# Current Controversies in Philosophy of Memory

## Evaluating the Book

César Schirmer dos Santos | 2023.07.14 | Mnemicity Seminar | Filosofia UFSM

**André Sant'Anna**
@ar_santanna

Glad to share that Carl Craver and I signed a contract to edit The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Memory!

The collection will include 52 chapters on a variety of topics on the metaphysics, epistemology, science, ethics, and social dimension of memory. Stay tuned!

12:31 PM · Jul 13, 2023 · **2,510** Views

*Current Controversies in Philosophy*

# CURRENT CONTROVERSIES IN PHILOSOPHY OF MEMORY

Edited by
André Sant'Anna, Christopher Jude McCarroll,
and Kourken Michaelian

**ent controversies in philosophy of mem**

**introduction**

ANDRÉ SANT'ANNA, CHRISTOPHER JUDE MCCARRO
KOURKEN MICHAELIAN

**PART I**

# What is the relationship between memory and imagination?

## 1 Remembering, imagining, and memory trace continuist causal theory

PETER LANGLAND-HASSAN

**he relation between**
**ut the ri**

# Genealogy

CTM → discontinuism

**"[...] because a subject who R-remembers a past event is experientially aware of a past particular event, while a subject who S-imagines a future event could not possibly be experientially aware of a future particular event, R-memories of past events and S-imaginations of future events are ultimately mental occurrences of two different kinds."**

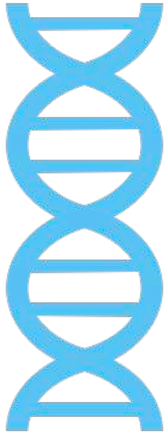
Debus 2014, 333

# Conceptual Ethics

# The pragmatics of "remembering"

## Uses of remembering

- The dimensions of language:
  - Pragmatics: the use of words (users → words)
  - Semantics: the dictionary meaning of words (world → words)
  - Syntax: relationships between words (words → words)
- In the current debates in philosophy of memory, "remembering" is used in ways that show the interlocutor how the word should be used.
  - (Metalinguistic negotiation → pragmatics → normative semantics).



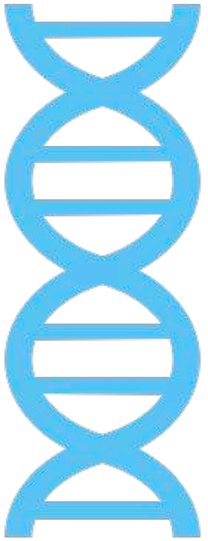
"A tomato is a fruit."

"No, a tomato is not a fruit."

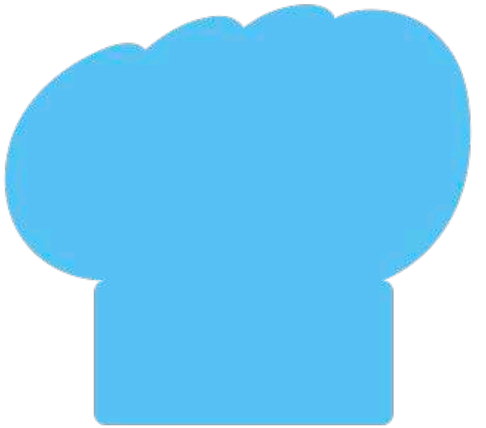
Pragmatic mechanism

A certain word is used as a way of showing how it should be used (either invariantly or in a certain context).

# What is a metalinguistic negotiation?



"A tomato is a fruit."



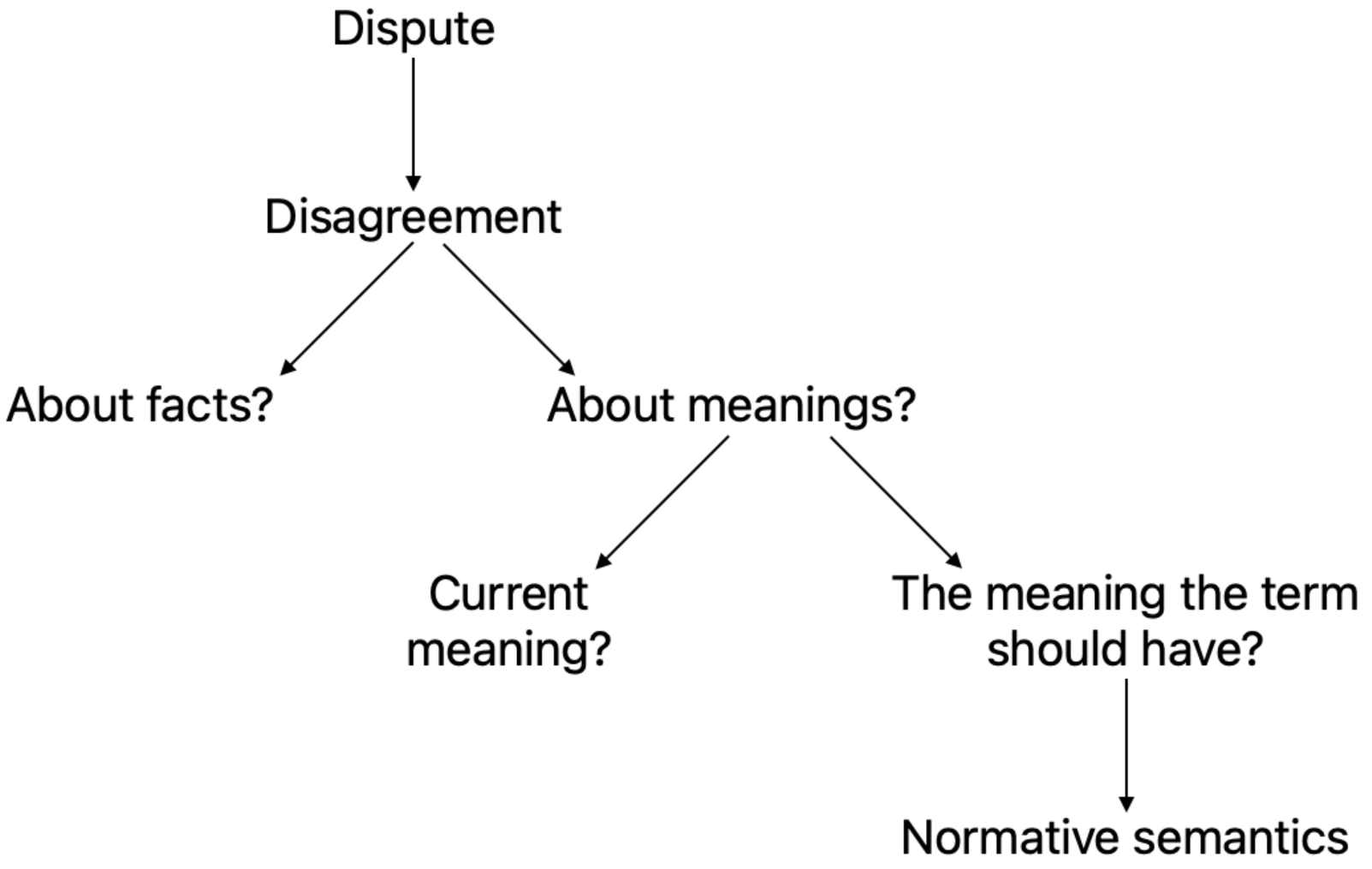
"No, a tomato is not a fruit."

