Remembering Objects

Conscious recollection, of the kind characterised by sensory mental imagery, is often thought to involve ‘episodically’ recalling experienced events in one’s personal past. One might wonder whether this overlooks distinctive ways in which we sometimes recall ordinary, persisting objects. Of course, one can recall an object by remembering an event in which one encountered it. But are there acts of recall which are distinctively objectual in that they are not about objects in this mediated way (i.e., by way of being about events in which they featured)? This question has broad implications, not least for understanding the nature and role of imagery in remembering, the requirements of memory-based singular thought about objects, and the sense in which remembering involves ‘mental time travel’ through which one ‘relives’ past events.

In this paper, I argue that we sometimes do recall objects from our past without remembering events in which they featured. The positive view of such cases I go on to propose draws on a wide body of empirical work in its support and accommodates a more nuanced picture of the role of imagery in remembering. Succinctly, remembering might essentially involve a kind of ‘re-experiencing’, but it need not involve ‘reliving’.

1 Introduction

What instances of conscious recollection enable one to have singular thoughts about ordinary material objects or persons from one’s past? Though not always explicitly stated, it has been generally assumed that “[m]emory demonstratives are made available by memory of events” (Campbell 2002: 177). To recall such an object, in that distinctive way characterised by recollective sensory mental imagery (‘experiential recall’), one must recall some event(s) in which it featured. As Broad put it: “I remember him only in so far as I remember events in which he was concerned” (1925: 224). If you are to experientially recall your grandfather, for instance, in such a way as to accompany memory-based singular thoughts about him, you must do so by experientially recalling some past perceptual encounter(s) of him.

It is natural to wonder whether this overlooks the possibility of experientially remembering an object other than through the recall of events in which it featured. Why must object remembering go via the recall of some other non-propositional entity? What is so special about events? This paper challenges a widespread assumption which we can call eventism.¹

¹ I pass over the metaphysics of the object–event distinction here (see Casati and Varzi (2020) for a survey). Some are sceptical of any such distinction. But the point of EVENTISM is not that experiential recall is de facto about events, it is that in virtue of the kind of psychological activity it is, such recall is necessarily about events.
EVENTISM: For all ordinary objects $x$, in order that a subject $S$ experientially recall $x$, $S$ must experientially recall some past event(s) in which $S$ encountered $x$.

Consider the following passage, in which Vladimir Nabokov unflatteringly recalls his childhood governess under the name ‘Mademoiselle’.

Mademoiselle rolled into our existence in December 1905 when I was six and my brother five. There she is. I see so plainly her abundant dark hair, brushed up high and covertly graying; the three wrinkles on her austere forehead; her beetling brows; the steely eyes behind the black-rimmed pince-nez; that vestigial moustache; that blotchy complexion, which in moments of wrath develops an additional flush in the region of the third, and ampest, chin (Nabokov 2012: 136).

It is natural to say that while writing this description Nabokov was recalling Mademoiselle, and not thereby recalling any event involving her. Of course, there plausibly must have been events in his past in which he perceptually encountered Mademoiselle. But it no more follows that what Nabokov recalls are those events than that when I recall that Yaoundé is the capital of Cameroon I am recalling the occasion on which I learned this. Or so I will be arguing. A state of remembering may in a broad sense be a causal record of some past event $E$ without its activation affording recollective awareness of $E$.

We will see that there are theoretical reasons for supposing that EVENTISM is true (§5). For now, I just want to make clear that such reasons are needed. EVENTISM has no special claim over common sense or grammar. Yet, often, it is taken for granted. Malcolm (1963) notes that we sometimes say ‘Not only do I remember that there was a lad named Robin in my class but I remember him.’ [...] to announce that we [...] see in our minds [...] the face of the classmate (1963: 205).

He goes on to call this ‘perceptual memory’ (1963: 207), simply defining it as the ability to personally recall an event in a way which essentially involves mental imagery (219). Broad (1925) similarly describes remembering ‘the late Master of Trinity’ immediately before writing: “to remember a thing or person simply means to remember certain past events” (224).3

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2 While some accounts are compatible with denying that things remembered must have been previously encountered (Michaelian 2016: 118), I will be assuming that this is a requirement for dialectical purposes.

3 In Broad’s case, this may simply follow from his conception of objects as events of a certain sort (1923: 393).
I will be arguing, against EVENTISM, that we sometimes do experientially recall objects without thereby remembering events from our past in which they featured. I will call these violations of EVENTISM objectual recollections, but I remain neutral on whether they are to be characterised as the immediate awareness of an object (as relationalists would claim), as entertaining a singular proposition with the object as a constituent (as representationalists may claim), or in some other distinctive way.\(^4\) I will be arguing that reflection on the imagery in apparent cases of objectual recall (§2), and on empirical work (§3), provides strong grounds to deny EVENTISM. On the positive account I offer in §4, objectual recall involves activating knowledge of the remembered object’s past perceptible qualities. I also explore some of the implications which the denial of EVENTISM has for our broader philosophical theorizing about memory. Throughout the paper, I use ‘remember’ or ‘memory’ to refer to a mental state, ‘recall’, ‘remembering’, or ‘recollection’ to a mental occurrence or process.

