “Memory and Truth” (Chapter 4), “To remember’ is factive in the sense that an utterance of ‘S remembers that p’ (where ‘S’ stands for a subject and ‘p’ stands for a proposition) is true only if p is the case. If not-p, then S may think that she remembers that p, but she doesn’t actually remember that p” (p. 52). A large number of chapters in this volume either embrace this notion, or feel that one must take it seriously enough to tackle it at length. To return to Bernecker again, many philosophers find the statement “I remember such-and-such, but such-and-such never happened,” if not literally contradictory, paradoxical. For them, it is “not really a
coherent assertion” (p. 53). From the first day of class, that seemed to be the case for Norman Malcolm.

For a psychologist, especially someone suckled on the constructivist approach to memory advanced by Bartlett, all of this struck me as bizarre. To account for the factivity of memory, as this volume makes clear, many philosophers take seriously some variant of trace theory. For them, experiences are encoded and leave a trace that remains fairly unaltered over time. At the desired moment, these traces are retrieved and placed in the “footlights of consciousness.” Yet everything I learned about memory in my psychological studies militated against this view of memory. I thought then and still think that trace theory is not only hopelessly out-of-date, but just wrong. Most psychologists would embrace a constructivist view and allow that there is nothing odd about stating, “I remember such-and-such, but such-and-such never happened.” Indeed, rather than being bizarre, statements such as these are all too frequent in daily life.

Yet this volume slowly worked on me, as one chapter after another dealt with concerns about memory and truth, in one way or another. I came to realize that philosophers have placed in the forefront what psychologists have failed to tackle head on. There is no doubt that lay people believe that their memories capture the past. They may accept that sometimes their memories are in error, but they act as if, and would claim that, overall their memories are representations not of an imaginary past, but the actual past. Even the diehard reconstructionist, the true disciple of Bartlett, accepts, at least to a degree, the factivity of memory. In his chapter on Bartlett (Chapter 45), Wagoner cautions that simply because people do not form traces of the past, but reconstruct the past “on the run” out of their schemata, it does not follow that memories are “necessarily inaccurate or distorted” (p. 540). As he writes, “If nothing else, they are accurate enough to maximize our functioning in the world.” (p. 540). But this appeal to functionalism must be extremely unsatisfactory to the philosopher trying to understand not simply why people act on their memories as if they are accurate, but also why they have the belief that they are and what about memory justifies that belief. I suspect that psychologists could supply no more definitive understanding of the “factivity” of memory than philosophers.

Indeed, if one examines the psychological literature, one quickly observes that whereas psychologists may side with a constructivist approach that mitigates the need for “justifying” memory representations of the past, they still cling, to varying degrees, to memory’s ability to capture the past in an accurate manner. It is not atypical to see within one paragraph a psychologist asserting the reconstructive nature of memory and then write about encoding and retrieval, thereby embracing both constructivist and trace theoretical approaches at the same time. But more critically, psychologists cannot even come to some agreement about how accurate memory actually is. As I stated, taking a functional approach and arguing it is good enough does not really get at what constitutes “good enough.”

The failure of psychologists to come to terms with the relation between memory and truth rests at the center of the recent debate among psychologists about the accuracy of eyewitness testimony. Since Loftus’ (2017) groundbreaking work on the malleability of memory, and the much longer Bartlettian tradition that emphasizes memory’s unreliability, psychologists have argued forcefully that eyewitness testimony should be viewed skeptically. The US Courts have begun to take their concerns seriously. Yet, recently, work by Wixted and his associates have asserted that if people’s memory is tested shortly after an incident and if the memory is confidently held, it tends to be accurate (Wixted et al., 2018). Those arguing for the unreliability of eyewitness reports often cite that many of the false convictions documented by the Innocence Project depended solely on the testimony of a single eyewitness. But Wixted has noted, that if one goes back to the original testimony collected shortly after the trial, the eyewitness in almost every case stated that they were not confident in their memory.
The Wixted work does not bear on the issue of whether it is bizarre or “not really coherent” to say “I remember confidently such-and-such, but such-and-such never happened.” Appeals to such judgments is a maneuver typical of philosophers, not psychologists. Psychologists seem content to simply study the relation between confidence rating and accuracy, leaving judgments about bizarre-ness and incoherence to others. But it is probably not too far of a step to go from (a) asserting that it rarely happens that inaccurate memories are confidently held to (b) stating it is bizarre to assert that one remembers confidently an event that never happened.