"No, in the context of the kitchen, the word 'tomato' should not be used as if it described a fruit."

# Metalinguistic use

"You can remember episodically only your personal past."

"No, you can remember episodically even the arrival of Napoleon in Grenoble in 1815."


Dispute
Disagreement
About facts?
About meanings?
Current meaning?
The meaning the term should have?
Normative semantics

# Conceptual Engineering

CTM → continuism

give up on the prop theory. I will end by pointing the way to such a view.

The key to making the prop theory (and continuism) more plausible is to show how a causal condition *of the right kind*—an 'appropriate' causation condition—can be fulfilled by successful rememberings, even if memory traces are as the prop theory imagines them. To see how we might get there, let us begin with a statement of a very general causal theory, where what constitutes appropriate causation is left open:

*Causal Theory*: *S*'s representation *r* is a remembering of event *e* iff: *S* observed *e*, *r* represents *e* within certain limits of accuracy, and *r* is appropriately caused by *S*'s observation of *e*.

Langland-Hassan 2023, 30

( ) keep
(✓) ameliorate *the (dis)continuism debate*
( ) replace
( ) eliminate

concepts
SCHIRMER DOS SANTOS, CHRISTOPHE
MCCARROLL, AND ANDRÉ SANT'ANNA
*Further Readings for Part I* 57
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**PART II**

# Do memory traces have content?

**3 Remembering without a trace? Moving b**
**minimalism**
DANIEL D. HUTTO

# Genealogy

# Traces have no content

## This is simply the best explanation

- "The general strategy of this paper is to argue that any theory of (representational) content has to adopt what I call a ‘‘functionalistic core” if it is to capture the explanatory role of representations in behavioral sciences. This means that if the content of a representation is taken to explain (flexible) behavior, then we have to take the target of the behavior as the starting point for determining the content." (Vosgerau 2010, 838)

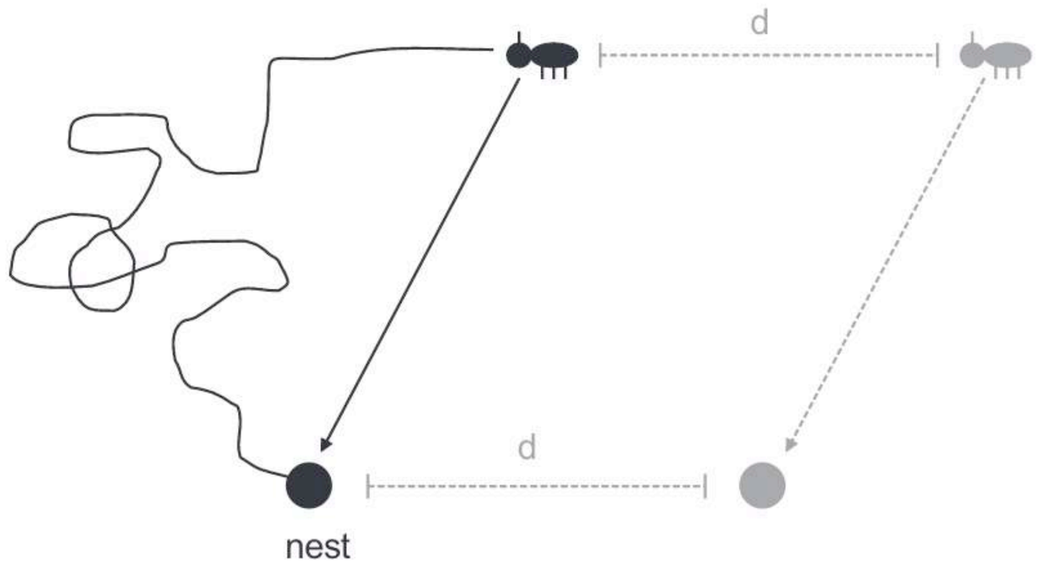



**Fig. 1.** Homing behavior of ants.

### 2.1. The role of representations

Consider the so-called homing behavior of the ant (Gallistel, 1993): After an unsystematic search for food, the ant is able to go back to its nest on a straight line (see Fig. 1 left). If the ant is displaced before returning, it will take a parallel path to a point where the nest would have been, if it had been displaced in the same direction and distance *d* (see Fig. 1 right).

