

# BOOK REVIEW

---

## *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*

EDITED BY FIONA MACPHERSON AND FABIAN DORSCH

Oxford University Press, 2018. xiv + 254 pp.

Perception, memory and imagination are profoundly intertwined in all sorts of difficult ways. Perception, for instance, seems to provide the building blocks of many of our memories, but also of many of our imaginations; likewise, memory plays a central role in imagination and can influence the contents of perception. With *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, editors Fiona Macpherson and Fabian Dorsch give us a useful volume with 10 chapters (plus an introduction) aimed at helping us clarify these intricate relationships. The book is divided in two parts. Part I comprises five chapters on the nature of perceptual imagination and perceptual memory, while Part II, also comprised of five chapters, deals with the epistemic role of imagination and memory. As I mention below, this distinction is somewhat arbitrary, as only Chapters 10 and 11 seem to deal directly with epistemology, and neither of them discusses memory, only imagination. Nevertheless, as is common with these topics, oftentimes the boundaries between philosophy of mind and epistemology are vague, and one can easily draw epistemic implications from reading several of the chapters included in the volume.

The first chapter of Part I, by Richard A.H. King, discusses Aristotle's distinction between *phantasia* (regularly translated as 'imagination') and memory. To understand the contrast between these two, King proposes to frame the discussion in terms of two possible readings: 'the activist' and 'the phenomenalist'. Roughly, for the activist, the difference lies in that in remembering, we are doing something other than what we do when we are imagining. By contrast, for the phenomenalist, the difference rests in the fact that memories and imaginings appear different to the subject. I must confess I didn't find this framing terribly useful, in part because it does not clarify whether we are talking about memory and imagination qua faculties, processes or mental events (De Brigard 2017). Presumably, one could be an activist with regard to memory and imagination qua cognitive processes, but a phenomenalist with regard to memory and imagination qua individual mental states. Moreover, I found other aspects of the discussion a bit lacking, as the fact that the author emphasizes the role of assent in recollection, as opposed to imagining, with little discussion of the casual role involved in the notion of *aikon* as an image that not only resembles but is also suitably caused by that which it resembles, versus mere *phantasmata* which resemble their objects without having been caused by them (Sorabji 1972).

In the next chapter, Dominic Gregory deals with an interesting question: when we have a recollection involving sensory images, are we remembering a particular spatio-temporal 'external' episode or are we remembering a certain 'internal' experience of the episode? This external/internal dichotomy suggests that these two kinds of memories

involve different types of representational contents. In fact, some have made use of this distinction to explain how, for instance, one can have observer memories that do represent a particular past episode without its being re-experienced from the original point-of-view. Gregory, however, argues that there need not be such a distinction between internal and external memories, and that the same kind of sensory images can feature in both sorts of recollections. The discussion about the consequences of blurring this distinction for the notion of veridical and genuine observer memories is also useful, and dovetails nicely with recent philosophical work on this topic (McCarroll 2018).

The nature of episodic memory is discussed in Chapter 4, where Robert Hopkins argues for what he calls the ‘Inclusion View’, according to which ‘episodic remembering is imagining controlled by the past’ (47). He contrasts this view with the ‘Common Component View’, according to which remembering and imagining share a common component – imagery – even though they are distinct, and the ‘No Overlap View’, according to which, despite their similarities, remembering and imagining share no components. For many of us working at the juncture between the philosophy and science of memory, the idea that memory and imagination are profoundly intertwined is basically a truism, but to pinpoint exactly what they have in common is no easy task. Hopkins’s article presents a number of challenges to the Common Component View that – he argues – are better handled by the Inclusion View. Researchers may disagree with the details of such challenges, yet I believe they are novel, useful and thought-provoking. Perhaps my only complaint is that, in defending the Inclusion View with ‘armchair’ phenomenology, Hopkins puts too much emphasis on the experiential similarities between remembering and imagining and very little – if any – on the differences. Sometimes the systematic recording of phenomenological differences (cf. Dennett’s heterophenomenology (Dennett 2003)), the way cognitive psychology does it, reveals differences we don’t identify through single subject introspection, and there is substantial empirical work reporting critical differences in the phenomenology of remembering versus imagining (e.g. Johnson 2006).