Whereas this debate about eyewitness testimony might seem to supply empirical evidence that might bear on the factivity of memory, no philosopher—or psychologist—would find it definitive. First, it is about the confidence people have in their memories, not claims about whether memories are “true” representations of the past. Psychologists largely eschew metaphysical musings about concepts like “truth.” Furthermore, as Wixted cautiously warns, “ideal conditions” must exist for confidence and accuracy to align. The testimony and confidence ratings must, for instance, be collected shortly after the incident. If the delay is too long a time, confidence ratings might not be a good indicator of accuracy. The caveats raise a conundrum that speaks to psychologists’ limited understanding of whether confidence in a memory can speak to its accuracy. In response to Wixted and colleagues’ claims, some psychologists see this limitation as evidence that memory is unreliable and that one can unparadoxically say “I remember such-and-such” even when one knows that such-and-such never happened. But these skeptics of memory’s representational nature must somehow confront the notion that, at least in the short-term, Bernecker’s truth condition seems to hold.

Reading through his volume has been a great treat. It has made me think more carefully about what is at stake in a constructivist approach, or for that matter, an archivist approach. Norman Malcolm’s obsessions turn out not be so bizarre. Indeed, whereas the methods for addressing the truth condition of memory may differ, the issues are not as different as I originally thought way back in graduate school. In other words, psychologists, as well as philosophers, will benefit from this landmark volume.

References

Author biography
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This volume collects essays about memory across subfields including epistemology, applied ethics, and metaphysics. To my mind, its main strength is a combination of both contemporary and historical articles, inviting the reader to think about how the contemporary study of memory compares in focus, method, and aims to various historical attempts to understand memory. And so in this review, I will focus on a few aspects of the philosophy of memory brought to light by this historical context. For brevity, I will use just one historical example.

Deborah Black, in her contribution on Averroes and Avicenna (Chapter 36), details how these two philosophers placed memory in broader theories of cognition. A central issue in her discussion
is the representational format of different kinds of memories. On Avicenna’s view, we store both sensory impressions (sensible forms) and non-sensory features of particular objects (intentions). For example, I might encode both a visual image of a black cat (a sensible form) and the idea that this pet was my childhood pet or tended to be very moody (an intention). In recollecting, we attach the two together, either by starting with a sensory impression and associating it with an intention, or by starting with an intention and calling up a sensory image to accompany it. What about universals, such as the idea of humankind or the number seven? For Avicenna, while we have dispositions to access these concepts in thought, we do not remember them. Averroes similarly reserves memory for particulars and their properties, maintaining that there is no internal “storehouse” for universals.

These theories might seem mired in a peculiarly medieval division between universals and particulars, but they reveal two ideas that have deep contemporary relevance. First, knowing something may be entirely distinct from having an internal storehouse that encodes it. Second, the act of remembering may involve a distinct type of content from what is stored in memory.

I will start with the first idea, which reflects Avicenna’s distinction between particulars and intentions, which are remembered, and universals, which are learned. Let us reconsider Avicenna’s position in light of Sarah Robins’ contribution to the volume, “Memory Traces” (Chapter 6). Robins highlights a series of debates concerning what memory traces might be, and why memory requires them. On the latter question, she considers four answers; for my purposes, the most significant is that memory traces might be needed to distinguish remembering from relearning. That is, it seems like there is a difference between learning something again that you have forgotten and remembering something. A natural diagnosis is that in the former case, you did not make use of a memory trace, and in the latter, you did. As Robins convincingly argues, this use of memory traces is more problematic than it appears.

To see where our Avicennian idea might intervene in this debate, let us look at an example. In the past, I broke a jar of water by freezing it, which led me to learn that ice has a larger volume than water. Now, I encounter a diary entry about the incident, which leads me to recall that past incident—or perhaps to re-learn about it. In the contemporary way of looking at it, I remember two things: a fact about the volume of ice and an event involving a jar. On Avicenna’s view, I only remember the event. By contrast, I know the fact, but not in virtue of remembering it. The contemporary view, following Robins, needs to differentiate both memories from re-learning, which presents a series of challenges, in part because re-learning based on a cue and remembering based on a cue and also a memory trace seem extremely similar, sometimes indistinguishable to the rememberer herself.