# The correct method

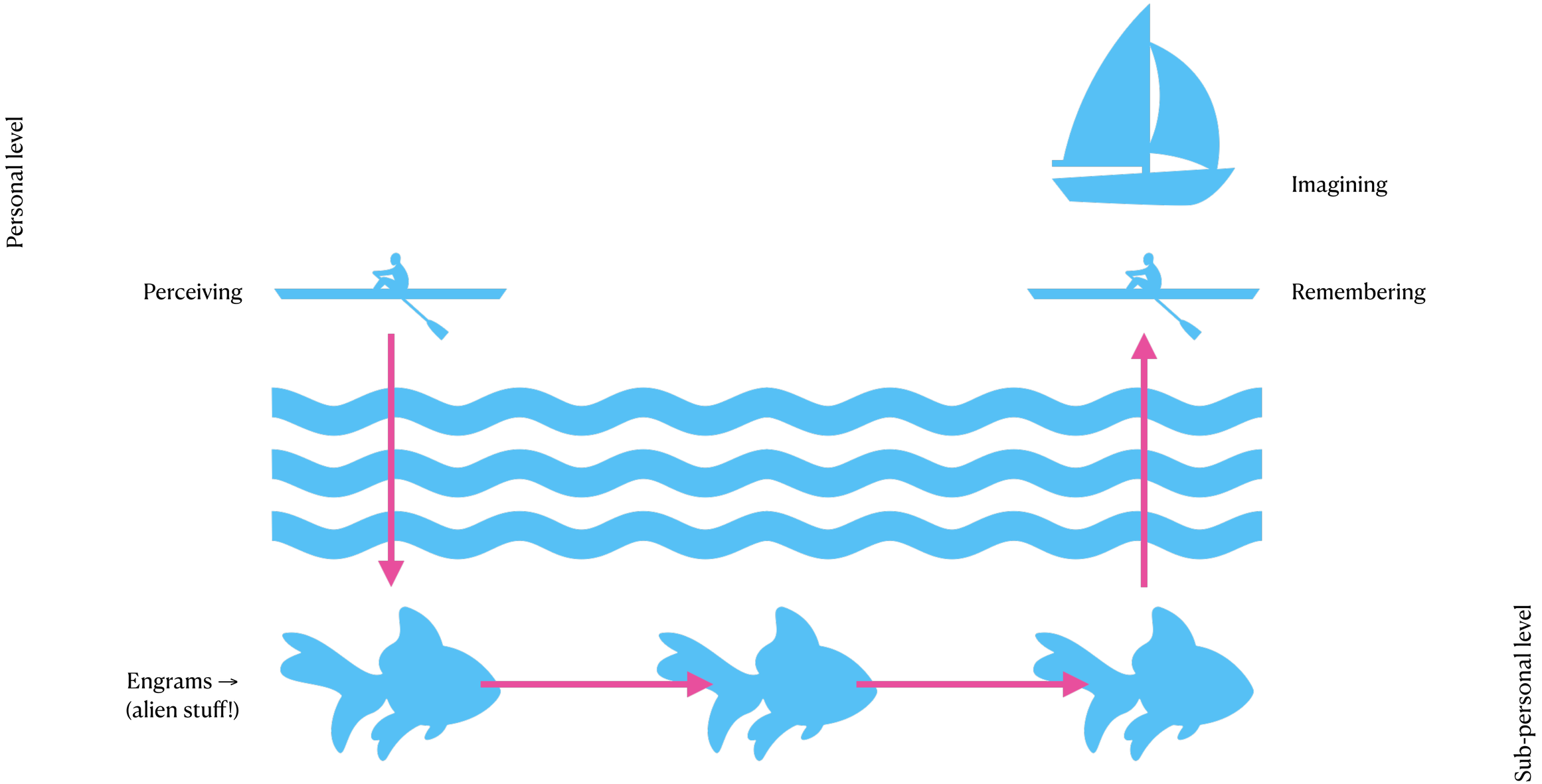
## How to talk about the role of engrams

- Correct method:
  1. Observe the behavior
  2. Look for a past behavior of the same animal that explains the observed behavior.
  3. Look for a series of physical (spatiotemporal) explanantia.

