

On the Difference Between Episodic and Autobiographical Memories

Gabriel Zaccaro

Universidade Federal de Santa Maria

Is there a difference between recollecting episodes from the past and recalling autobiographically? Both in the philosophical and psychological literature, it does not seem that there is a consensus on whether autobiographical memories should be considered as a metaphysically equivalent concept to episodic memories or a different category of memory entirely. In this article, I give reasons to believe that autobiographical memories do not relate to the recollection of past episodes since they do not have an associated subjective experience and the consequential experience of mental time travel. Autobiographical memories, I argue, are presented as a narrative that is constructed propositionally, thus differing substantially from episodic memory in its subjective property, the reference to the self, and the content in which each one is grounded. To do so, first I use data from the psychological literature on amnesic patients as evidence for both the difference in phenomenology and content. And second, I use insights from recent philosophical literature on memory and the self, to defend that what is referred here as “autobiographical memory” is indeed a different kind of memory that differs substantially from episodic memory and slightly from semantic memory.¹

1 Introduction

hrough remembering, we can re-experience our past and this is particularly important for our own identity. But to what extent does the remembrance of past episodes contribute to the internal narrative of our lives? Let us suppose that we are asked to determine whether we are generally happy in our lives. To do so, would we have to remember all our happy past episodes, as opposed to the sad ones? Or, would our “happiness evaluation” result from a preconceived notion of “general happiness” available to us, based on the narrative of our lives? This question can be formulated differently to fit the philosophical debate: When we recall the narrative of our lives, do we use episodic information, semantic information, or both? What this problem seems to refer to is the doubt in whether we can differentiate clearly between episodic and autobiographical memories. Here, I defend the idea that remembering a life narrative, or autobiographical recalling, does not need to be represented through the remembrance of past episodes but can be a representation based on semantic information available to the individual. Furthermore, I intend to show that episodic and autobiographical memories can be distinguished based on their phenomenology. Although episodic remembering is an experience of mental

¹I would like to thank César Schirmer dos Santos for his comments on previous versions of this paper, as well as Eduardo Vicentini de Medeiros for some insightful discussions about the topic.

time travel, with the necessary awareness that the episode belongs to the subject's personal past (autonoesis), both mental time travel and autonoesis are not present in autobiographical memory. This claim is based on psychological research focused on the amnesic patient K.C. The studies of K.C.'s case suggest that although he cannot remember past episodes and create new ones, he can, to some extent, present semantic knowledge about his autobiography. This was primarily used by Tulving to identify the properties of the subjective experience of remembering.² However, Tulving left aside any conclusions about how this autobiographical semantic information could be used to compose K.C.'s life narrative. What I propose is that the semantic autobiographical knowledge that K.C. has is sufficient to account for a chronologically ordered life narrative.

The distinction proposed here considers both the type of content that constitutes each type of memory and the phenomenological nature of both memories. Concerning the content of which type of memory, I defend, differing from most of the philosophical literature, that autobiographical memory draws its content from semantic information. Concerning their phenomenology, I argue that while episodic memory has a distinct phenomenology characterized by auto-noetic consciousness, autobiographical memory, as is expected from semantic information, is not related to auto-noetic consciousness and mental time travel but can be more easily associated with noetic consciousness. To support my thesis, I will show in section 2 the definition of autonoesis and its necessity for episodic remembering. Then, in section 3, I will defend that autonoesis is not required for autobiographical recalling and that, therefore, it cannot consist of an experience of mental time travel. And finally, in section 4, I will defend the view in which autobiographical memory is a separate form of declarative memory, differing substantially from episodic memory and slightly from semantic memory.

The main argument of this article can be exposed as follows:

- (1) All episodic memory has an auto-noetic property (shown by the philosophical and psychological literature on memory).
- (2) Some autobiographical memory does not have an auto-noetic property (shown by the studies of the amnesic patient K.C).
- (3) If two entities are identical, then they must present identical properties. (Principle of indiscernibility of identicals).
- (4) Episodic memory and autobiographical memory differ in the auto-noetic property. (1,2)
- (5) ∴ Episodic memory is different from autobiographical memory. (3,4)

²Tulving, E., "Memory and Consciousness," *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 26, no. 1 (January 1985), 5-6.