Drawing on Avicenna’s idea, we can propose a different solution. Learning results in knowledge, a kind of intellectual habit, relation, or disposition. Memory results in a retained image or other representational content. Thus, assuming that I currently entertain a particular image of the jar incident, the issue cannot be whether I learned that image. We can still ask whether I retained the image from memory or imagined it as a result of the diary, but this question need not have a clear answer; as Felipe de Brigard notes in his entry on “Memory and Imagination” (Chapter 10), there is a wide-ranging set of evidence that suggests that memory and imagination are hard to distinguish, and even importantly intertwined. Accepting this Avicennian answer does not commit us to a deep dichotomy between universals and particulars, but merely to a distinction between having a disposition to infer, and having an actual occurrent mental representation.

The second idea has to do with the process of remembering itself producing a different kind of content than the kind of memory content that is encoded and stored over time. This idea is orthogonal to the claim that memory is constructive; for example, a constructive account might hold that
we actively fill in content while remembering based stored fragments of information, but that the pre-recall stored representation and the richer representation assembled during recall share a single type of content, for example, a proposition concerning a state of affairs in the past.

In his contribution on “The Intentional Objects of Memory” (Chapter 7), Jordi Fernandez considers a range of views concerning the content of episodic memory, divided into objective, subjective, and hybrid views. Objective views take the contents of memories to be mind-independent propositions, such as “here was a house on the corner.” Subjective views take memory contents to be propositions concerning past experiences, such as “I had an experience of a house.” Hybrid views involve a combination of these features, such as “I veridically perceived a house,” or even, “I have this memory because I veridically perceived a house.”

This creates something of a dilemma, as Fernandez points out: we have intuitive reasons to think episodic memories are in some sense objective (i.e. similar to perception) and in some sense subjective (i.e. similar to introspection), but the available ways of combining the two in a hybrid content are excessively demanding. For instance, a memory that I was at the stream can be totally accurate in terms of matching my experience at the time and the actual stream, but counts as incorrect if, unbeknownst to me, I was caused to entertain this content through imagination.

Our second Avicennian idea presents an alternative. On this view, memory content is equivocal—in fact, there are retained contents and contents of recollection, and the two are importantly different. Thus, it might be possible to dissolve the tension that Fernandez notes between objective and subjective as follows. The stored content in memory might include objective and subjective fragments: for instance, I might separately “store” an image of a friend’s face, and a bit of information about how she seemed to me to be angry. Then, at the time of recall, when I am in the business of combining these representations, a hybrid content could arise. Since the hybrid content is now generated through the act of recollection, as opposed to identified with the object of recollection, the demanding nature of the hybrid view is lessened. I still, in some sense, remember correctly even when I fail to correctly position myself in the past event or when my sense of my own perspective is constructed later. That is, the retained information is accurate, whether objective or subjective. However, correct and complete recollection requires putting together retained information correctly, and this process can be incorrect even when all of the retained information are correct. Breaking up memory content into two categories—retained content and recollected content—gives us the advantages that Fernandez sees in a hybrid view without creating unrealistic conditions for veridical memory.

This anthology provides many opportunities to connect threads between diverse projects in the philosophy of memory, as I have aimed to do here. It covers a wide range of topics, though with some notable omissions. For instance, only one article touches on issues of memory in political philosophy, despite a rich engagement with memory in that field on topics such as reparations, national identity, and political legitimacy. The historical section includes some continental philosophers, though there are no contemporary contributions from the continental tradition. It might have been relevant to include recent continental work on the archive or museum as institutions of memory, or on memory in phenomenology. But as a starting point for work on contemporary and historical approaches to memory in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind, this volume will serve readers well.

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Reviewed by: Lisa Bortolotti, Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, UK

In recent years, the philosophy of memory has flourished, and The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory does a great job at pointing to the different areas of philosophy affected by the study of memory, including metaphysics, epistemology, phenomenology, philosophy of time, philosophy of mind and history of philosophy. In each of the areas, contributors highlight specific issues of interest, some of which have attracted considerable controversy and are still hotly debated, such as the nature of memory itself and the best way to characterise the contribution that memory makes to our knowledge of the world.