Before pressing ahead with the paper’s argument, §1.1 provides some context and introduction, clarifying the current theoretical landscape and pointing out some features which may explain why objectual remembering has been largely overlooked.\(^5\)

1.1 Experiential and ‘episodic’ remembering

Many mental states carry information with past experience as its source. But not all enable what we can most generally call experiential remembering: the recall of things encountered in one’s past in a way accompanied by phenomenally rich, multisensory imagery. ‘Experiential’ here does not specify a kind of thing recalled (i.e., a past experience), but rather a kind of recollective activity.\(^6\) In particular, the relevant imagery is presented, on its very face, as being somehow “from and about my past” (Klein 2018: 121). Although widely agreed to be important, this feature is notoriously difficult to characterise. Termed ‘autonoesis’ by Tulving (1985), it is sometimes glossed as a “feeling that one is reliving the circumstances from which that content was acquired” (Klein 2018: 121). Understood that way, experiential recall is more or less by definition about events in one’s past. It is in part due to this conception of experiential recall’s distinctive imagery that the flourishing literature principally addresses ‘episodic’ memory (a

\(^{4}\) Notice the contrast with ‘objectual’ as used by those who argue that there are irreducibly non-propositional attitudes, such as that of loving one’s brother (see Grzankowski and Montague (2018) for references).

\(^{5}\) A notable exception is Bernecker (2010), whose grammatically based taxonomy explicitly marks out object memory. Unfortunately, Bernecker says little about this category and, perhaps because his taxonomy cuts across that adopted in the empirical literature, it has received little attention elsewhere. For reasons to be suspicious of grammatically based taxonomies of memory, see Werning and Cheng (2017).

\(^{6}\) This is not to suppose remembering is necessarily an action (see Berntsen (2009) and Soteriou (2013: 319ff)).
term due to Tulving (1972)), which consists “(in pre-theoretical terms) in reliving past autobiographical episodes as if one travelled back to them mentally and went through them anew in the form of phenomenally rich mental images” (Perrin and Rousset 2014: 291–2).

Much of the accelerated philosophical progress on memory is due to an increased sensitivity to cognitive psychology and neuroscience. It is also largely for this same reason that, despite its progress, the recent philosophical literature has taken experiential remembering and the recall of specific, episodic events in one’s past as more or less synonymous. In cognitive psychology, ‘episodic’ memory is used variously to refer to a hypothetical system which encodes, stores, and retrieves memories of past episodes, to such representations themselves, and to the distinctive recollective experiences one has upon their retrieval. It is contrasted, at the declarative level, with ‘semantic’ memory—“the retrieval of general conceptual knowledge divested of a specific spatiotemporal context” (Irish and Piguet 2013: 1)). Although it would be understandable for the recall of specific episodes to be the philosopher’s paradigm case, it is sometimes underappreciated that empirical investigations, perhaps in an operationalist spirit, take such temporal specificity to be a criterion. Episodic recall involves remembering “a personally experienced past event from a particular place and time”, where “the retrieval of a specific context is essential” (Barry and Maguire 2019: 128–9).

Episodic memory inherently has a one-shot-learning character, while the semanticization of memories involves the synthesis of information from across multiple experiences (Cheng 2013: 7).

Although Tulving argues for as many as 28 differences between the [episodic and semantic] systems, all but one seems secondary. The primary difference is that episodic memory represents temporally and spatially localized events, while semantic memory represents [...] generic information (Hintzman 1984: 241).

...the fundamental feature of episodic memory: the fact that episodic memories are memories about specific past events (McCormack 2001: 287).

...an episodic memory has the phenomenal characteristic of referring to something that happened once at a specific time and place (Nelson 1993: 7).

From an empirical point of view, ‘one-off’ cases offer a clear window onto a phenomenon (‘episodic memory’) being identified in part by an informational contrast with
factual knowledge abstracted from its context of acquisition. From the perspective of philosophy of mind, however, construing experiential recall as essentially concerned with episodes would be distorting. Our interest is in experiential recall as a conscious, intentional occurrence, about which we can ask such questions as: what are its intentional objects; in what ways is it phenomenologically distinctive; does it necessarily involve a sense of self; how does it afford a source of knowledge? In the context of these projects, there is no reason whatsoever to focus on ‘one-shot’ cases, and good reason to expect it would blind us to cases where otherwise appealing claims can be appreciated as incorrect.

Precisely this accusation has recently been made by Andonovski (2020). Many of our recollective experiences involve the recall of general, extended, or repeated events (Brewer 1986). When asked to freely recall events from their summer, only 21% of Barsalou’s (1988) participants described single events lasting less than a day (200). 41% of statements expressed the recall of general or extended events (e.g., ‘I watched a lot of TV’; ‘I took a trip to Italy’). Yet the non-episodic character of such recollections is consistent with substantial overlap with episodic recall. As Nelson (1993) goes on to write, following the above quote: “All that seems to truly distinguish episodic recall from generic event memory is the sense that ‘something happened one time’ in contrast to the generic ‘things happen this way’” (7). On these and other grounds, Andonovski (2020) argues that neglect of non-episodic event recall has hindered philosophical theorising. We should, for many purposes, consider non-episodic cases of remembering as being of a piece with the paradigm, episodic cases.

In the following two sections, I argue that there are other neglected instances of experiential recall which reward philosophical attention: it is sometimes inaccurate to characterise experiential recollections as being about events—even extended, general, or repeated events—as opposed to things which persist across events.

