

Olivia Erlanger How does emotion affect memory?

Robert Hopkins, Professor of Philosophy, New York University

It affects it in various ways. In part, what we remember is not simply what happened, but how we felt about it at the time. So emotion can be part of what we remember. **But our present feelings toward past events can also determine how we remember them: pushing us to recall them in a worse, or better light, than their past reality merits, in order that our sense of our past can cohere with our present attitudes and affects.**

OE When does a memory change perception?

RH Perhaps it never does. If it does, it does so either through the medium of current feeling (as when our memory of a traumatic encounter leads us to find the person at its core in the faces of the crowd around us), or by enriching our expectations about what there is to see in the world (as when our past encounter with a species of flower changes how we see the flower now before us by putting us in a position to recognize it as a species we've seen before).

OE What is your biggest hope for the future of the mind and what is your biggest fear?

RH **My greatest fear is that we will lose our minds, that is, literally cease to be minded, by reconceptualizing our mental lives in terms brains, neurons, and the other concepts of the scientific perspective on them.** That perspective is essentially third-personal—it views these phenomena from the outside. But it is essential to their nature to be first-personal—a thought, or feeling, is only such because it is experienced as a thought or feeling, and as one's own. The great challenge to the scientific, third-personal perspective is to capture this aspect of mental phenomena. Despite this challenge, we are in the grip of a sort of fascination with the scientific approach.

If we become so enamored of neuroscience that we forget the possibility of the first-personal perspective, there will cease to be the phenomena which that perspective partly constitutes. **We will thus have thought our way out of our own minds.** Perhaps it is not possible to complete this process, but I see the first stages of it in the students I teach today. My fear is that we will be able to, and will, travel further down this road.

My hope, in contrast, is that technology will extend our mental powers to the extent that it has extended our physical powers. Such developments bring with them other things worth fearing, but at their core is the promise of a more elevated life.

OE What is foresight?

RH It is the ability to anticipate how things will be.

OE Could you describe how it is possible that we are able to envision or create things that do not exist?

RH I think this capacity is basic. Sartre thought that the name for it is “imagination”: the ability not merely to perceive and think about what is, but to grasp the possibility that things might be otherwise. He may not be right that imagining is the only way to do this, or that all imagining is a way of doing it, but he was certainly right to think that some imagining involves the exercise of this capacity.

OE How do you perceive a future where we can share our personal thoughts, feelings, sensory experiences with others directly?

RH Depending on what “directly” means, I am not sure this is possible. If my access to your thoughts, feelings and experiences is as unmediated as yours, then what makes those thoughts, feelings and experiences yours, rather than ours (or mine alone)?

OE Why do we create?

RH **Not to make the world more interesting, but to express our interest in the world that already exists.**