I have a long-standing interest in whether beliefs that are seen as epistemically problematic (due to being false or irrational) support our agency. I suspect that they do have a positive role to play and that such role is mediated by how they impact on our sense of self and the construction of our self-narratives. Memory beliefs are especially important in this context, as they convey autobiographical information about the past. In the Handbook, there are several contributions that are relevant to the role of memory beliefs and that I thoroughly enjoyed reading, including Bernecker on “Memory and Truth” (Chapter 4), Hutto on “Memory and Narrativity” (Chapter 15) and McCarroll and Sutton on “Memory and Perspective” (Chapter 9). Here, due to the space constraints, I shall focus on Fivush and Graci on “Memory and Social Identity” (Chapter 21).

**Memory beliefs and the sense of self**

A person with dementia and impaired autobiographical memory may sincerely report beliefs about her past that others find inaccurate and implausible. However, having those beliefs and reporting them may enable the person to retain information about herself that would otherwise be threatened by the progressive degeneration of her memory capacities. In Bortolotti and Sullivan-Bissett (2018), we discuss some examples from the literature on Alzheimer’s disease. One such example is Martha’s story. Martha often told the story of how she learnt to drive, and she bought her own car, defying the objections of the people closest to her (Hydén and Örulv, 2009: 207). This was something she was presumably very proud of because not many women at the time would have done the same. Notwithstanding repetitions and inconsistencies in her reports, the story played a key role in Martha’s sense of self by reinforcing the conception of herself as someone who would follow her own mind.

Even in the absence of known memory impairments, it is common for people to sincerely report beliefs about their past that downplay their responsibility for failed tasks and overstate their role in achieving success. Such memory beliefs do not reflect the totality of the evidence, and are motivationally biased; however, having those beliefs and using them to explain past performance and to predict future performance may be more conducive to the attainment of people’s goals than having more realistic beliefs. That is because realistic beliefs often lead to self-doubt. In a paper on the relationship between optimism and success (Bortolotti, 2018), I consider the literature on self-affirmation as offering some good examples of this. It has been argued that negative affective states associated with poverty cause agents to make short-sighted and risk-averse decisions that are often self-defeating (Haushofer and Fehr, 2014). But when agents are encouraged to describe past achievements that gave them a sense of pride before making a decision, then they are more likely to think in ways that show intelligence and flexibility and to take advantage of the opportunities available to them (Hall et al., 2014).

**Memory beliefs and socially constructed identities**

Some of the positive effects of memory beliefs partly stem from the social context in which people report them. While sharing their narratives with their peers, people express their values, redefine
their identities and receive feedback on their beliefs. Narrative identity evolves and is preserved in a social context. In Fivush and Graci’s chapter, we learn about the social dimension of how narrative identity is established in the first place, in the relationship between a young child and (typically) her mother.

In their fascinating developmental perspective, Fivush and Graci emphasise the connection between certain ways of reminiscing the past together and other things we value, such as attachment, coping and emotional regulation. They argue that “more elaborative maternal reminiscing earlier in the preschool years facilitates the development of more coherent and elaborate narratives as children grow older” (p. 272). When they are adults, those people who were invited to reminisce past events in a more detailed way by their mothers have more coherent and emotionally regulated self-narratives. In particular, when addressing difficult or traumatic events, they identify opportunities for growth, and as a result, they cope better with the difficulties or the trauma they experienced.

There are two aspects of this discussion that I find useful in thinking about memory beliefs and their potential role in supporting agency. The first is that it is not the accuracy of the memory which contributes to the development of good narrative identities down the line, but its elaboration and coherence, especially in relation to those emotions that children may find particularly hard to understand or manage, such as sadness and grief. This suggests that some memory distortions may not be problematic, for instance, when they contribute to increased elaboration of the remembered events or help impose coherence on the jointly constructed narrative. Although Fivush and Graci do not address this issue, we can speculate that a moderately unrealistic emphasis on how unpleasant situations can be remedied may be welcome, depending on what it enables the person to do.