Let: episodic memory = E, autobiographical memory = A,
 auto-noetic property = T, any property = P.

$$(1) \forall(x)[E(x) \rightarrow T(x)]$$

$$(2) \exists(y)[A(y) \wedge \sim T(y)]$$

$$(3) \forall(x)\forall(y)[x = y \rightarrow \forall P(P(x) \equiv P(y))]$$

$$(4) \forall(x)\forall(y)[E(x) \wedge A(y) \rightarrow \forall(T)(T(x) \equiv \sim T(y))] (1, 2)$$

$$(5) \therefore \forall(x)\forall(y)[(E(x) \wedge A(y)) \wedge \forall T(T(x) \equiv \sim T(y)) \rightarrow \sim (x = y)] (3, 4)$$

2 The Necessity of Auto-noetic Consciousness for Episodic Memory

The use of the terms “episodic memory” and “autobiographical memory” can vary widely within the philosophical and psychological debate. From their conceptual identification to their conceptual distinction, these terms have been used variably, and this can be a problem. And that is because there is no consensus on whether we should use the term “autobiographical” as meaning a mental representation of a narrative nature or an episodic nature. If we intend to widen our understanding of human memory and how it is related to a life narrative, solving this problem is of great importance. So, for the sake of clarification, in this section, I will show the definitions of two main categories of memory, episodic and semantic, and show that auto-noetic consciousness is necessary for episodic memory as viewed as an experience of mental time travel. In the next section, I will deal with autobiographical memory, its characterization, and present reasons why it is not related to auto-noetic consciousness or mental time travel.

2.1 Some Definitions on Types of Memories and Their Respective Consciousnesses

Episodic memory is defined as a present mental representation of past experiences with perceptual and temporal information that is accompanied by a state of consciousness, the so-called *auto-noetic consciousness* or *auto-noesis*.³ Episodic memory relates specifically to past *episodes* from the individual’s life, and its content is *perceptual*, meaning that it is a re-experience of the given past episode. In this re-experience, the subject can relive the episode with a significant amount of sensorial (visual, olfactory, auditory, etc.) quality. To remember episodically is “to consciously re-experience past experiences”.⁴ On

³Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness,” 3.

⁴Tulving, E., “Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain”, *Annual Review of Psychology* 53, no. 1 (February 2002), 6.

the other hand, semantic memory deals with propositional information related to general knowledge of the world.⁵ Semantic memory is necessary for language use because it deals with verbal symbols, their meanings, relations among them, and rules for their manipulation.⁶

To put it more clearly, the difference between episodic and semantic memory is that the former is presented perceptually to the subject, and the latter is presented propositionally.⁷ In this sense, to remember episodically is to remember what it was like for you to experience your last birthday party, for instance, and to recall semantically is to recall knowledge learned in the past, such as, for example, “2+2=4” or that “Germany is located within Europe”. You could, nonetheless, remember propositions about your birthday party like “I remembered it happened on the 4th of August” but this information is not presented as an experience of reliving this episode. Likewise, you could remember episodically the day that you learned that “2+2=4” but when you remember the propositional information, the experience of the episode does not come to mind.

Episodic memories are a present re-experience of the perceptual information of an event, be it visual, olfactory, auditory, palatal, or tactile. But, along with the experience of perceptual contents, episodic memories are accompanied by a specific type of consciousness, named *autonoesis*. *Autonoesis* is defined as the awareness of one’s experiences in a subjective timeline, and being a necessary component of episodic memory, it assures that when the individual remembers episodically, he is aware of the remembered episode’s existence in his past.⁸ On the phenomenal aspect of this kind of consciousness, Tulving says that: “The awareness and its feeling-tone are intimately familiar to every normal human being. One seldom mistakes remembering for any other kind of experience — perceiving, imagining, dreaming, daydreaming, or just thinking about things one knows about the world.”⁹ Thereby, *autonoesis* is important for episodic remembering because (1) it is what allows the subject to be aware of the subjective time in which events happened,¹⁰ and (2) is what individuates episodic memory from other forms of memory. On the other hand, semantic memory is related to *noetic consciousness*. *Noetic consciousness* dictates that the subject is conscious of the knowledge he possesses and can cognitively operate upon them, permitting thus its declaration utilizing symbolic knowledge. The difference between *noetic* and *autonoetic* consciousness is that in the former, the subject has no awareness of the qualitative temporal character of the content.

It is also important to note that there is a difference between knowing that an episode is from the past and being aware that the episode is from your past. In the former, being past is an attributed property of the representation of the event. For instance, in semantic memory, I can know that the proposition “Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo in 1815” is past, but only because I infer it from other propositions such as “I am living in the year 2021” and “The year 1815 is past in relation to the year 2021”.¹¹ Whereas

⁵Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness,” 3.