When we remember, we take our recollective experience to present to us how things were in the past. This is not the case, however, when we imagine. Philosophers have offered different accounts as to what it is about memory, as opposed to imagination, that entitle us to make such claims about the past: from Hume’s vivacity criterion to James’s sense of familiarity, to Russell’s feelings of pastness. In Chapter 5, Dorothea Debus throws her hat in the ring with a different account. She suggests that recollective memories, as opposed to sensory imaginations, provide us with reasons to take the experienced contents as telling us how things were in the past because they are embedded in a reasonably detailed autobiographical narrative. Although Debus’s view resembles coherentist theories of mnemonic justification (e.g. Lewis 1946), it likely avoids some of their pitfalls as she puts further causal and narrative constraints on the nature of the belief set in which our recollective experience is embedded. Her account also has the advantage of offering convincing explanations as to why, sometimes, false and distorted memories are wrongly judged as telling us something about the past.

Section I ends with a long chapter by Paul Noordhof on imaginative content. Unlike the previous chapters that dealt with the imaginative contents in memory as opposed to imagination, this one deals with differences between imaginative contents in imagination versus perception. This is a rich and complex chapter, not suitable for the

uninitiated, as it involves detailed discussions of subtle claims made by a handful of philosophers, some of which hadn't even been published at the time the current volume hit the shelves. If I understand correctly, the purpose of the chapter is to try to figure out, on the basis of the phenomenological content of our sensuous imaginings, what may be the nature of the properties that give rise to such contents. The verdict is that (a version of) representationalism fares better than non-representational rationalism, so readers who are interested in defending direct realism for memory may find this chapter relevant for their research.

Section II starts with Chapter 7, by Derek Brown, where he defends the thesis that 'most if not all perceptual experiences are infused with imagination' (133), whereby to be infused with imagination is for a perceptual experience to arise 'in part from self-generated ingredients that have ampliative effect on its phenomenal and directed elements' (138). This thesis contrasts with the view that when we perceive, everything is decided by the environment; that nothing is 'made up', as it were, by us. *Prima facie*, one might think that the author is putting forth an argument for the cognitive penetration of imagination on perception. Well, not quite. He does argue that cognition may causally initiate the imaginative contribution on perception, but cognition itself does not become part of the resulting perceptual state. In fact, he even speculates, via arguments based on well-known examples of poverty of stimulus in vision, such as amodal completion (Nanay 2010), that the imaginative contributions to perception may sometimes be fully independent of top-down, cognitive processes.

Robert Briscoe argues for a different take in Chapter 8. He discusses what he calls 'make-perceive experiences', which involve both bottom-up perception and top-down imagination. He first makes a case for make-perceive experiences by discussing instances in which these sorts of mental events help with problem solving (I highly recommend his discussion of Hutchins's (1995) example of the Caroline islanders of Micronesia!). But next, he moves to the kind of examples that Brown clearly interpreted as contributions of imagination to perception, in order to argue instead that such cases – e.g. amodal cognition – are *not* cases of make-perceive experiences, but rather clear instances of good-old bottom-up perception. It is not hard to think that Brown and Briscoe are using imagination in different senses here, but then again, it is not easy either to put a finger on exactly how they differ.

The theme of the precise relationship between perception and imagination is also pursued by Gregory Currie in Chapter 9, but now as it applies to film. Specifically, Currie seeks to understand the phenomenon of 'fictive dominance', which typically occurs when, in watching a movie, we see fictional characters while watching real actors. How do we keep track of the fictional world we see in the film while our vision is merely processing the scenes on the screen? An attractive answer is to say that there are two things going on: the fictional story is imagined, and the actual scenes are visually processed. Another view, in line with the Kantian/Strawsonian approach Brown reminded us about two chapters before, is to say that, in watching a movie, our perception is 'suffused with imagination' (189). But Currie is going to reject both views to argue instead for a kind of two-tiered process inspired by work on attention and object tracking. Readers interested in the role of attention during imagination would find the article interesting and, if you are like me, you may also find yourself wanting to watch – or re-watch – some of the films discussed therein.

