

Conflicts of Integration in Philosophy of Memory as Metalinguistic Negotiations

Talk @ MemLab

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Abstract

The idea

- In the last years, philosophy of memory became an established research area with established debates. Two of these debates are causalism versus simulationism and continuism versus discontinuism. These debates generated, as by-products, many conceptual and theoretical advances in the study of the metaphysics and epistemology of memory. Still, none of these debates have a clear winner. The stalemate situation in the case of both debates made some philosophers of memory wonder whether these debates were metaphilosophical. In the most promising higher-order reading of the above-mentioned debates, they are cases of conflict of integration rather than real disagreement. Concerning this proposal, I believe that theoretical integration at different levels of inquiry is a challenge, but by reading these disputes as metalinguistic negotiations, we find space for substantive disagreement between the participants of these debates.

The philosophy of memory

In the last years, philosophy of memory became an established research area with established debates.

- The philosophy of memory is an established research area with key publications in important academic publishing houses, such as Routledge, and key academic venues, such as the Bochum-Grenoble Memory Colloquium (<https://www.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/phil-lang/BochumGrenobleColloquium.html>, <https://phil-mem.org/seminars/bochum-grenoble.php>).
- The philosophers of memory debate issues as the nature of memory, the metaphysics of memory, the relationship between memory and meaning, the relationship between memory and the self, the relationship between memory and time, the relationship between memory and society, the epistemology of memory, the ethics of memory, and the history of the philosophy of memory.

Debates between philosophers of memory

Two of these debates are causalism versus simulationism and continuism versus discontinuism.

- The causalism versus simulationism debate. Causalists argue that a representation must be causally connected to the original event it represents. This means that for a mental state to be considered a memory, it must have been caused in the right way by the event it represents. Simulationists, on the other hand, argue that remembering involves the ability to simulate or recreate past events mentally. The simulationists emphasize the reconstructive nature of memory and the role of imagination in remembering.
- The (dis)continuism debate. This debate revolves around whether there is a fundamental difference between episodic memory (remembering the past) and episodic future thought (imagining the future). The debate is not just about the processes involved in remembering and imagining, but also about the attitudes associated with these mental activities. The debate has been framed in terms of processual (dis)continuism, which concerns the processes of remembering and imagining, and attitudinal (dis)continuism, which concerns the attitudes involved in remembering the past and imagining the future.

Lateral progress

These debates generated, as by-products, many conceptual and theoretical advances in the study of the metaphysics and epistemology of memory.

- The concept of ignorant remembering (Bernecker 2010).
- The application of the concept of experiential awareness to mental time travel (Debus 2014).
- Misremembering as a normal output of the memory construction system (De Brigard 2014).
- The notion of information effect (Michaelian 2016).
- Procedural causalism (Perrin 2018) and trace minimalism (Werning 2020).

Stalemate

Still, none of these debates have a clear winner.

- The causalism versus simulationism and the (dis)continuism debates: stalemate.

Let's go meta- ?

The stalemate situation in the case of both debates made some philosophers of memory wonder whether these debates were metaphilosophical.

- Epistemic remembering and empirical remembering? (Craver 2020)
- Explanatory contextualism? (McCarroll, Michaelian, and Nanay 2022)
- Circularity? (Bernecker 2023)
- Integration conflict? (Openshaw, forthcoming)

Integration conflicts

In the most promising higher-order reading of the above-mentioned debates, they are cases of conflict of integration rather than real disagreement.

- Openshaw, forthcoming.

Going metalinguistic!

Concerning this proposal, I believe that theoretical integration at different levels of inquiry is a challenge, but by reading these disputes as metalinguistic negotiations, we find space for substantive disagreement between the participants of these debates.

- Some indicators to justify the metalinguistic interpretation of a debate:
 - The condition of dispute: There is an ongoing dispute about the meaning of a term.
 - The condition of disagreement: There is an expression of disagreement between the debaters.
 - The condition of equivocation: There is evidence that the debaters understand the disputed terms differently.
 - The condition of normativity: The appeal to the current meaning of the term in dispute does not end the debate.
- If this set of conditions is satisfied, then the dispute can be interpreted as being normative, as it concerns not the current meaning of a term, but what the term should mean.