⁶Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness,” 3.

⁷Michaelian, K., “*Mental Time Travel: Episodic Memory and Our Knowledge of the Personal Past*,” (MIT Press, 2016), 35.

⁸Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness,” 3.

⁹Tulving, E., “What Is Episodic Memory?,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, no. 3 (1993), 68.

¹⁰Tulving, E., “Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, 53 (2002), 2.

¹¹Klein, S.B., “Autonoesis and Belief in a Personal Past: An Evolutionary Theory of Episodic Memory Indices,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 5, no. 3 (2014), 437.

in the latter, which is related to auto-noetic consciousness, being past is a phenomenologically intrinsic property of the event that the subject represents. If you remember your last birthday party, the pastness of the event is phenomenologically embedded in the representation, so you have an experience of *what it is like to experience the episode as a part of your past*.

2.2 Episodic Memory as an Auto-noetic Mental Time Travel Experience

Thus we arrive at the idea of episodic memory as *mental time travel*. When an individual remembers episodically, she can place herself in a subjective timeline, in the case of episodic memory, in the past, and can consciously re-experience the remembered event. We call this capacity to *project oneself* at a specific point in this subjective timeline, mental time travel (MTT).¹² And it is through MTT that the individual can access the experiential information that is stored in the episodic memory system. Tulving supports the idea that the ability to mentally travel to the past is strictly related to the ability to imagine or pre-experience possible future scenarios, *i.e.*, the ability to mentally time travel to the future.¹³ He inferred through the case of patient N.N., later identified as patient K.C.,¹⁴ that there must be a significant correlation between memory deficits and the inability to imagine the future. He suggests that problems in one's auto-noetic capabilities may affect both the awareness of the past, as well as the awareness of the future, insofar as K.C.'s behavior indicates that he lives in a "permanent present" (more on that in section 3).

This brought to light another view about the relationship between memory and imagination, which considers both as sharing the same fundamental mental capacity, namely, one of MTT. In the current debate about the difference between memory and imagination, we have both the continuist view, which holds that memory and imagination are brain processes of the same kind, and the discontinuist view which holds that memory and imagination are different types of neural processes. Based on the same beliefs as Tulving, continuists separated MTT abilities according to their temporal orientation. The one related to episodic memory has a past temporal orientation and is called past-oriented mental time travel (PMTT). And the one related to imagined future scenarios has a future temporal orientation and is called future-oriented mental time travel (FMTT).¹⁵ This distinction is quite important when we aim to differentiate the temporal orientation of memories and imagination. However, as I intend to discuss only concepts that are included under the term "memory", I will refer to MTT here as meaning past-oriented mental time travel.

Thereby, as far as the distinction between auto-noesis and mental time travel goes, we could put it a little bit more explicitly by saying that auto-noesis is the *awareness* of the

¹²Wheeler, Stuss, and Tulving, "Toward a Theory of Episodic Memory: The Frontal Lobes and Auto-noetic Consciousness," *Psychological Bulletin* 121, no. 3 (1997), 331.

¹³Tulving, "Memory and Consciousness," 5.

¹⁴This disambiguation can be seen in Tulving et al., "Priming of Semantic Autobiographical Knowledge: A Case Study of Retrograde Amnesia," *Brain and Cognition* 8, no. 1 (1988), 7.

¹⁵Perrin and Michaelian, "Memory as Mental Time Travel," *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory* (Routledge, 2019), 228.

existence of oneself in a subjective timeline, and MTT is the *action* of mentally putting oneself at some point of this timeline. As Tulving puts it: “Mental time travel allows one, as an “owner” of episodic memory (“self”), through the medium of auto-noetic awareness, to remember one’s own previous “thought-about” experiences (...)”.¹⁶ Therefore, auto-noesis is necessary for MTT for it is the medium through which one can travel through the subjective timeline that one is conscious of. Without auto-noesis, there would be no MTT and as a consequence, no episodic memory. And that is because a subject that is not aware of his existence through time, is not able to project the self in this subjective timeline and experience the perceptual contents that are stored in the episodic memory system. Most continuist and discontinuist-based views, that accept that episodic memory is an experience of MTT, assume the necessity of auto-noesis for MTT and consequently for episodic memory.¹⁷