# An incorrect method

## With a too expensive ontological commitment

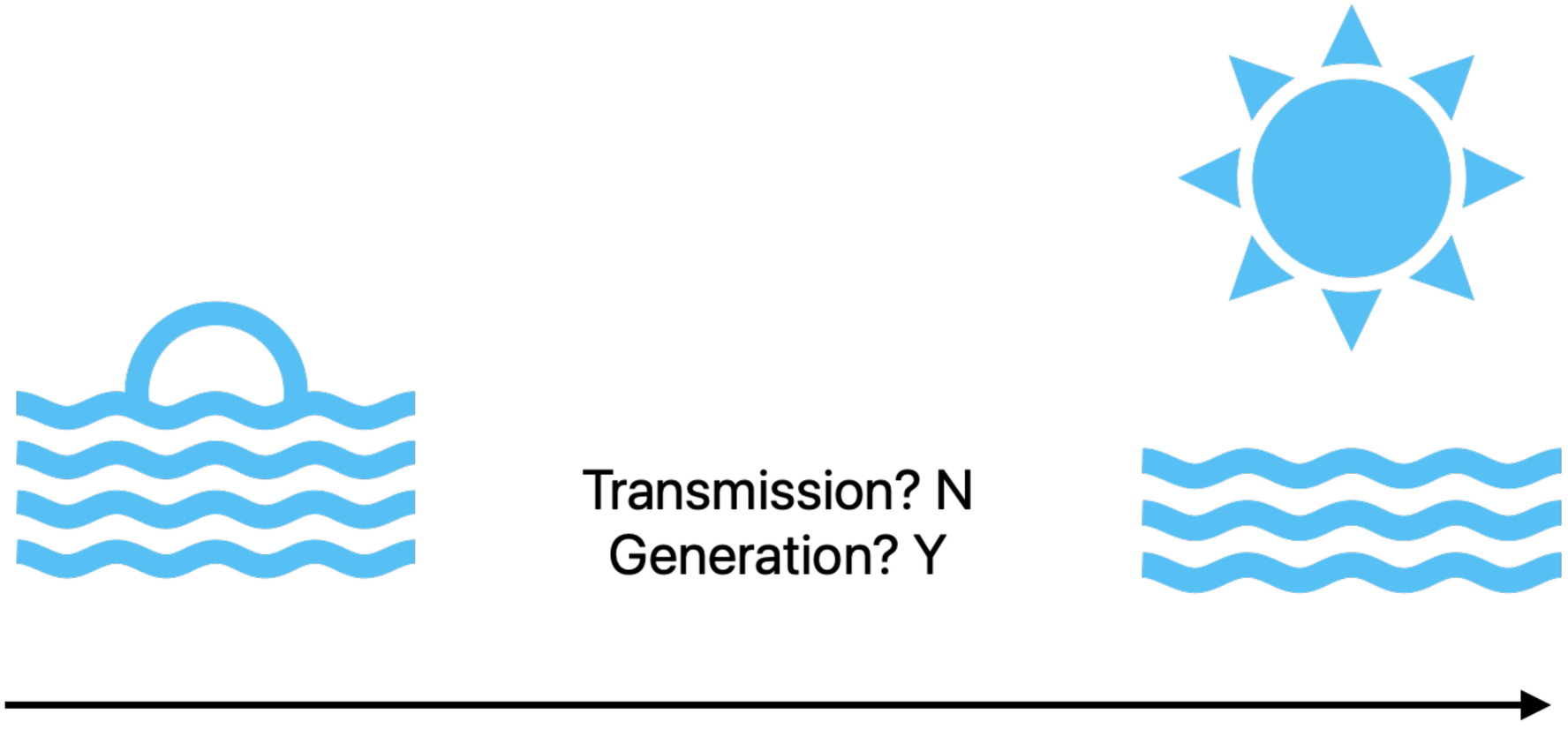
- Don't:
  1. Observe the behavior.
  2. Assume that a representation is stored in the brain.


Personal level
Imagining
Perceiving
Remembering
Engrams →
(alien stuff!)
Sub-personal level

# Minimal traces

## Traces without representational content

- "[...] a minimal trace: an internal process causally linking experience and remembering and operated by the system in a truth-approximating reliable way. Minimal traces need not bear any representational content and, *a fortiori*, do not preserve it from perception to remembering, not even partially." (Werning 2020, 3170)


Transmission? N
Generation? Y

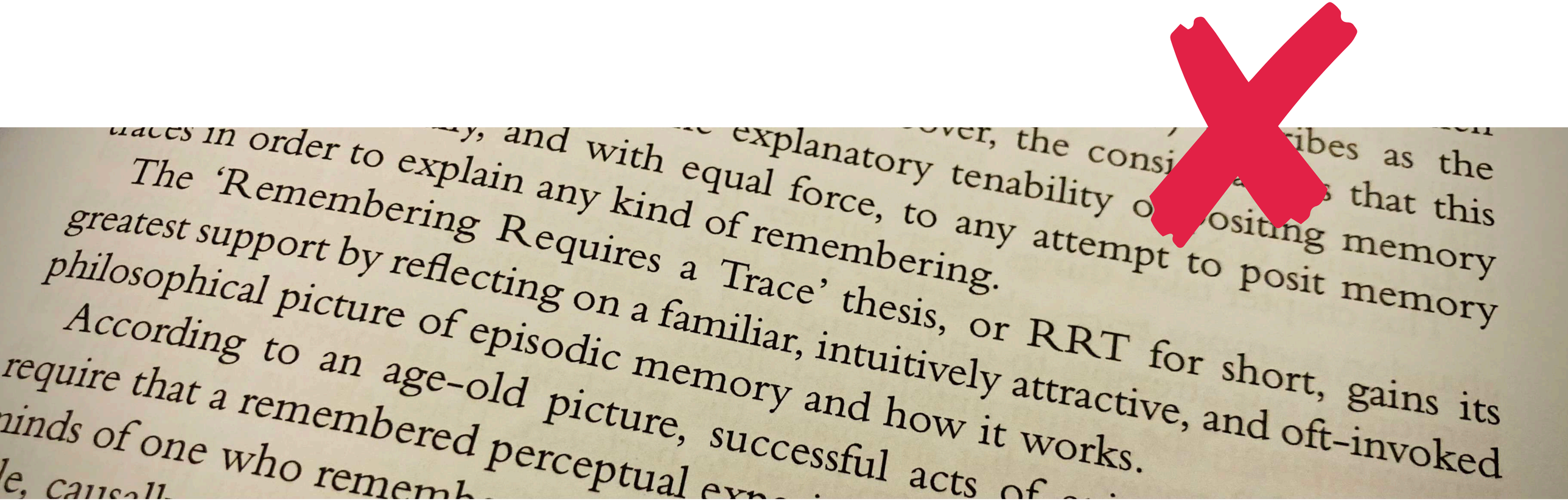
# Conceptual Ethics

Photograph: RichSTOCK/Alamy

# What should be the theoretical role of engrams?

**Mind the gap!**

- Engrams are part of the explanation of the counterfactual statement:
  - If S had not perceived E before, S would not be remembering E.
- Engrams are a good reason for keeping the CTM explanation of remembering.



traces in order to explain any kind of remembering.

The 'Remembering Requires a Trace' thesis, or RRT for short, gains its greatest support by reflecting on a familiar, intuitively attractive, and oft-invoked philosophical picture of episodic memory and how it works.

