

Thinking through The Past: Reid on the Epistemic Value of Memory

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Book Abstract

Memory is essential to our functioning as fully developed, social individuals. Being in the world presupposes our remembering most of what we did; without access to this information, we would be unable to process and acquire any kind of knowledge about ourselves, the world we live in, and everyone else around us. Memory, however, is often unreliable. So, a basic philosophical question arises: can memory give us knowledge of the past? My monograph will address this question by using an innovative approach integrating the study of the history of philosophy with empirical resources from psychology and cognitive science. The starting point of my current research is Reid's philosophical. Methodologically, I will combine a thorough interpretation of his revolutionary break with his predecessors' representationalism with a philosophical analysis of contemporary research on the value of memory. What emerges is a Reidian account on which memory is *required* for our knowledge of the present, not just the past. Concretely, the book explores three related issues. The first topic relates to investigating what memory is about: the past, the present, or both? I argue that memory itself is partly constituting our perception of the external world and our awareness of the internal one. The second topic investigates the ways in which memory is supposed to give us access to past events and objects that we once perceived or were conscious of. Finally, I turn my attention to understanding how I have knowledge that all the memories that seem to be mine are, indeed, mine. The upshot is that our past and present collide in very unexpected ways to allow us to develop a complete representation of the world.

Descriptive Table of Contents for *Thinking through The Past*

Introduction: Setting up the problem, motivation

Part 1: The objects of memory

1. **Events as objects of memory:** I discuss the distinction between external events, experienced via perception, and internal events, experienced via consciousness, drawn by Reid.
2. **Knowing the present depends on remembering the past:** I explain that memory is essential for experiencing both types of events.

Part 2: The proto-conceptual structure of memory

3. **Types of conception:** I explain that, for Reid, the conception employed by perception, memory, and imagination varies on a spectrum: from non-conceptual in perception, proto-conceptual in memory, to fully conceptual in imagination.
4. **Memorial conception:** I argue that we remember both external and internal events by pinning down some of their descriptive elements.

Part 3: Memory and self-knowledge

5. **Locke and Reid on memory and self-consciousness:** Although memory cannot be the criterion of personal identity, as Locke envisioned, it is essential for keeping all representations of the self together, as Reid, in my interpretation, argues.

6. **Memory's role in self-knowledge:** Memory, I argue, enables us to have first-personal representations of mental events.

Conclusion: I discuss the significance of this theory of memory.