Now, experiential recollection is itself an event, with conscious imagery that often unfolds over a period. It might therefore seem that all such recall must represent events. But this line of thought blurs the distinction between acts of remembering and the contents of those acts. Visual experiences, albeit events, intentionally relate perceivers to objects and perhaps to property instances as well as to events (Burge 2010: 55). However, one might

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7 I do not mean to suggest that the episodic–semantic distinction is commonly thought to be informational in character (as in Tulving (1972)). But even investigators who take it to be largely phenomenological in character intend to track it, third-personally, via an informational contrast.

8 Prior to Tulving (1972), philosophers (e.g., Malcolm (1963)) distinguished ‘personal’ from ‘factual’ memory, the former of which may perhaps have been taken to equally concern non-specific events.

9 Some have explicitly discussed non-episodic event recall (Campbell 2002: 177; Hoerl 2014: 370–1), but Andonovski (2020) is right that various details are not fully worked out.
nevertheless insist that experiential remembering is importantly different from perceiving: the former is in some sense the *replay of* experience, and, being thus directed at past experiences, necessarily represents events. Whether this picture of experiential remembering can be maintained in general will be examined later (§5). Until then, allow me to foreground a no less intuitive starting point: while we surely do sometimes recall experiences, such as bodily sensations (itches and pains), the objects of experiential recall are as heterogeneous as those of perception. For one thing, this offers a more straightforward account of remembering ‘from the outside’ (Nigro and Neisser 1983): *what* is recalled is identical to what one could recall ‘from the inside’—namely, a worldly scene or event—albeit under a different mode of presentation (McCarroll 2018: 150ff; Sutton 2010: 33). Viewed this way, the burden of argument would in fact seem to lie with the proponents of **EVENTISM**. But if this seems like the correct starting point to some, it has in fact been curiously overlooked. So, in §2, I start by examining introspective grounds for thinking objectual remembering is a coherent and indeed perhaps common occurrence. These considerations harmonise with a considerable body of work in cognitive psychology (§3). And this harmony, I argue, provides a compelling abductive argument against **EVENTISM**. §4 offers a positive philosophical account of what objectual remembering consists in, before §5 undermines some apparent arguments in favour of **EVENTISM**. My hope is that drawing attention to objectual remembering will enable philosophical inquiry to develop a more well-rounded conception of what it is, in general, to experientially recall the past.

2 Objectual remembering and its imagery

In what follows, I speak of objectual remembering or recall rather than memories to emphasise neutrality about what kind of representations might enable such acts of recall. It is unnecessary to posit *sui generis* object representations or ‘mental files’ as vehicles whose retrieval affords objectual recall. Cognitive architecture may take little notice of any ontological distinction between events and objects (though see Binder and Desai (2011: 534)). Relatedly, I take no stance on whether objectual recall is at some level a product of an ‘episodic memory system’. Nor am I claiming objectual recall is a cognitive ‘natural kind’ in the way some have suggested experiential remembering is more generally. It is compatible with everything said here that

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A nice example of remembering from the outside is described by McCarroll: “I am seated on a rope swing, dangling from the branches of a large but anonymous tree. […] Suddenly I lose my grip, just as the swing reaches its forward apex. I fall off, landing on my back. […] I see myself, as if from behind, run down the hill in panic” (2018: 1–2). Since it is possible to ‘switch’ perspective during retrieval (Rice and Rubin 2009), I avoid talk of ‘observer’ and ‘field’ memories.
there is only one relevant kind of remembering—experiential remembering—and that it is simply certain instances of this kind which have been overlooked.

It will help to supplement the case lifted from Nabokov (§1) with a case of my own. On its face, it suggests it is possible to recall an object without being so much as capable of recalling events from one’s past involving it. In the abstract, I take it, that possibility is rather intuitive. Sometimes one finds oneself recalling a person, or a face, while being unable to recall (perhaps even if appropriately cued) any event from one’s past in which they featured. Sometimes there is at least some spatial context one represents the recalled person as occupying. But this is not always the case. It can happen that what one represents is not a spatial scene in which oneself is situated, viewing the person from some point of view. One is more or less just sensorily presented with the visual appearance of the person recalled.

Case W

I can recall an acquaintance from my childhood. I do not remember her name, so let’s use W (‘Whatshername’) to refer to her. I believe we attended the same primary (elementary) school, so there must have been lots of occasions on which I did encounter W. But when I recall W, all I have is more or less only a vague impression of a face, brown eyes, freckles, red hair, and of a distinctively hoarse voice. I cannot recall any events in my past involving W whatsoever.

To reiterate, there is nothing particularly remarkable about this case, and I hope its general shape is broadly familiar to, or—better—reconstructible for, the reader. W will, of course, be very different today. I am in no position to recognize W. Whatever I have retained in memory enables me to recall W as the child she once was. But there is no context to this recollection; no place or particular time(s) it represents. So might it be that, in engaging in this activity of remembering people and objects, particularly from the remote past, one is doing just that—recalling the thing in abstraction from any past events in which one encountered it?

Debus (2007) suggests something very much like this. She claims that one can experientially recall (‘R-remember’, in her terminology) an object “without being aware of a past perceptual experience of [it]” (174). Debus offers the following case as an example:

on a recent visit to a museum, Mary [...] spent quite a while looking at a picture by Mondrian. [...] Mary presently R-remembers the picture and the spatial organization of its colours and shapes. She does not R-remember the picture in a spatially involved way, that is, her R-memory does not, for example, present the picture ‘an arm’s length in front, slightly to the left’, nor does she R-remember the
picture at a determinate location. Rather, the R-memory presents the picture at no particular location at all (2007: 181).