The second observation is that the benefits of an elaborated and coherent narrative identity developing as a result of the social scaffolding happening in childhood are not merely psychological, or not psychological in a narrow sense. As we can see from the passage below, Fivush and Graci describe the benefits in terms of the construction and maintenance of a self that can cope effectively with adversities and feels loved, safe, secure and competent:

Securely attached parents and children engage in elaborated and emotionally expressive and regulated co-constructed narratives of everyday and challenging experiences, and these children develop more coherent, emotionally expressive, and regulated narratives as they grow older. As these securely attached and narratively elaborative individuals develop into adolescents and young adults, these early foundations set the stage for the formation of a narrative identity and life story. As adults, more securely attached individuals continue to narrate their experiences more coherently and in more emotionally regulated ways, and, importantly, narratives that coherently express attachment-related themes of exploration and support seeking are related to greater personal growth.

(p. 278)

**Conclusion**

Reflecting on how reminiscence underlies narrative identities helps us understand the relationship between memory beliefs and agency. We saw that reminiscing in an elaborated and coherent way gives rise to more detailed and better emotionally regulated narrative identities. In Fivush and Graci’s chapter, the inclusion of items such as personal growth and exploration among the benefits of elaborated and emotionally regulated self-narratives suggests that such narratives support the person’s agency in general, potentially sustaining her motivation to persevere in the pursuit of her goals in the face of setbacks.
Book review symposium

References

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Lisa Bortolotti is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Birmingham, affiliated both with the Philosophy Department and the Institute for Mental Health. She works in the philosophy of psychology and psychiatry, specialising in the study of behavioural manifestations of irrationality, such as delusional beliefs, cognitive biases, distorted memories, and failures of self-knowledge. Her latest books are Irrationality (Polity 2014) and Delusions in Context (Palgrave 2018).

Reviewed by: Felipe Rocha L Santos, Faculdade de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, Universidade Federal da Bahia, Brasil

The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory, edited by Sven Bernecker and Kourken Michaelian, should be considered one of the main references for those who want to have at the same time a panoramic view of the philosophical problems concerning memory and a more in-depth view. The book has 48 chapters, divided into eight thematic parts, focusing mostly on the analytical tradition of philosophical investigation. Unfortunately, as highlighted by the editors in the introduction, many relevant and interesting problems could not be placed in the book, given the lack of space. What is interesting about this book is that even with an approach to analytic philosophy and even focusing on themes such as “Memory and Time” (Part 5, Chapters 16–18), “The Epistemology of Memory” (Part 7, Chapters 22–26), and “Metaphysics of Memory” (Part 2, Chapters 4–7), the book devotes 18 chapters to the history of the philosophy of memory, discussing from classical philosophers as Plato (Chapter 30) and Aristotle (Chapter 31), to contemporary philosophers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (Chapter 46) and Paul Ricoeur (Chapter 48), with an interesting inclusion of chapters on the philosophy of memory in Classical Indian philosophy (Chapter 32) and Chinese Buddhist philosophy (Chapter 34).

Given the wide variety of themes discussed in the handbook, I will focus on one of the parts that attracted my attention, since it discusses themes that are not only relevant to philosophy, but also which are very important to our everyday life, namely, “Memory and Morality” (Part 8, Chapters 27–29). This part has three chapters wherein a different aspect of memory and morality is discussed in each. In fact, there is not yet exhaustive literature on memory and morality, especially addressing topics such as the use of memory modification technologies (MMTs) and contemporary legal aspects such as the legal concept called the right to be forgotten. Having said that, I will briefly comment on the chapters that form this section and the possibilities they open for the discussion of the ethics of memory.

In “A Duty to Remember” (Chapter 27), Jeffrey Blustein briefly discusses what cases we are or should be obliged to remember. What is interesting here is the brief historical approach, searching in classical antiquity for antecedents to this discussion, and seeking to compare modern ethical
theories such as consequentialism and deontology to the duty to remember. This seems to be the most discussed topic in memory ethics, mainly due to events that marked the history, such as the Holocaust, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and other events that killed large numbers of innocent people.