In this way, I defend that auto-noesis is necessary for episodic memory, as viewed as an experience of mental time travel. And that is because it is impossible by definition for someone to have an episodic memory without (1) having an awareness of his existence through time (auto-noesis), and (2) mentally traveling to a specific past episode (mental time travel to the past). In Tulving’s words: “Auto-noetic awareness (or auto-noesis) is required for remembering. No auto-noesis, no mental time travel”.¹⁸ For those reasons, as far as memory is concerned, MTT is only possible through episodic memory. It is the only type of memory that conveys the personal, sensorial, and emotional information that involves the self’s immersion in his own past experiences. This is important because if we want to use concepts such as episodic memory and autobiographical memory and be able to distinguish between them, we must consider their differences, and the necessity of a subjective experience for episodic memory is one of them.

3 Difference in Phenomenology

In this section, I intend to show through the reports of the case of the amnesic patient K.C. that autobiographical memory is a type of memory that is experienced narratively and that it differs from episodic memory, which is presented perceptually. In this view, someone who autobiographically recalls can construct a life narrative that is ordered chronologically, and that can be given verbally. This narrative also encompasses greater periods of the person’s life, unlike episodic memory, which contains only short episodes. The second and main point is that autobiographical memory differs significantly from episodic memory since the latter comprises a subjectivity component, which the former does not, and that the latter can be viewed as a form of MTT, as the former cannot.

¹⁶Tulving, E., “Episodic Memory and Auto-noesis: Uniquely Human?” In *The Missing Link in Cognition* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 9.

¹⁷Robins, S., “Defending Discontinuism, Naturally,” *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2020), 471.

¹⁸Tulving, “Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain.”, 2.

3.1 The Case of Patient K.C.

After a motorcycle accident that led to a serious case of both anterograde and retrograde amnesia, K.C. lost the ability to remember episodically or form new episodic memories. With the progression of the study of his case, psychologists concluded that K.C.'s lesions to the medial temporal lobe of his brain were the cause of his severe case of amnesia. However, those studies showed that although his episodic memory capabilities were seriously impaired, his capacity to recall semantically related information was maintained.¹⁹ In other words, although K.C. could not remember either his distant or more recent past, he could know several facts about the world and facts that occurred to him in his past.²⁰ This reinforced the idea that semantic and episodic memories are processed in different areas of the brain since the lesions to K.C.'s brain affected specifically his episodic memory capabilities. K.C. lacks auto-nosis, which in turn results in a lack of subjective awareness in time, and consequently in an inability to access memories of the past and to think about the future (MTT).²¹

But despite that, K.C. could know general facts about the world and his past, meaning that he knew about facts that pertained to his life narrative. This preservation of knowledge relating to his personal experiences is what is important to note here. K.C. was not able to remember episodically, *i.e.* bring back to mind perceptual information of past experiences, but he had factual information about his past and was able to construct a verbally presented life narrative. K.C. knew "what year the family moved into the house where they live now, the names of the schools he went to or where he spent his summers in his teens".²² But, although K.C. could know all that information, he could not remember it, in the episodic sense. The difference is that, although he could "remember" which year they moved to the house where they now live and the names of the schools in which he studied, he could not remember, for instance, the specific episode of the day that they moved into the new house, or a specific episode that he experienced in one of those schools. And that means that he could not relive and bring back to mind the joys and sadnesses of past.

3.2 Defining Autobiographical Memory

The main point of confusion seems to be in the term *remember*. After all, when we refer to K.C.'s capabilities of bringing past information to mind, we refer to it as remember, but we should differentiate between "remembering" in a semantic sense, which means that the subject knows facts about the past, and remembering episodically, which means that the subject mentally travels back to the past and re-experiences perceptually that episode once again. K.C. could not remember in the episodic sense, but he could remember in the semantic sense. Tulving mentions the difference in vocabulary that we should note when

¹⁹Rosenbaum et al., "The Case of K.C.: Contributions of a Memory-Impaired Person to Memory Theory," *Neuropsychologia* 43, no. 7 (2005), 994; Rosenbaum et al., "Amnesia as an Impairment of Detail Generation and Binding: Evidence from Personal, Fictional, and Semantic Narratives in K.C.," *Neuropsychologia* 47, no. 11 (2009), 2185; Tulving, "Memory and Consciousness," 4.

²⁰Tulving, E., "Remembering and Knowing the Past," *American Scientist* 77, no. 4 (1989), 362.

²¹Rosenbaum et al., "The Case of K.C.: Contributions of a Memory-Impaired Person to Memory Theory," 993.