According to an age-old picture, successful acts of

Hutto 2023, 61

**"The claim that remembering is sustained by a memory trace is a guiding assumption of empirical inquiry into the memory process. And, most importantly, it is an assumption that appears well confirmed by these inquiries."**

Robins 2017, 83

**"[...] there are a large number of memory phenomena for which explanations that do not postulate the existence of memory traces are definitively worse than explanations that do postulate them."**

De Brigard 2020, 23

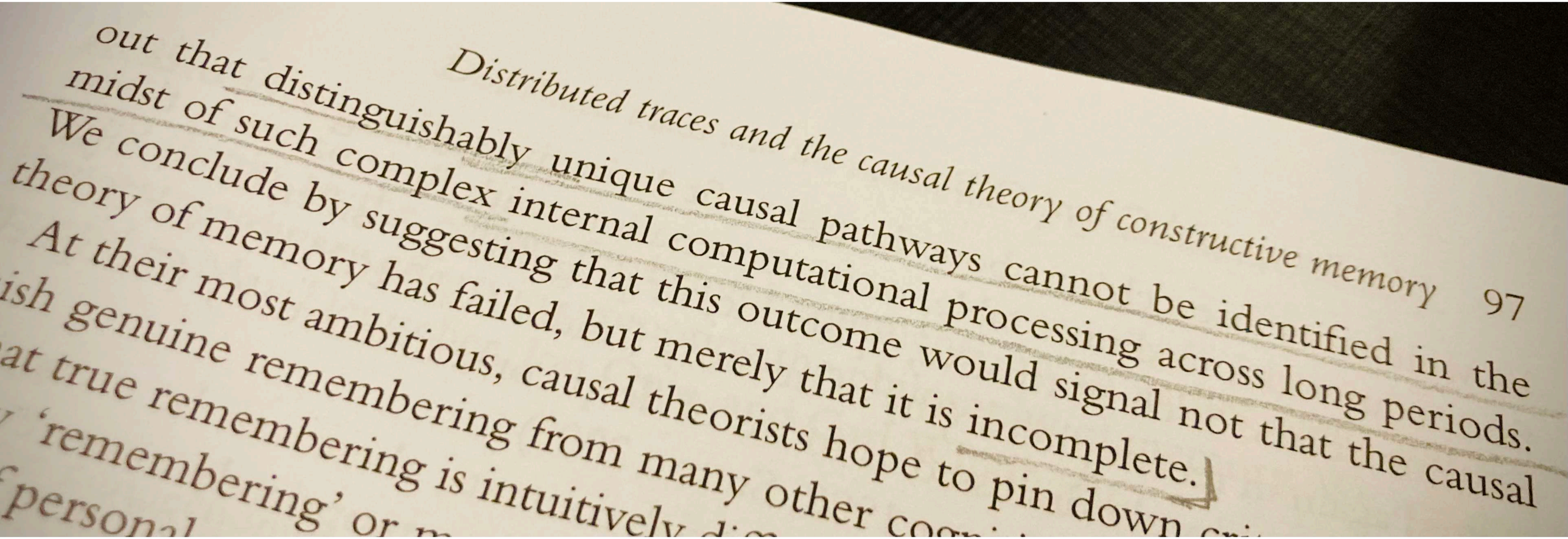
**"Memory traces are employed as theoretical entities, that is, as devices introduced in the context of a theory to explain some more accessible phenomenon. The status of the concept memory trace is like that of equator or center of gravity."**

Bernecker 2008, 45

earlier, about the scope of CTM in pragmatic contexts of remembering.

## 4.7 Causal theories in context: Pragmatics and development

The amounts and forms of similarity between patterns activated at experience and at retrieval vary substantially. Causal connections between experiences, memory traces, and acts of remembering are complex and variable. It may turn



*Distributed traces and the causal theory of constructive memory* 97

out that distinguishably unique causal pathways cannot be identified in the midst of such complex internal computational processing across long periods. We conclude by suggesting that this outcome would signal not that the causal theory of memory has failed, but merely that it is incomplete.