The visual imagery of Mary’s recollection will, of course, have certain spatial and perspectival characteristics. It will present the painting as oriented in some way, so that the yellow rectangle is at the bottom and the red square at the top, say. In general, if visual imagery for an object is to be accurate then it will need to represent some of the object’s spatial properties. Debus’s point, however, is that to recall perceiving an object is to recall it “in a spatially involved way and at a determinate location” (2007: 182). And since Mary is introspectively aware that she is not recalling the painting in these ways, it follows that she is not remembering perceiving it.

Insofar as Debus is to be read as arguing for this claim, everything rests on what it means to say that Mary (is introspectively aware that she) does not recall the painting ‘in a spatially involved way’ or ‘at a determinate location’. Defining the latter, Debus draws attention to the way in which everyday perceptual experience of objects necessarily presents them as being “located at determinate places in our environment” (2007: 180). Defining the former, Debus tells us that describing a spatially involved experience necessitates the use of monadic spatial notions: we will have to say things like ‘she perceives the painting as being to the left’ rather than ‘she perceives the painting as being to the left of herself’ (2007: 179).

Unfortunately, these descriptions are not developed any further. While there are said to be imagistic features necessarily present in the recollection of perceptual experiences which are absent from some cases of object remembering, providing a convincing argument against EVENTISM requires clarifying both what the spatial-perspectival differences are and why these differences should be taken to imply a difference in what these recollections are about. I propose a particular way of clarifying these matters in the following sub-section.

2.1 Imagery and content in objectual remembering

According to Rubin and Umanath’s (2015) influential discussion, whether a subject recalls an event (which is necessary but not sufficient for episodic recall) is, in part, a matter of whether they are ‘constructing a scene’ at the time of recall. Insofar as a variety of cognitive states may carry spatial information, the crucial difference between these and event recollection is whether such information is used to achieve a certain form of imagery. Constructing a scene involves a representing an “egocentric perspective from a specific spatial location”, and one can achieve this in remembering “even if the egocentric view at recall is one never actually experienced” (2015: 4). In other words, event recall, whether ‘from the inside’ or ‘from the
outside’, requires that the imagery of one’s recollective experience present things from some point of view within an imaged scene. The recalled event “must be viewed from a particular seat”, and while “[t]he seat need not be on the stage”, “it must be in the theatre” (2015: 4). Less metaphorically, remembering an event requires that, at the time of recall, one is able to judge from where within the recalled space the presented perspective on the original event is located in egocentric terms.

So suppose one recalls giving an in-person conference talk ‘from the outside’. The visual imagery necessarily presents this from some point of view, and spatial relations between things within the recalled scene and the point of view taken on that scene are also present in one’s imagery. Since one is not remembering from the inside, these relations lack a certain kind of egocentric significance. But the point of view is still found within the space itself: it is at the back of the lecture theatre, or in the seat in which one witnessed the other talks. The recalled event is visualized from some more or less specific point of view within the scene itself, then, even if this point of view is not represented as having been one’s own.

The requirements on event recall which fall out of Rubin and Umanath’s (2015) discussion not only serve as a clear expression of the importance placed on scene construction in the recent empirical literature, they also capture an insight in Debus’ (2007) discussion. An earlier approximation of that insight within cognitive psychology is nicely expressed by Brewer:

To the degree that a memory of an object includes information about the experiencing ego (e.g., ego location, ego feelings, etc.) it is a personal memory, but to the degree that information about the ego is not present one would have depersonalized memory of particular objects (Brewer 1986: 31).

We can make sense of these ideas by framing things as follows. At the most general level, experiential remembering presents one with imagery representing things as having been some way or other. In entertaining the imagery, it seems to one that the world was once a certain way. But there are different ways in which such imagery can acquire significance, much like imagining a kitchen table and imagining a dog hidden from view beneath a kitchen table may involve one and the same mental image. Sometimes, and most paradigmatically, experiential recall involves its seeming that one “underwent sensory episodes in which things looked [...] or otherwise stood sensorily the ways that the memory’s accompanying recollective images show things as standing sensorily” (Gregory 2018: 30). Other times, however, for instance when one recalls past events from the outside, the recollective imagery plays a more complex and indirect role. In those cases, such imagery represents “merely that a portion of
the world was once certain sensorily-characterized ways” (Gregory 2018: 30); not that those ways conform to the very ways in which oneself experienced the event. In the example just given, where one recalls delivering a conference talk from the outside, one’s visual imagery necessarily presents this from some point of view, but this point of view is simply a way for one to visualise the action (McCarroll 2018: 117). To quote Velleman (who is concerned with imagining), the imagery “represents objects as they would appear to a viewer, if one were present, but it doesn’t represent them as so appearing to anyone” (1996: 50). Still, the point of view is one which looks out from some location within the recalled scene.

These different recollective projects may not be wholly exclusive, and one may not always be aware or confident, at least prior to reflection, just how one is representing things as having been in undergoing the relevant recollective experience. But that there are these different ways for imagery to represent the past in experiential recall is difficult to deny.