²²Tulving, "Memory and Consciousness," 4.

we refer to the different actions that the individual engages when he employs this or that type of memory.²³ Stating that in the natural use of language we can differentiate between those actions even when using the same term, in academic use, and to avoid ambiguities in the term “remembering”, we should refer to memory in the episodic sense as “recollecting” or “remembering” and in the semantic sense as “knowing” or “recalling”. Although Tulving states that K.C. has autobiographical knowledge, meaning that he knows facts that pertain to his past existence, he also says that we should distinguish it from “autobiographical memory” used here in the sense of episodic memory.²⁴ Furthermore, he mentions the relation of this kind of recalling to the self by saying that “It’s knowledge of one’s life from the point of view of an observer rather than that of a participant.”²⁵ This means that the subject does not participate in the recall in an experiential sense, but he is “looking from the outside” (I shall treat the self-reference issue in section 4). While I agree with Tulving’s affirmation that in recalling autobiographically the subject does not experience the memory as an episode, with perceptual information, I do not agree that we should not call that an autobiographical *memory*. That is because, if that were the case, semantic memory, which is also constituted of propositional information, should not be considered memory as well. So, it seems plausible to call *autobiographical memory*, the propositional knowledge in which: (1) the subject has information of the personal past that is presented verbally, and (2) that allows for the knowledge and construction of an extended linear life narrative.

Additionally, concerning the types of consciousnesses implied in distinct kinds of memory, it is a consensus among psychologists and philosophers of memory that episodic memory relates to auto-noetic consciousness, and that semantic memory relates to noetic consciousness. But what about autobiographical memory? Just as semantic memory is related to noetic consciousness, there is no reason to assume that autobiographical memory would not be, since it is based mostly on information of semantic nature, and it is presented propositionally. A noetic conscious being is aware of the knowledge he possesses and can act upon objects, concepts, events, and their relationship, without their presence, employing symbolic knowledge.²⁶ Furthermore, unlike noetic consciousness and auto-noetic consciousness, an auto-noetic conscious being can perceive the environment, represent its perception, and “behaviourally respond to aspects of the present environment.”²⁷ In this manner, auto-noetic consciousness is related to procedural memory, that is, the memory for motor skills learned in the past that the individual can use in the present, like remembering how to ride a bicycle. Autobiographical memories are not related to motor skills, neither are they related to re-experiencing the past and, therefore, the type of consciousness they imply cannot be explained either by auto-noetic consciousness or auto-noetic consciousness. Rather, given the similarity in content between autobiographical memories and semantic memories, it seems reasonable to assume that, like semantic memory, they are presented with noetic consciousness. K.C., for instance, is aware of the knowledge that he possesses about himself and can present this knowledge verbally in an extended temporal manner. Thus, I believe that the awareness of his autobiographical semantic knowledge can be sufficiently explained in terms of noetic consciousness.

²³Tulving, “Remembering and Knowing the Past.”, 362-363.

²⁴Tulving, “Remembering and Knowing the Past.”, 362-363.

²⁵Tulving, “Remembering and Knowing the Past.”, 362-363

²⁶Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness.”, 3.

²⁷Tulving, “Memory and Consciousness.”, 3.

K.C.'s vision of his past is presented as phenomenologically dry as his general knowledge about the world, such as "2+2=4" or that "humans are mammals", but it is nonetheless a representation of his existence. It is not difficult to imagine that he could have, for instance, drawing solely on semantic information, put together a narrative that goes from his childhood to his adulthood, in chronological order. Those memories are autobiographical because they present the happenings of his life, and he is conscious of them. The difference between remembrance of past episodes with an associated phenomenal experience of reliving the past episode as *past*, and a semantical representation of one's past is what is worthwhile noting for present purposes.

One objection that might arise from this view concerns whether K.C. could organize his life narrative in chronological order without episodic memory. Episodic memory is known as the type of memory that enables us to order events of our past. So, the agent only knows that an event E_1 came before an event E_2 because he *experienced* those events in this order. However, in cases of impaired episodic capacities, it is still possible for the agent to order the semantic knowledge that pertains to a life narrative. This can happen if (1) there is temporal-related information embedded in the content,²⁸ (2) if the agent learns the temporal order of the events,²⁹ or (3) if he can interpret or infer the temporal relations from the content given to consciousness.³¹ Thus, it would be possible for K.C. to order chronologically a life narrative based on information that carries explicit temporal information such as "I used to live in this house during *my childhood*", or "I remember moving to this house in the year 1985". These two examples give different degrees of specificity of the temporal information that can enable an organization of the narrative structure of autobiographical memories. Surely, in the case of neurotypical agents, the process of organization would be much more fluent, because they can use information derived from episodic memories to do so, but that does not rule out the possibility that K.C. could have done it either, even if in a more elemental level. Also, just because neurotypical agents may in some cases use episodic memories to help order chronologically events in a life narrative, that does not mean that this episodic information is *necessarily* a part of the life narrative.