At their most ambitious, causal theorists hope to pin down

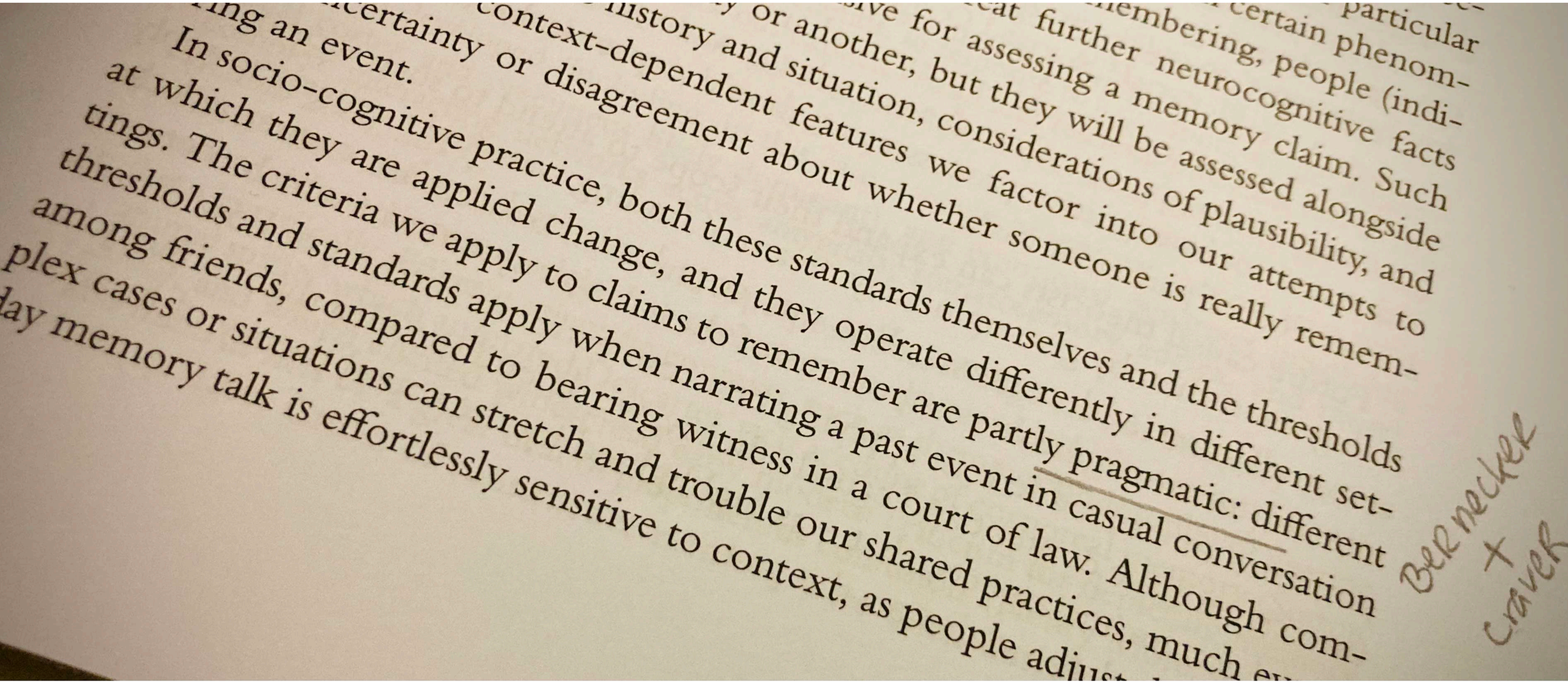
ish genuine remembering from many other

at true remembering is intuitively

'remembering' or

personal

Sutton & O'Brien 2023, 96–97



ing an event.

In socio-cognitive practice, both these standards themselves and the thresholds at which they are applied change, and they operate differently in different settings. The criteria we apply to claims to remember are partly pragmatic: different thresholds and standards apply when narrating a past event in casual conversation among friends, compared to bearing witness in a court of law. Although complex cases or situations can stretch and trouble our shared practices, much ev

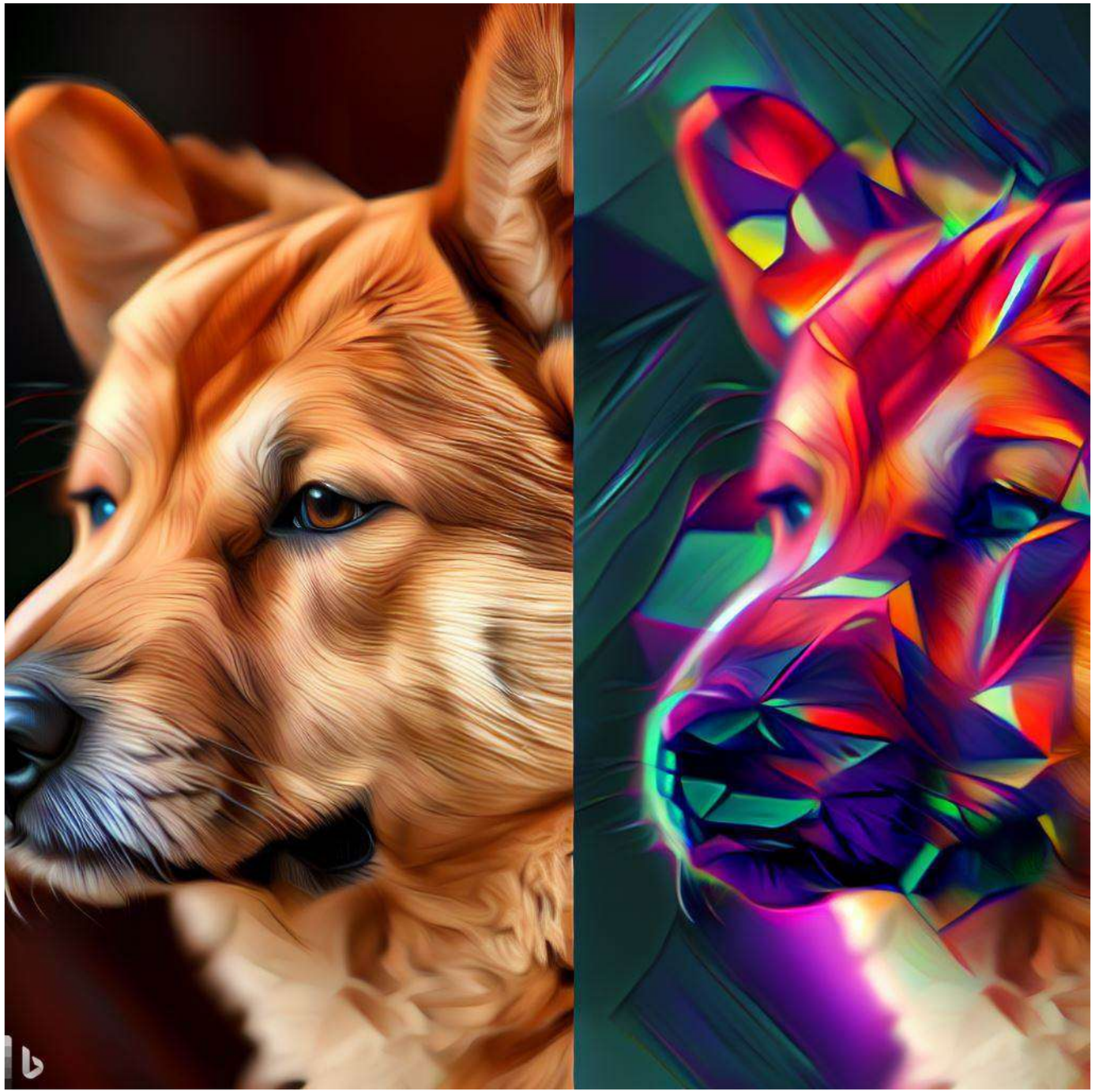
Bernecker + Craver

Sutton & O'Brien 2023, 97

**"[...] the intentional stance, in which one treats the system whose behavior is to be predicted as a rational agent; one attributes to the system the beliefs and desires it ought to have, given its place in the world and its purpose, and then predicts that it will act to further its goals in the light of its beliefs."**

Dennett 1988, 496

This is a good image for finding Fido, the missing doggo.