The difference between remembering ‘from the inside’ and ‘from the outside’ does not seem to be an essentially imagistic difference. It is true that switching from remembering event E from the inside to remembering that same event E from the outside will at least typically be accompanied by some imagistic change. But it is not obvious that there is any kind of pictorial aspect or quality of the recollective imagery in the former case which is necessarily missing from the latter (or vice-versa). Both involve the basic process of what is now often called scene construction. As McCarroll (2018: 143ff) convincingly suggests, remembering from the outside is compatible with internal or embodied imagery—recalled sensations or emotions. The essential difference is, plausibly, at the level of the wider recollective project in which one is engaged, and in which imagery plays a supporting role.

It is sometimes supposed that the purpose of sensory imagery in recollective experience is to signal to the rememberer that they are remembering, rather than daydreaming or fantasizing (Conway 2001: 1379), and that inferences about one’s past are therefore warranted (1381; see also Conway (2005: 614)). It is similarly important, for epistemic book-keeping purposes, that one is typically able to tell in which of the above ways recollective imagery is being used. And, indeed, we typically are not tricked into thinking that we are remembering from the inside when we are remembering from the outside, and vice-versa. But this awareness does not come from inspecting the pictorial elements or qualities of the imagery. It comes, rather, from our capacity to know what kind of recollective activity we are engaged in. Insofar as there is an egocentric way in which things are presented only in remembering from the inside, then, this could be understood as something external to the imagery itself.

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11 For critical discussion of whether remembering from the outside is genuine remembering, see Debus (2007), McCarroll (2018), and Sutton (2010). Such forms are very widely accepted in the empirical literature.
To summarise, recollective imagery plays a complex, multi-dimensional role. There is potential for divorce between the way things are sensorily presented as having looked/sounded and the way things are represented as having been by means of visual/auditory imagery. In spite of the divorce illustrated by remembering from the outside, we are of course typically aware of what we are recalling and of whether we are doing so from the inside/outside.

With this background in place, we can begin to appreciate the stark contrast with objectual recall. In objectual remembering there is no question of judging where a recalled or adopted point of view is located in egocentric terms with respect to what is being recalled, contra Rubin and Umanath's (2015) requirement on event recall. Nabokov does not image a scene within which Mademoiselle is spatially related to a point of view he now either recalls or adopts. While Nabokov remembers Mademoiselle as having looked some way, he is not remembering her as having looked that way to something in some place. And this feature violates Rubin and Umanath’s requirement; namely, that it must involve an “egocentric perspective from a specific spatial location” (2015: 4). As Warren and Carmichael suggested, remembering an object to which one has had repeated exposure seems to involve a “composite image” which “shows the object without any definite location in time and space and with no fixed surroundings or background” (1930: 217). Since the cases of objectual remembering described above do not involve either the recall or adoption of a point of view within a scene also occupied by the recalled object, they apparently do not afford awareness of events. And since they do afford awareness of objects from one’s past, Eventism is apparently false.

It may be replied that visual imagery of an ordinary object necessarily requires assuming some way of looking upon the recalled object (e.g., from several feet away, with the object face-on). Insofar as this is right, what is crucial is that this way of looking upon the remembered object need not involve a point of view from within some recalled space. In remembering an event from the outside, one’s visual imagery presents things from some point of view which looks out from a location within the imaged scene. (In the case of repeated events, of course, this may not be associated with any sense of temporal specificity.) By contrast, in recollective experiences such as those illustrated by Nabokov and I, there is no wider scene representing a place of encounter within which both the recalled object and a point of view on that object sit in some spatial relation. And so there are insufficient grounds for supposing that what is experientially recalled is an event. To put it one way, there is simply no room for a ‘from the inside/outside’ distinction in the case of objectual recall.12

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12 It is worth mentioning that there are strong grounds for thinking that object mental imagery and spatial mental imagery recruit functionally independent systems of representation (Farah et al. 1988).
These broadly introspective considerations do not by themselves provide overwhelming evidence against EVENTISM. But they at least begin to cast some doubt, and to perhaps even shift the burden of argument. §3 will strengthen my case by illustrating the harmony between empirical work and the foregoing interpretations of Case W and Nabokov’s Mademoiselle.

A philosopher might object that Rubin and Umanath (2015) are wrong to think their requirement applies to experiential recall of events in general; it applies only to episodic recall (§1.1). And so a defender of EVENTISM could argue that recalling a plurality of encounters need not satisfy their requirement, and that this is indeed what is happening in apparently objectual cases. As we will see, however, the considerations in §3 cast doubt on this assurance that memory exclusively involves representing events. And while there surely is some story to tell about the relation between Nabokov’s past perceptual encounters with Mademoiselle and his present recollective experience, this story need not involve the claim that he is now remembering those past encounters, much less experientially remembering them (§5). As a general rule, and as Rubin and Umanath’s (2015) requirement suggests, experientially recalling something with the aid of information acquired from some past learning event(s) does not entail that one is experientially recalling such event(s).

3 Objectual remembering: A view from cognitive psychology

De Brigard (2018) summarizes a number of studies suggesting that the experience of nostalgia does not always involve episodic recollection. In one of Wildschut et al.’s (2006) studies, the majority of nostalgic experiences concerned persons. De Brigard remarks,

> it is odd that researchers keep insisting that nostalgia is always associated with a specific episodic autobiographical memory. The reason, I believe, has more to do with experimental methodology than with psychological reality (2018: 160).