Therefore, if we can say that K.C. has a narrative vision of his life because of his propositional knowledge about his past and that this conscious narrative representation is considered autobiographical memory, then we must agree that K.C. can recall autobiographically, although completely incapable of remembering episodically. This contradicts the common idea in the literature, that episodic memory is the same as autobiographical memory.

Furthermore, assuming the phenomenological difference between episodic and autobiographical memories, and given the more temporal extended quality of the latter, it seems unrealistic to assume that the individual should have sensorial, iconic, and complex information of all these life periods. Thus, the assumption that the ability of MTT is present in most of the content of autobiographical memory, as it seems to be suggested by the identification of episodic and autobiographical memories, can be seen as cognitively unrealizable. Episodic memory is related to shorter and self-contained

²⁸Tulving, E., "Episodic and Semantic Memory," in *Organization of Memory* (Academic Press 1972), 389-390.

²⁹30

³¹Klein, "Autonoesis and Belief in a Personal Past," 437-438.

episodes that have emotional or sensorial relevance to the subject. We remember things that are remembering-worthy, meaning that we remember things that have emotional importance to us. So, if one asks if we think that we are living happy lives, even though the question has an emotional character, our response would probably be based on autobiographical memories because the episodes of happiness and sadness are too many to remember and account for.

My argument states that autobiographical memories can exist without episodic information, in cases such as K.C.'s. This could suggest two different views on the nature of autobiographical remembering. First, it could be considered that semantic information is more fundamental to the life narrative than episodic information. That is to say that in neurotypical agents, there is some episodic information in the content of autobiographical memories, but in a considerably low amount when compared to semantic information. As seen above, it is more plausible to defend that most of the content is of propositional origin, as it would be unrealistic to assume that agents could remember all, or even most of the perceptual information that would pertain to an entire life narrative. Second, on a stricter view, it could be defended that all the content of the autobiographical memories is propositional, with no place for episodic information. That is to defend that although in neurotypical agents narratives can contain some semantical information that *could elicit* an episodic memory, the life narrative itself is not presented perceptually, it is, rather, presented propositionally. In the first position, autobiographical memories would have to be able to support both auto-noetic and noetic consciousness. So, for this reason, I defend that the second position is more suitable because it is a simpler account of the type of consciousness of autobiographical memories. But independently of which view we choose, it is still evident that a difference between episodic and autobiographical memories is necessary, insofar as K.C.'s case shows empirical evidence of an auto-noetic difference between autobiographical memories and episodic memories.³²

4 Memory's Reference to the Self

This section aims to discuss whether we should consider K.C.'s semantic knowledge of his autobiography an autobiographical memory or whether it should be considered memory at all.

The field of investigations of the self and its relation to memory is vast. Although I do not intend here to give a complete account of the subject, it is worth explaining a basic conceptual difference that tries to shed light upon the distinctions between episodic and autobiographical memory and its self-references, that will be useful for the discussion of whether autobiographical memory should be considered a separate kind of memory. To do so, I will borrow Baddeley's distinction of the types of memory in which, on one hand, the self is the experiencer (1), and on another, the self is the object of the experi-

³²In the literature concerning the Simulation Theory of Memory, the preferable term for the episodic memory system might be "episodic construction system", that encompasses the whole of the imaginative processes that are able to construct mental scenarios based on episodic information. For the purposes of this article, I preferred to treat it more generally, as "episodic memory system", but I think my view could be applicable to a simulational framework.

ence (2).³³ I consider, opposite to him, that episodic memories are more closely related to type (1), and that autobiographical memories are more closely related to type (2). To put it more clearly, it is as if when we are in a mnemonic mental state, there are two selves: The present self or the “experiencer self” and the past self or the “experienced self”. In remembering, it is as if both selves are aligned or superpositioned, and consequently, the subject has a full qualitative and personal experience of the episode. This is partly stated by Perrin when he says: “Autonoeticity implies the identity of the self whose experience is simulated with the simulating subject”.³⁴ He also states the same in: “First, for the appearance of episodic memory to occur, I must have the belief that I am the subject whose past experience I represent. This identity belief is a condition of the episodic appearance”.³⁵ Conversely, in recalling, the selves are kept separate, meaning that the present self relates to the recall as an observer instead of an experiencer.