This is a good picture to decorate your office if you want to remind Fido while at work. (See Bernecker 2008,

**"One of the factors that figures in the subject context of remembering is the agent's intention. If a rememberer is trying to give a verbatim account of what he thought or experienced, he thereby raises the standards for fulfilling the truth condition of memory. If, however, the rememberer is trying only for a rough account of what he thought or experienced, he thereby lowers the standards for meeting the truth condition."**

Bernecker 2008, 173

# Conceptual Engineering

(✓) keep *CTM*
(  ) ameliorate
(  ) replace
(  ) eliminate

ted traces and the causal theory of constructi
memory
JOHN SUTTON AND GERARD O'BRIEN
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*Study Questions for Part II* 106

**PART III**
**What is the nature of mnemonic confabulation?**

**5 An explanationist model of (false) memory**
SVEN BERNECKER

**6 Towards a virtue-theoretic account of confabulation**
KOURKEN MICHAELIAN
*Further Readings for Part III* 145
*Study Questions for Part III* 146

IV
s the funct

# Genealogy

"A neurologist enters a hospital room and approaches an older man sitting up in bed. The neurologist greets him, examines his chart, and after a brief chat in which the man reports feeling fine, asks him what he did over the weekend. The man offers in response a long, coherent description of his going to a professional conference in New York City and planning a project with a large research team, all of which the doctor writes down. The only problem with this narration is that the man has been in the hospital the entire weekend, in fact for the past three months."

Hirstein 2005, 1

| Retention of the past event? | Representation constructed by a reliable memory system? | The representation is accurate? | Belief in the reality of the past event? | Output |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| - | - | N | N | Confabulation (Hirstein 2005) |
| Y | - | N | - | Misremembering (Robins 2016) |
| N | - | N | - | Confabulation (Robins 2016) |
| - | Y | N | - | Misremembering (Michaelian 2016) |
| - | N | Y or N | - | Veridical or falsidical confabulation (Michaelian 2016) |

Theories for the Varieties of Memory Errors

# The DRM effect

**When you retrieve inaccurately because you construct-by-retention**

- At t1, you hear your friend talking about Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, The Who, and Pink Floyd—the greatest rock bands in 1971, in their opinion.
- At t2, your brain uses retained information from t1's event to construct a representation of your friend's opinion as being that the greatest bands of 1971 were Led Zeppelin, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Pink Floyd, *and T. Rex*.

# Conceptual Ethics

# Ethical issues

## The clinical and the philosophical projects

- How should a philosopher deal with a concept in use for treating people in distress and suffering?
- Mind the gap: the project of tagging a phenomenon as "confabulation" for clinical activities can be different from the project of parsing the several metaphysical and epistemological ways remembering can go wrong.

# Conceptual Engineering

(✓) keep *CTM for philosophical purposes*
(  ) ameliorate
(  ) replace
(  ) eliminate

6 **Towards a virtue-theoretic account of confabu**
KOURKEN MICHAELIAN

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**PART IV**
**What is the function of episodic memory?**

7 **Episodic memory: And what is it for?**
JOHANNES B. MAHR

8 **Episodic memory is not for the future**
SARAH K. ROBINS

*Further Readings for Part IV* 185
*Study Questions for Part IV*

RT V

# Genealogy

**"[...] there is, perhaps, nothing more frightening and more sinister in the whole prehistory of man than his *technique for remembering things*."**

Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 2nd Essay, §3, trans. Douglas Smith

"On the one hand, if there were no way to ensure that signals were reliable (in the face of possible deception and incompetence), then listeners would soon stop paying attention to them. On the other hand, if speakers had no way of influencing their listeners' mental state effectively and to their benefit, they would stop sending messages (Sperber 2001). On this basis, Sperber et al. (2010) argued that we should expect humans to have evolved a suite of capacities that let us – as receivers – scrutinize communicated information for its veracity through assessing both its content and its source. The mechanisms allowing us to do this are collectively referred to as epistemic vigilance."

Mahr & Csibra 2018, 9

**"[...] if episodic simulation indeed produces mental imagery, it remains unclear how the non-imagistic aspects of its outputs become cognitively determined. In this article, I argue that there are (at least) four such non-imagistic 'dimensions' of episodic simulation: specificity, temporal orientation, subjectivity, and factuality.**

Mahr 2020, 1

# Conceptual Ethics

# How to think about remembering as cognition?

**Hint: Use Kant's intuitions+concepts structure**

- Images without concepts are undetermined. Concepts without sensations are empty.
- When thinking about the structure of remembering, consider that (1) it represents external objects imagistically and (3) it presents the images of the external objects as if they were particular, past, actual, and personal.
- Suppose STM. It explains the production of the image. Still, it does not explain the non-imagistic element of remembering.

# Conceptual Engineering

( ) keep
(✓) ameliorate *STM*
( ) replace
( ) eliminate

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**PART V**
**Do non-human animals have episodic memory?**

9 **Episodic memory in animals: Optimism, kind sceptic and pluralism**
ALEXANDRIA BOYLE

10 **What does it take to remember episodically?**
NAZIM KEVEN

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*Study Questions for Part V* 224

# Genealogy

'The human being might ask the animal: "Why do you just look at me like that instead of telling me about your happiness?" The animal wanted to answer, "Because I always immediately forget what I wanted to say"—but it had already forgotten this answer and hence said nothing, so that the human being was left to wonder.'