In “An Obligation to Forget” (Chapter 28), David Matheson seeks to describe what conditions are sufficient for a moral obligation to forget some information about another person. Matheson argues that even if the act of forgetting is an apparently involuntary act, there is enough scientific evidence to consider that forgetting is not merely a cognitive process, but an epistemic activity susceptible to moral obligations. And not only individual agents should be susceptible to the obligation to forget when they meet the conditions, but also corporate agents like Google or Facebook. With this argument, Matheson elaborates a defense of the concept of the right to be forgotten. Finally, in “The Ethics of Memory Modification” (Chapter 29), S. Matthew Liao discusses MMTs, which are technologies that can improve, erase, or even create new memories at a biological level. That is, the text seeks to discuss MMTs in the form of drugs that may act on memory, the negative ethical consequences of using these technologies, and when it should be permissible to use MMTs for positive purposes.

What these three chapters have in common is that, in general, the memory that is the object of moral action (remembering or being forgotten) is always in the mind of an individual (or in the database of an institution, e.g. Google). Even when we discuss the obligation to remember heinous crimes like the Holocaust, we are talking about reliving the memory of individual members of a collective. However, with the advancement of philosophical theories such as the Extended Mind (discussed in Chapter 19 of the handbook), we can raise other types of questions that I believe are of primary importance when talking about ethics of memory. For example, it is known that transitive memory systems are the kind of systems that go into operation when we trust part of the information to another person, storing it externally. I can trust a person to store specific information and can consult this person when I need the information. However, transitive memory is not only distributed between individuals and social groups. Recent research (see Lynch, 2016; Sparrow et al., 2011; Ward, 2013) suggests that technologies increasingly function as transitive memories, as more of our cognitive tasks are “outsourced” by our technological devices. That way, if a friend takes photos of a trip that we took together, uploads these photos to Facebook and tags me in the photos, I can trust that whenever I want to see the photos, I can go on my profile to search the photos I was tagged in (a sort of memory trace), and find the desired image. This memory could be considered a type of transitive memory, or even a type of shared extended memory. So, the question is, “To whom does this memory belong? To me? To my friend? To both? If for some reason, he decides to erase all the photos from his social networks, would he be committing an immoral action by erasing my memories, against my will?”

The central point of my reflection is that, in addition to being important to discuss moral questions about certain mnemonic activities (remembering, forgetting, memory alteration, etc.), it also seems fundamental to discuss moral issues about the ownership of memory. To give an example, in 2017, US President Donald Trump published on his twitter: “Despite the constant negative press covfefe.” More than 120,000 people re-tweeted it. Despite that, he realized it was not a good tweet and decided to delete it. We can ask, “Do his followers (or any person, actually) have the right to bring this tweet back—remembering, even against his will?” Before answering this question, it is necessary to assess the moral weight of the content of the memory in question to discuss ownership. A president, by voluntarily sharing something in public, apparently loses the ownership of the information and therefore is not allowed to delete it. He could try to force companies such as Google and Twitter to erase any vestige of published information from the network. The given information is already part of the memory of those who use these technologies either as transitive
memory or as shared extended memory. In this way, as citizens, it seems to be the case that we have a moral obligation to remember this kind of fact, even when the author himself tries to erase it.

And why is it a moral obligation or a duty to remember this kind of fact? Here I can recall Blustein’s article (Chapter 27) where he writes that remembering “is just what one ought to do as an integral part of the caring relationship,” and that on the view defended by him, “remembering is a manifestation of ongoing caring” (p. 352). We live in society and it can be said that we are part of a caring relationship with each other. Thus, we should act and follow our democratic duties in order to improve and help our society to flourish, including remembering facts that are of public interest that help us make better political decisions, for example. Some people may argue that this is not a strong argument, but the discussion of consequentialism and deontology in Blustein’s article may shed light on this argument. On a consequentialist point of view, one may argue that to make better political decisions, we must have available the maximum of information about the political actors and political actions. Remembering a president’s tweet is relevant because it can make explicit the president’s moral character and his competence as a leader. Hence, remembering this kind of fact may promote better outcomes. And on a deontologist point of view, one can say that this is a duty to remember since it is based on the moral principle of justice and the moral principle of autonomy (Blustein, pp. 360–361).