In autobiographical memory, as in a mnemonic state that is based on semantic information, it does not seem to be the case that there is a superpositioning of both selves. To defend that this is the case is to consequently affirm that autobiographical memories could share the same phenomenological experiences or would at least be capable of substantiating the same phenomenological complexity that episodic memory is capable of. And that is because the only way in which the “experiencer self” can be identified with the “experienced self” is in an autonoetic state. If my argument, in which autobiographical memories are related to semantic information, and its content presented by noetic consciousness is right, then the alignment of both selves would not be reasonable, because they would define autonoetic awareness, which as I tried to show, is non-present in autobiographical memories.

One objection that can emerge from my ideas is whether we should consider a narrative view of our lives as a type of memory. This point has already been made by Klein.³⁶ He argues that only those kinds of memories that we would describe as episodic (mental states with a past-oriented subjectivity), can be conceived as memories. This means that the autobiographical knowledge that K.C. has which enables him to have information not only about the past but the past that relates to his life, cannot be considered a memory of any kind. While I would agree with Klein by saying that he cannot remember episodically, because he lacks the ability to mentally travel to the past or to even conceive himself in a subjective timeline, I think it is too extreme to not consider it memory. And that is mainly because the problem of the differentiation of those entities can be solved, as Tulving did, by referring to it by different actions. For this reason, I argue that my view shows a degree to which we can still call the knowledge that K.C. has of his past “memory”, by referring to it as autobiographical memory, as it possesses two of the main consensual general characteristics, that seem to be important for the recognition of a mental state as a memory, which are: (1) a present reference to the past, meaning that the present information refers to something that already happened, and (2) a reference to a self, meaning that the subject knows (or feels) that the information brought to mind refers to his experience.³⁷

³³Baddeley, A., “What Is Autobiographical Memory?,” in *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1992), 19.

³⁴Denis Perrin, “Asymmetries in Subjective Time,” In *Seeing the Future: Theoretical Perspectives on Future-oriented Mental Time Travel* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 46.

³⁵Denis Perrin, 52.

³⁶Klein, S.B., “What Memory Is,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 6, no. 1 (2015), 1.

³⁷Criteria (i) and (ii) seem to be consensual throughout most of the philosophical tradition on memory. I think that the differ-

At this point, with the empirical evidence shown, to say that autobiographical memories are the same as episodic memory, is, at least, debatable. Taking Klein's approach and saying that autobiographical memory is not memory at all is a possibility, but one that is very costly because it would mean that semantic memory, which similarly to autobiographical memory draws its contents from propositional information, would not be memory also. Although Klein's view is plausible, I believe that a more intermediate view in which both episodic memory and semantic memory are types of memory, or even a broad view, which holds that episodic, semantic, and even procedural memories are indeed forms of memory,³⁸ is more adequate.

Also, to call an autobiographical memory a semantic memory, because of its relatedness with propositional information, seems at least questionable. Indeed, although both semantic and autobiographical memories pertain to the self, meaning that both are of things that the self knows, autobiographical memory goes further and is also knowledge about things that happened to the self. And for that reason, I argue that they are different. In autobiographical memory, the present self is an observer of the facts that happened to the past self, without their identification, which would equate to episodic memory. In semantic memory, however, the present self is an observer of general facts about the world that he knows, but not about his past self. I believe that to differentiate clearly between semantic, autobiographical, and episodic memories may help us understand the capability of the brain to maintain a verbally available life narrative, even in cases where auto-noetic awareness is missing.