While the previous chapters deal only marginally with epistemological issues pertaining imagination, the last two address them directly. In Chapter 10, Magdalena Balcerak Jackson tackles the question as to whether imagination could be a source of epistemic justification and, thereby, a source of knowledge. A traditional view holds that imagination cannot teach us anything we didn't already know, as the contents of our imaginations are 'up to us' (212). Balcerak Jackson, however, argues that at least a particular kind of imagination she dubs 'recreativist' can provide us with 'phenomenal evidence', which in turn can help us justify certain insights into metaphysical possibilities. Her argument does not apply to all kinds of imagination: only to imaginings that are tightly related to perception. Although her reasoning is airtight and convincing, I couldn't help but notice that there is an important missing step: the relationship between my perceiving a particular object and, later on, my imagining it – however recreatively – is mediated by the memory in which the encoded perception resides. I wonder, then, to what extent the reliability and fallibility of our recreative imagination depend, not only on the reliability and fallibility of the original perception, but also on the reliability and fallibility of our memory, which not only encodes and stores the original perception but also retrieves it when we employ our imagination to recreate it. Despite this lacuna, this article is a delight to read, and it is an essential reading for anyone interested in modal epistemology.

The final chapter, by Amy Kind, also discusses the question of whether imagination can justify beliefs. However, unlike Balcerak Jackson, Kind's focus is not on whether imagination can justify beliefs about metaphysical possibilities, but rather whether it can justify belief about contingent facts in the real world (228). For many, this thought may be preposterous: whatever epistemic value imagination may have, it is either limited to what's merely possible or, if related to the actual, it is at best confined to the context of discovery – e.g. Einstein's musings about riding alongside a beam of light – never to that of justification. Kind disagrees and argues against this 'charge of epistemic irrelevance' against imagination. Using as examples the ways in which Nikola Tesla and Temple Grandin employed their imaginative capacities to run mental simulations upon which to test and, thus, justify their engineering inventions, Kind explores the ways in which imagination can actually help us to justify beliefs about contingent facts in real-world situations. The discussion is certainly compelling, and dovetails nicely with recent views suggesting that causal reasoning depends on our capacity to generate offline mental simulations of counterfactual events ([Gerstenberg et al. forthcoming](#)). I wonder to what extent the epistemic role of imagination Kind argues for is itself constrained by causal reasoning.

In sum, *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory* offers a somewhat mixed collection of articles for different researchers with distinct inclinations and backgrounds. Except for a few chapters, both philosophically minded scientists and scientifically minded philosophers will find themselves in unfamiliar territory. Indeed, readers who are not deeply imbedded in the philosophical debates will find certain chapters utterly inscrutable. As such, it is not recommended for researchers who are only beginning to study these topics, or who seek deep connections between the science and philosophy of memory and imagination – although, again, some chapters in the second part include intriguing discussions of the empirical literature. None of this, of

course, detracts from the value of this volume. Memory and imagination are such central issues in epistemology, metaphysics and the philosophy of mind, that I bet there is already plenty of readership for it.

FELIPE DE BRIGARD  
 Duke University  
 Durham, NC 27708, USA  
 felipe.debrigard@duke.edu

### References

- De Brigard, F. 2017. Memory and imagination. In *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory*, eds. S. Bernecker and K. Michaelian, 127–40. London: Routledge Press.
- Dennett, D. 2003. Who's on first? Heterophenomenology explained. *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 10: 19–30.
- Gerstenberg, T., N. Goodman, D. Lagnado and J. Tenenbaum. forthcoming. A counterfactual simulation model of causal judgment. *Psychological Review*, doi 10.31234/osf.io/7zj94.
- Hutchins, E. 1995. *Cognition in the Wild*. London: MIT Press.
- Johnson, M.K. 2006. Memory and reality. *American Psychologist* 61: 760–71.
- Lewis, C.I. 1946. *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. LaSalle: Open Court.
- McCarroll, C. 2018. *Remembering from the Outside: Personal Memory and the Perspectival Mind*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Nanay, B. 2010. Perception and imagination: amodal perception as mental imagery. *Philosophical Studies* 150: 239–54.
- Sorabji, R. 1972. Aristotle, mathematics, and colour. *Classical Quarterly* 22: 293–308.