Nietzsche, "On the Utility and Liability of History for Life" §2, transl. Richard T. Gray

# Conceptual Ethics

# The question about non-human episodic remembering

## Respect the difference

- An unsound syllogism: Humans are [? superior] to other animals; Humans remember episodically; Therefore, remembering episodically is a mark of superiority.
- A guilty syllogism: All animals are equal; [? Remembering episodically is a mark of superiority]; Therefore, ???.
- An ecological syllogism: The function of a cognitive power is explainable by survival scaffoldings and pressures; Language is a scaffold that explains episodic remembering structure (sensory + non-sensory information); The social (labor division) survival strategy of humans explains the cognitive structure of episodic remembering.

sceptics and optimists. I suggest that this disagreement is not primarily about whether there are differences between human and non-human memory. Rather, it is about what episodic memory is, and what it would take for animals to have it. In Section 9.5, I consider how we might make progress. I argue that ques-
tions about the delineation of episodic mem

Boyle 2023, 189

# Conceptual Engineering

from a sparser characterisation of episodic memory to be more inclusive

that comparative psychology could benefit from such a characterisation, but that sparse characterisation deserves its own name to avoid unnecessary terminological confusion. In fact, kind sceptics already offer a sparse characterisation, namely event memory, and carefully distinguish it from episodic memory.

Boyle, however, insists on calling that sparse characterisation episodic memory and argues that kind sceptics set the bar too high when they define episodic memory. She seems to overlook the opposite problem, though. If comparative psychologists operate with a sparse characterisation of episodic memory, there could be instances where some animals thought to have episodic memory may not actually have it. If researchers set the bar too low, then there could be many false positives. Among other potential problems, this could have detrimental effects for biomedical fields in which animals are used as model organisms. Although Boyle

Keven 2023, 209

(✓) keep *Mahr's ecological explanation*
(  ) ameliorate
(  ) replace
(  ) eliminate

PART VI
**Does episodic memory give us knowledge of the past?**

**11 The epistemology of episodic memory**
THOMAS D. SENOR

**12 You don't know what happened**
MATTHEW FRISE

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*Study Questions for Part VI* 260

# Genealogy

NOÛS

NOÛS 00:0 (2017) 1–24
doi: 10.1111/nous.12211

# *Nothing at Stake in Knowledge**

DAVID ROSE
Rutgers University

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University of Pittsburgh

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Rutgers University

MARIO ALAI
University of Urbino

ADRIANO ANGELUCCI
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Review of Philosophy and Psychology
https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-023-00687-9

EDITORIAL

# Editorial: Cultural Variation and Cognition

**Edouard Machery[1] · Joshua Knobe[2] · Stephen P. Stich[3]**

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Review of Philosophy and Psychology
https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-023-00683-z

# Difference and Robustness in the Patterns of Philosophical Intuition Across Demographic Groups

**Joshua Knobe**[1]

Accepted: 28 April 2023
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## Abstract

In a recent paper, I argued that philosophical intuitions are surprisingly robust both across demographic groups and across development. Machery and Stich reply by reviewing a series of studies that do show significant differences in philosophical intuition between different demographic groups. This is a helpful point, which gets at precisely the issues that are most relevant here. However, even when one looks at those very studies, one finds truly surprising robustness. In other words, despite the presence of statistically significant differences between demographic groups, a core finding coming out of those studies is that philosophical intuitions are surprisingly robust across demographic groups.

Philos Stud
https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-020-01581-1

# Experimental philosophy without intuitions: an illustration of why it fails

**Herman Cappelen**[1,2]

Accepted: 12 October 2020
© Springer Nature B.V. 2020

**Abstract** Machery's book is an effort to show how experimental philosophy can be valuable without the perephenelia of intuitions. I argue that the effort fails.

Episteme, 12, 1 (2015) 95–116 © Cambridge University Press
doi:10.1017/epi.2014.27

# ON NORMATIVITY AND EPISTEMIC INTUITIONS: FAILURE OF REPLICATION

HAMID SEYEDSAYAMDOST
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the experiments. Despite several different data sets and in various cases larger sample sizes, we failed to detect significant differences between the above-mentioned groups. Our results suggest that epistemic intuitions are more uniform across ethnic and socioeconomic groups than Weinberg *et al.* (2001) indicates. Given our data, we believe that the notion of differences in epistemic intuitions among different ethnic and socioeconomic groups advanced by Weinberg *et al.* (2001) and accepted by many researchers needs to be corrected.

PHILOSOPHICAL TOPICS
VOL. 29, NOS. 1 & 2, SPRING AND FALL 2001

# *Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions*

Jonathan M. Weinberg
*Indiana University*

Shaun Nichols
*College of Charleston*

Stephen Stich
*Rutgers University*

I don't know the answer to that question. But I'll conclude with a bold suggestion: There is *episodic* memory knowledge that is not a form of *semantic* memory knowledge because it does not involve belief. Here is the idea.

S has non-doxastic episodic memory knowledge R of event E iff:

RELIABILITY

1. R is produced by processes that ~~accurately~~ depict S's original experience X,
2. X is an accurate depiction of event E ~~(this entails E occurred)~~, and
3. R has at least quasi-assertoric force for S (as it would if it were okayed by the endorsement mechanism).

Senor 2023, 238

# Conceptual Ethics

Should the word "knowledge" be used in an epistemological (rather than, e.g., social) way in the question about memory as a source of knowledge about the past?
Is it about justification? Or is it about sociability?

# Conceptual Engineering

( ) keep
( ) ameliorate
(✓) replace *with Mahr's ecological explanation*
( ) eliminate

# Conclusion

# Conclusions

**There is conceptual space for improving philosophy of memory**

- Ameliorate the (dis)continuism debate. The pragmatics deserves attention. Consider the possibility of a continuist causalism.
- Keep CTM's no-content traces view.
- Concerning confabulation, CTM has better explanatory power.
- On the function of episodic remembering, ecological views improve STM's descriptive power.
- On the issue of non-human episodic remembering, consider, again, the ecological explanations.
- On the issue of episodic remembering as a source of knowledge of the past, maybe justification should not be the first concern.

Thank
You