Another interesting case that can be interpreted in terms of memory ethics is the case of whistleblowers. Edward Snowden, for example, was responsible for developing many of the systems used by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and had access to many of the documents stored by this organization. These documents can be considered part of the organization’s memory. Is the leaking of such unauthorized memories analogous to cases of revenge porn, where one partner publicly makes available without the consent of the other videos or intimate photos of the other? The idea behind the legal concept of the right to be forgotten applies to the latter cases, forcing Google and other companies to erase all records of what was made available on the grounds that, in cases like these, the person has the right to be forgotten. Cases of whistleblowers and revenge porn seem to be structurally equivalent, at least according to Matheson’s analysis in Chapter 28. Given Matheson criteria for an obligation to forget, one has this obligation just in case (1) S1 knows i because S1 performed the epistemic activity of learning i; (2) S2 has not for S1 waived a moral right to privacy that S2 has with respect to i, and (3) S1 can successfully perform the epistemic activity of forgetting i without unduly diminishing her ability to care for herself or others in morally appropriate ways. That is why cases of whistleblowers and revenge porn seem to be structurally equivalent, but the diagnosis for each case is different. This is because there seems to be an important difference of ownership and moral value of memory that would change the diagnosis of cases, especially related to second criteria. I am suggesting that in cases of whistleblowers, given the moral value of the information, the original owner loses his ownership on that information, making it information of public interest (and ownership).

Some people might argue that cases like the US President’s tweet or those of whistleblowers are not cases concerning memory ethics. In fact, they are cases that can be analyzed ethically from different perspectives. But one cannot deny that there is the perspective of memory, especially when we consider hypotheses like the extended mind. The legal discussion about the right to be forgotten, discussions about MMTs and the duty to remember is a great opportunity to advance the discussions about memory and morality, however, it is necessary to include in the analyses questions about extended mind, extended memory traces, and memory ownership, besides the moral weight of the memory that is the object of the moral action. Therefore, the chapters of this handbook are of great importance for having already taken an important step in this direction, but we still have a lot of work to do.
References


Author biography

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Editor’s response, Sven Bernecker and Kourken Michaelian

When Memory Studies’ book review editors originally proposed the idea of this review symposium, the intention was for us, as editors of The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory, to respond to the reviewers’ criticisms of the volume. When we received the reviews, however, they turned out (we are pleased to say) to contain few real criticisms. After consultation with the editors, we have therefore opted to combine our responses to the reviews (which, we wish to emphasize, constitute valuable contributions to the growing field of philosophy of memory in their own right) with reflections on topics that either have garnered increased attention since the publication of the handbook or are poised to in the near future and hence might be included in a potential second edition of the handbook.

Some context may be of use here: we began work on the handbook in 2014. This was well before Issues in Philosophy of Memory (IPM), the first major international conference in the area, took place in Cologne; indeed, the handbook had just been published when the conference occurred in 2017. As we write this introduction in 2019, IPM2 has just taken place in Grenoble, and we are already looking forward to IPM3 in Bogotá in 2021. There have, in the intervening years, been more workshops, special issues, authored books, and edited books in the area than we can hope to list here; indeed, there is now even a book series dedicated to the philosophy of memory and imagination.1 If, in 2014, the idea of the philosophy of memory as a distinct field of research was still something of a novelty, this is now, in 2019, most definitely no longer the case. The contours of the field have become much clearer, and reflecting on the similarities and differences between the topics covered in the handbook and those that have figured most prominently in subsequent discussions will provide a sense of the field’s current directions and possibilities.

The handbook is divided into nine parts: (I) The nature of memory; (II) The metaphysics of memory; (III) Memory, mind, and meaning; (IV) Memory and the self; (V) Memory and time; (VI) The social dimension of memory; (VII) The epistemology of memory; (VIII) Memory and morality; and (IX) History of philosophy of memory. Six of the book’s nine parts, in other words, are dedicated to descriptive questions, two are dedicated to normative issues, and one is dedicated to historical approaches. An informal survey of the recent literature2 makes it clear that the topics covered in the descriptive section—such as the phenomenology of memory, the causal theory of memory, memory traces, observer memory, memory and narrativity, and memory as mental time travel—continue to attract the lion’s share of attention. Judging by the contributions to IPM23 and