Something similar is true in the case of experiential remembering. For Tulving (1985: 4), and much of the literature that has followed step, "memories about objects free of their spatial and temporal context are semantic memories" (Rubin 2021). Yet this somewhat dismissive allocation fails to say anything positive, and insofar as ‘semantic memories’ are taken to be

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13 Rubin (2021) instead recommends an alternative organizational model for memory. His category of ‘explicit non-scene non-self-reference memory’ may prove fruitful in drawing attention towards objectual recall.
‘merely known’ rather than ‘recalled’ *per se* it implies that experiential remembering necessarily involves the recollection of episodes—a view even stronger than *eventism*.14

Nonetheless, support for the occurrence of objectual remembering can be recovered from the wider psychological literature. In this section I appeal to two sorts of consideration. The first concerns the *retrieval* stage of experiential remembering. The second concerns the *consolidation* stage in the lifecycle of memories and the gradual process of *semanticization*. These not only provide some support for the actual occurrence of objectual recall, they help point us in the direction of a positive account (§4).

First, then, the cases described in §2 often seem to be what psychologists call *visual memories*: long-term “memory representations that maintain information about the perceptual properties of viewed stimuli” (Hollingworth and Luck 2008: 4). It is well known that we have a vast capacity for visual long-term memories (see Schurgin (2018) for references and a survey). However, the retrieval of visual memories can accompany recollective experiences with a generic or blended character. As Palmeri and Tarr put it, sometimes

a number of matching memories [...] are combined together [...] during the act of memory retrieval [...]. What is common between these memories [...] [are] those visual properties present across many instances stored in memory (2008: 185).

This notion of memories ‘blended’ at the stage of retrieval has a long history of discussion (see Hintzman (1986)). As the Nabokov passage (§1) suggests, it is often faithful to the phenomenology of remembering that the imagery entertained does not purport to concern any particular event. It is perhaps in this way, as a retrieval-stage phenomenon, that Nabokov objectually recalls Mademoiselle. (Readers of *Speak, Memory* soon learn that Nabokov has various episodic memories involving Mademoiselle.) Visual object imagery is known to facilitate the recall of events (Vannucci et al. 2016), and so Nabokov may have seamlessly gone on to recall some specific or general event involving her. But what Nabokov recalls as he writes that very passage is some common *constituent(s)* of events—Mademoiselle’s visible properties, generalised from across the many events in which she was encountered.

Second, it is also widely held that the typical lifecycle of memory traces involves continuous transformation and, over time, *schematization* or *semanticization* (Cermak 1984).

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14 Levine et al. (2004), in conceiving of *repeated event* recall as semantic memory (1641), suggest that repeated events are “not vividly recollected; they are rather ‘known’” (1634). Yet the mean subjective ratings of visual imagery vividness in their own study, while 82% for episodes, are still 57% for repeated events (e.g., one’s coffee-making routine)—and only 22% for items of general knowledge (e.g., historical facts) (1635).
'Consolidation' refers to a family of ongoing dynamic and generative processes. At the declarative level, part of their role is to extract general representations and knowledge from episodic memories and to facilitate their accessibility. It is often suggested that transitional forms of representation exist along a continuum of specificity, from the most specific, recent episodes to the most general items of factual knowledge (Cabeza and St. Jacques 2007; Rubin 2021). The term ‘gist’ is used to refer to a representation of the thematic features of a specific episode, ‘schema’ to “adaptable associative networks of knowledge extracted over multiple similar experiences, capturing similarities across particular episodes” (Robin and Moscovitch 2017: 114). These ‘semantic(ized)’ representations frequently co-exist and interact with episodic memories.

A number of influential accounts posit a hierarchy of such representations, each level of which may contribute to recollective experience. According to the most comprehensive story, derived from Conway and Pleydell-Pearce (2000), recall involves the activation of an autobiographical memory knowledge base. This base comprises two types of representation: autobiographical knowledge—organized in a nested hierarchy ranging in abstraction from one’s ‘life story’ and ‘lifetime period’ knowledge, through to general, extended, and repeated event knowledge—and, second, episodic memories (Conway 2005: 608). Even on such a model, which takes there to be a distinction in kind between episodic memories and memories for general events (such as of ‘taking first year laboratory classes’), retrieval of the latter is acknowledged to afford recollective experiences. Indeed, within Conway’s ‘general event’ category, we find example entries for objects and persons such as ‘Prof. Smith’ (2005: 609). “General events”, we are told, “are more experience-near than lifetime periods and contain information about others, activities, locations” (Conway 2001: 1377). What this framework involves is the idea of a level of schematized representation retaining information for the general perceptible characteristics of event constituents such as scenes and objects, and it is by working in tandem with a general scene construction system that recollective experiences are typically brought about (Conway 2005: 608). According to a more recent elaboration of these ideas, semanticized representations facilitate experiential recall (or indeed ‘episodic future thinking’) by providing a ‘semantic scaffold’ (Greenberg and Verfaellie 2010; Irish and Piguet 2013).

From a philosophical perspective, the term ‘general event’ for the “heterogeneous” (Conway 2001: 1377) content of this level of representation is an imprecise and arguably misleading catch-all term. It is not clear why everything at the intended level of abstraction...

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15 This echoes Neisser’s (1981) influential suggestion that, often, “[t]he single clear memories that we recollect so vividly actually stand for […] a sequence of related events that the single recollection merely typifies” (20).
should represent an event. Insofar as these curated general elements are poised to be funnelled into a scene construction system they should typically be representations of event constituents.

