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Memory Matters: An Epistemological and Cognitive Inquiry

I propose *Memory Matters: An Epistemological and Cognitive Inquiry* as the theme for next year's graduate conference because it captures something both timeless and timely.

Memory is one of those concepts that seems simple until you start thinking about it philosophically. It's what connects our knowledge across time, the invisible thread that ties judgment, identity, and collective understanding together. Yet as soon as we ask how memory works, what it preserves, how it justifies, and why it sometimes deceives, we find ourselves in a labyrinth of epistemological and psychological puzzles.

Memory is not a fixed archive; it is a reconstructive, dynamic process that reshapes the past in light of the present. It doesn't only preserve knowledge — it can generate it. Remembering becomes an act of predicting and reinterpreting experience.

Over the course of a year, it would allow us to explore how memory sustains, transforms, and sometimes undermines knowledge and how, in a world increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, remembering itself becomes a philosophical action.

Let's turn to the different topics and readings

I would propose five main chapters/topics with various texts that we could read throughout the year:

1. Extended, Distributed and Collective Memory

2. Memory and Personal Identity

3. Memory malfunctions

4. Predictive processing and memory

5. Preservationism and Generativism of memory

Extended, Distributed and Collective Memory

Extended Memory

Memory now often exists outside the human brain: in cloud storage, databases, and neural networks. This fits with the extended mind hypothesis (Clark & Chalmers, 1998): memory can be distributed across systems, human and artificial.

- Carter, J. Adam & Kallestrup, Jesper (2016). Extended cognition and propositional memory. Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 92 (3):691-714.
- Andy Clark & David Chalmers, "The Extended Mind" (*Analysis*, 1998)

Distributed Memory

Human memory is diverse, involving neural systems, bodily actions, and external resources, reflecting the "distributed" view that remembering extends beyond the brain.

- Michaelian, K., Sutton, J. Distributed Cognition and Memory Research: History and Current Directions. *Rev.Phil.Psych.* 4, 1–24 (2013). https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-013-0131-x

Collective Memory

Shared intentionality:

- Tomasello, Michael ; Carpenter, Malinda ; Call, Josep ; Behne, Tanya & Moll, Henrike (2005). Understanding and sharing intentions: The origins of cultural cognition. Behavioral and Brain Sciences 28 (5):675-691.

Memory and Personal Identity

Personal Identity

- Is Memory Merely Testimony from One's Former Self? David James Barnett. The Philosophical Review (2015) 124 (3): 353–392. https://doi.org/10.1215/00318108-2895337

Self Memory System

"The Self-Memory System (SMS) is a conceptual framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of self and memory. Within this framework memory is viewed as the data base of the self." (Conway, 2005)

- Martin A. Conway, Memory and the self, Journal of Memory and Language, Volume 53, Issue 4, 2005, Pages 594-628,https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jml.2005.08.005.

Memory for Agency

- Khalidi, Muhammad Ali (forthcoming). Memory for Agency: A Proposal for the Function of Episodic Memory. Review of Philosophy and Psychology.

Memory malfunctions

"[...] ordinary cases of misremembering should not be seen as instances of memory's malfunction, but rather as the normal result of a larger cognitive system that performs a different function, and for which remembering is just one operation." (De Brigard, 2014)

- De Brigard, Felipe (2014). Is memory for remembering? Recollection as a form of episodic hypothetical thinking. Synthese 191 (2):155-185.

- "Forgetting,"New Directions in the Philosophy of Memory, edited by Kourken Michaelian,Dorothea Debus, and Denis Perrin. Routledge, pp.223–240(2018)

Predictive processing and memory

Predictive processing in language: Concepts

"Within this framework, concepts are viewed as generative models which play a key role in minimizing prediction errors and making sense of sensory data in a given context." (Nikolova, 2025)

→ Concepts aid in making predictions, facilitating perception and understanding, and make the world more predictable

- Nikolova, D. (2025). Predictive Processing Theory in Mind Studies: Cross Points with 4E Cognition and Cognitive Linguistics. Open Journal of Philosophy, 15, 349-366. https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2025.152021
- França, T. F. A. Predictive processing: Is the future just a memory? *European Journal of Neuroscience.* https://doi.org/10.1111/ejn.14874

Preservationism and Generativism of memory

Preservationism (i.e. memory is just a preservation of non-memorial knowledge), generativism (i.e. memory can itself create new knowledge not derived from other sources of knowledge)" (Limbeck-Lilienau, 2025)

- Miyazono, K., & Tooming, U. (2025). A preservation/generation distinction about memory. *Asian Journal of Philosophy, 4*, 69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44204-025-00292-w

Generativism of memory

- Lackey, J. (2005). Memory as a generative epistemic source. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 70*, 636–658. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2005.tb00418.x
- Boyle, A. (2019). Learning from the Past: Epistemic Generativity and the Function of Episodic Memory. Journal of Consciousness Studies 26 (5-6):242-251

Preservationism of memory

- Senor, T. D. (2007). Preserving Preservationism: A Reply to Lackey. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *74*(1), 199–208. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40041033
- "Preservationism in the Epistemology of Memory,"ThePhilosophical Quarterly67 (268): 486–507,(2017)

Fun Excursion to Reliability and Epistemic Justification?

- Williamson, Timothy (2002). Knowledge and its Limits. Oxford, GB: Oxford University Press.
- Further ideas of relevant papers?!

Why Care About This Topic?

ChatGPT's Take:

1. Because it's the only topic where philosophy of mind, epistemology, and neuroscience all flirt shamelessly.
2. Because philosophers secretly love unreliable data. Memory gives them an excuse to philosophize about how we can know anything when our minds are basically creative fiction writers.
3. Because collective memory is now algorithmically curated. TikTok decides what humanity remembers. We're living in a world where attention, nostalgia, and algorithmic memory shape history itself.

My Perspective:

1. Memory is one of our primary sources of knowledge, alongside perception, inference, and testimony. Understanding how memory contributes to justification, belief, and knowledge is central to any theory of epistemic reliability and the continuity of belief over time.
2. Memory is not only individual but socially and culturally embedded, as exemplified by collective memory and algorithmic curation.
3. Cross-disciplinary engagement between analytic epistemology, philosophy of mind, and cognitive science is essential for a nuanced understanding of memory.
4. Digital technologies are fundamentally transforming the conditions of remembering and forgetting.

Possible speakers

Philosophy

- Rebecca Dreier, BA, MA (London School of Economic and Political Science) https://www.lse.ac.uk/people/rebecca-dreier
- Mag. Dr. Christoph Limbeck-Lilienau (Institut Wiener Kreis)
- Oliver Lukitsch, BSc MSc (Universität Wien)
- Doroteya Nikolova (Sofia University) https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2790-511X
- Anny Räty, Phd (University of Vienna)

- Prof. Thomas D Senor (University of Arkansas) https://philosophy.uark.edu/directory/?uid=senor
- Alexandria Boyle (London School of Economics) https://philpeople.org/profiles/alexandria-boyle
- Matthew Frise (Milwauke School of Engineering), Assistant Prof., https://sites.google.com/site/matthewfrise/home
- Further ideas?

Cognitive Science

- More to come!

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Literature

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