5 Conclusion

Considering what has been demonstrated I conclude that even though they are sometimes still treated as a synonymous term throughout philosophical and psychological discussions, there are good reasons to believe that episodic and autobiographical memory should be considered fundamentally different. Considering that the kind of recall that K.C. has is of autobiographical relevance and that it differs in phenomenology, meaning that it lacks the auto-noetic component and it is not presented as an experience of MTT to the past, as episodic memory is, then there should be no reason to identify the two. Furthermore, I argued that autobiographical recalling should be considered a separate kind of memory, than for instance, semantic memory, because its content relates to the self in a more meaningful way than the content of semantic memory, as can be demonstrated by insights about the relation of memory and the self.³⁹ Concerning the content, I show that the information of autobiographical memories, while similar to semantic information since it relates to facts, consists nonetheless, in facts about agent's life happenings

entiation between episodic and autobiographical memories can be defended both in a causal framework as well as a simulational framework. The only requirement seems to be that the theory supports a view in which episodic memories are presented as an experience of MTT. However because the main theories of memory deal with the difference between memory and imagination, and here I am proposing a differentiation between two types of memory, I left other more specific criteria out. To more information on different theories of memory, see Michaelian and Robins, "Beyond the Causal Theory? Fifty Years after Martin and Deutscher," *New Directions in the Philosophy of Memory* (Routledge, 2018), 13–32.

³⁸Michaelian, "Opening the Doors of Memory: Is Declarative Memory a Natural Kind?" *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 6, no. 6 (2015), 476.

³⁹Baddeley, "What Is Autobiographical Memory?"; Perrin, "Asymmetries in Subjective Time."

that are, however, not presented perceptually as is episodic memory.

Bibliography

Baddeley, Alan. "What Is Autobiographical Memory?" In *Theoretical Perspectives on Autobiographical Memory*, 13–29. Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 1992.

Klein, Stanley B. "Autonoesis and Belief in a Personal Past: An Evolutionary Theory of Episodic Memory Indices." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 5, no. 3 (2014): 427–47.

———. "What Memory Is." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 6, no. 1 (2015): 1–38.

Michaelian, Kourken. *Mental Time Travel: Episodic Memory and Our Knowledge of the Personal Past*. The MIT Press. The MIT Press, 2016.

———. "Opening the Doors of Memory: Is Declarative Memory a Natural Kind?" *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Cognitive Science* 6, no. 6 (2015): 475–82.

Michaelian, Kourken, and Sarah K. Robins. "Beyond the Causal Theory? Fifty Years after Martin and Deutscher." *New Directions in the Philosophy of Memory*, 2018, 13–32.

Perrin, Denis. "Asymmetries in Subjective Time." *Seeing the Future*, 2016, 39–61.

———, and Kourken Michaelian. "Memory as Mental Time Travel." *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Memory*, no. January 2017 (2017): 228–39.

Robins, Sarah. "Defending Discontinuism, Naturally." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 11, no. 2 (2020): 469–86.

Rosenbaum, R. Shayna, Asaf Gilboa, Brian Levine, Gordon Winocur, and Morris Moscovitch. "Amnesia as an Impairment of Detail Generation and Binding: Evidence from Personal, Fictional, and Semantic Narratives in K.C." *Neuropsychologia* 47, no. 11 (2009): 2181–87.

Rosenbaum, R. Shayna, Stefan Köhler, Daniel L. Schacter, Morris Moscovitch, Robyn Westmacott, Sandra E. Black, Fuqiang Gao, and Endel Tulving. "The Case of K.C.: Contributions of a Memory-Impaired Person to Memory Theory." *Neuropsychologia* 43, no. 7 (2005): 989–1021.

Tulving, Endel. "Episodic and Semantic Memory." In *Organization of Memory*, 1:381–403, 1972.

———. "Episodic Memory: From Mind to Brain." *Annual Review of Psychology* 53, no. 1 (February 2002): 1–25.

———. "Memory and Consciousness." *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne*

26, no. 1 (January 1985): 1–12.

———. “Remembering and Knowing the Past.” *American Scientist* 77, no. 4 (1989): 361–67.

———. Tulving, Endel. 2005. “Episodic Memory and Autonoesis: Uniquely Human?” In H. S. Terrace, & J. Metcalfe (Eds.), *The Missing Link in Cognition* (Pp. 4–56). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.” *Cognition*, 2005, 4–56.

———. “What Is Episodic Memory?” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 2, no. 3 (June 22, 1993): 67–70.

———, Daniel L. Schacter, Donald R. McLachlan, and Morris Moscovitch. “Priming of Semantic Autobiographical Knowledge: A Case Study of Retrograde Amnesia.” *Brain and Cognition* 8, no. 1 (1988): 3–20.

Wheeler, Mark A., Donald T. Stuss, and Endel Tulving. “Toward a Theory of Episodic Memory: The Frontal Lobes and Autonoetic Consciousness.” *Psychological Bulletin* 121, no. 3 (1997): 331–54.