The scene construction posited to underlie episodic memory retrieval and prospection refers to a partial, internal simulation [...]. The content of such a simulation is conceptual knowledge about particular entities, events, and relationships (Binder and Desai 2011: 533).

...numerous personal or general semantic representations related to the recollected environment (e.g., people, friends, buildings, objects, [...] etc.), [...] allow the rememberer to form an episodic [memory] (Svoboda et al. 2006: 2199).

Conway offers a useful characterisation of how ‘general event knowledge’ is employed during a typical instance of experiential recall. A cue, such as the phrase ‘seaside’ or ‘bicycle’, activates part of the autobiographical memory knowledge base. The cue is elaborated by means of a search cycle for associated entries, followed by further search cycles as one continues to recall, typically terminating in recollection of an episode. But imagery is constructed throughout this process. Conway provides two schematized examples:

**Cue word**

**Bicycle**

‘I can see my own bicycle at home in the garage’

‘I rode it a lot when I was home last year in the summer [...]’

‘There is a pub on the canal near us and ‘X’ and I cycled there and it was completely packed out with people sitting outside on the walls’ [...]’

**Seaside**

‘When did I last go to the seaside?’

‘I just had an image of a beach in Cornwall’

‘I’m trying to remember going there on a holiday just after I left school, before college.

I remember we bought some nets, just like kids’

‘And now I remember a rock pool and we had our nets in the water, and our trousers rolled up, and we had a bucket too’ (Conway 2005: 617).

Consider the first line in ‘Bicycle’ and the second line in ‘Seaside’. When all goes well, the imagery accompanying this stage of retrieval involves the activation of general event
knowledge: the knowledge of what one’s garage looks like as one opens the door, or what Gwithian Beach looks like in the summer. Sometimes one gets no further than this stage, and one is unable to retrieve memories of specific events. What is ‘brought to mind’ at this first stage of elaboration are the visualisable properties of so-called general events and their constituents (see also Vannucci et al. (2016)). Conway also notes that people can recall a house they once lived in, people that they have briefly met, etc., without being able to recall any, or more than a few, specific memories. Retention of conceptual autobiographical knowledge that corresponds to experiences that actually occurred without access to associated episodic memories may be one way the SMS [i.e., self-memory system] reduces the potential information overload (2005: 596).

This account fits the intuitive description I gave of Case W, and of the distinctive characteristics of objectual recall described in §2.1. What enables Case W is something at the ‘general event’ level of Conway’s hierarchy, beyond the level of event representations proper.

To summarise, there is a natural interpretation of the kind of case where Nabokov recalls Mademoiselle on which he enjoys a schematic experiential recollection with imagery constructed at the retrieval stage drawn from a range of episodic memories or ‘gists’. And there is also a natural interpretation of Case W on which I, the subject, might only have schema-like representations to go by due to the consolidation and semanticization of any once-episodic memory traces. So, despite its relative neglect of non-episodic forms of experiential recall, the empirical literature encourages the idea that there are recollective experiences not afforded by the retrieval of episodic memories. Consolidation processes, in particular, are understood as generalising or semanticizing the content of memories away from specific episodes, and, over time, towards objects, places, and themes which extend or persist across events in time.

4 A positive account of objectual remembering

§§2–3 drew on considerations from introspection and from the empirical literature to build a case in favour of objectual recall and against EVENTISM. There are ways of experientially recalling ordinary material objects which do not involve experientially recalling events involving them. In this section, I sketch a positive account of what objectual remembering does involve. On the view proposed, to objectually recall o is to activate knowledge of o’s past perceptible qualities. This proposal ties a number of threads together. Objectual remembering is imagistically distinctive in lacking certain spatial-perspectival qualities which one’s experience must possess
when one experientially recalls an event (§2.1). And, as §3 began to suggest, recollective experiences like Case W can be accommodated if we think of them as the manifestation of semantic(ized) representations of objects’ general, past perceptible qualities.¹⁶

So-conceptualized, objectual remembering may more closely resemble semantic memory than episodic memory. But objectual recall involves activating a certain kind of knowledge in a distinctive way. It is constitutively bound up with the subject’s retention of abilities to engage in conscious imagery which appropriately matches the object’s past perceptible qualities, generalised from across the times at which the subject encountered the object. This is why objectual recall affords instances of experiential remembering.

Don Locke (1971) describes something like this for what he calls personal memory of “particular items—people, places, things, events, situations—that we have personally experienced” (70), a kind of memory which “essentially involves mental imagery” (80). He suggests it “consists in bringing some previously experienced thing to mind”, “going over what it was like, […] where the ability to do this depends on our having experienced it” (76).

Consider an analogy with discrimination. There is the state of being able to discriminate between tokens of ultramarine and azure, and there is the process of discriminating between them. Williamson (1990) recommends thinking of the former as knowledge and of the latter as its activation.¹⁷ One thing this does is explain the sense in which discriminating—like remembering—is a success notion: one cannot discriminate something in error, just as one cannot remember that which did not occur.

In remembering, too, we have an occurrent, conscious episode (active recall) which is the product of a state. By a loose analogy with the claim that “[t]o discriminate between a and b is to activate the knowledge that a and b are distinct” (Williamson 1990: 7), the simplest story, I propose, is that to experientially recall an object is to activate knowledge of its past perceptible qualities; e.g., of what it was like to see it.¹⁸ I say ‘knowledge of’ the qualities of an object to bring out the sense in which objectual recall is—like all experiential recall—bound up with an particular sort of sensory mental imagery, something Don Locke so nicely expresses:¹⁹

¹⁶ One would not want to simply say that, e.g., Nabokov knows Mademoiselle, and that it is this ‘objectual knowledge’ (see n. 4) that he is activating. First, it is not clear there is any robust, context-invariant sense to be given to ‘knows x’ locutions (Boer and Lycan 1986). Second, this would not obviously help to explain why activating such knowledge gives rise to recollective experience, with its distinctive sensory mental imagery.

¹⁷ Of course, one may not have encountered instances of azure and ultramarine before, so talk of its activation may amount to either the employment of knowledge already possessed or to its acquisition.

¹⁸ There are some similarities here with Soteriou’s (2013) proposal that “what is retained in the case of episodic memory is knowledge of […] what it was like to apprehend the particular event now recalled” (173).

¹⁹ It might be objected that one could surely objectually recall O while remaining agnostic about whether one really is remembering or is instead confabulating. But, just as the observation that one can discriminate a
there is a difference between remembering what something was like in the sense of remembering that it was such-and-such, and remembering what it was like in the sense of remembering the such-and-suchness of it [...]. Someone who remembers that a certain shop was dark, dirty, and musty may be said to remember the shop, even to remember it well, but I do not think he can be said to recall it unless he remembers not just that it was dark, dirty, and musty, but remembers the dark, the dirt, the musty smell (1971: 80).

Now, it can look as though objectual recall, understood in this way, collapses into either the experiential recall of an event or mere sensory imagining. Either one is merely sensorily imagining an object one has encountered in the past by activating knowledge of what it is like to encounter it, or one is remembering an object by activating knowledge of what it was like to encounter it. And if one is doing the latter, one is, after all, recalling some past event(s) in which one encountered it. This dichotomy seems to be suggested by Soteriou’s (2013: 178) discussion. Hoerl (2014) nicely expresses the two sides of the apparent dichotomy as follows:

Instances of remembering seeing x can be based on more than one perceptual encounter with x, without collapsing into a form of generic memory such as merely remembering what x looks like, because they involve an appreciation that what is being remembered can in some sense not be encountered again in the same way [i.e., as lying in the past] (Hoerl 2014: 369; emphasis added).

According to Hoerl, what distinguishes remembering seeing an object from merely remembering what it looks like is that the former involves appreciating that what one recalls is an event which is now completed, and which lies in one’s past. Extrapolating, one might think that what distinguishes remembering in general from mere imagining is the positioning of what one recalls within one’s past. And, in that case, experientially remembering an object, as opposed to merely sensorily imagining it on the basis of knowledge of what it looks or sounds like, requires the mediation of an event after all.

However, there are two reasons why this worry should be resisted.

First, we should not accept an exhaustive dichotomy between the two activities. Although ‘knowing what it is like’ more readily has a generic reading than ‘knowing what it was from b without knowing that one has done so does not undermine the claim that to discriminate is to activate knowledge, nor does it follow from the fact that one can recall things without knowing that one is doing so that to remember is not to activate knowledge.
like’, the latter has such a reading, too. It seems this is what one should independently say about non-episodic remembering; in particular, about experientially remembering repeated or ‘general’ events. By focusing on these generic readings, we can begin to make room for objectual remembering.

It does not follow from one’s remembering a quality of some past experiences that one is remembering those experiences (Hoerl 2014: 352). I can recall what it has been like for me to taste marmite (something I have seldom tasted) without recalling the past occasions on which I tasted marmite. In a similar way, I can recall what it has been like to see a certain object or person without remembering the occasion(s) on which I have done so. What I am doing is activating knowledge acquired from those past experiences. In Case W, for example, although I have not retained knowledge of what it was like to perceptually experience any particular past events involving W, what I do have is more schematic, perhaps ‘semanticized’, knowledge of what it was in general like to see and hear W; of W’s past perceptible qualities. While I cannot recall perceptually encountering W, I can recall what it was in general like to perceptually encounter W. Nabokov learned what it was like to perceptually encounter Mademoiselle through his perceptual encounters with Mademoiselle, but it does not follow from this fact about the causal aetiology of his knowledge that what he is doing is recalling the events which were his perceptual encounters with Mademoiselle. This is for more or less the same reason that when one ‘semantically recalls’ that Yaoundé is the capital of Cameroon one is not thereby recalling the occasion(s) on which one learned this fact. What Nabokov recalls, in a seeing like way, is Mademoiselle herself.

The second consideration which can explain how objectual recall may be characterised as the activation of knowledge without collapsing into event recall has to do with the importance of ‘top-down’ effects in remembering. Hoerl (2014) goes on to write that

what generates the element of ‘episodicity’ or ‘pastness’ in episodic memory, which makes remembering seeing x different from merely remembering what x looks like, is the way in which episodic memory recruits other knowledge and a particular kind of causal reasoning. When we remember episodically, we have an idea of some concrete way in which things have changed since the events or situation we remember, providing for a sense in which those are events or situations that won’t occur again (2014: 370–1; emphasis added).

Hoerl suggests that insofar as memory mobilizes such knowledge and causal reasoning it is episodic (2014: 371). There may indeed be a specific kind of knowledge and causal reasoning
which is peculiar to the recollection of events. Yet, much like with recollection of a general type of event of which there may be tokens in one’s future, when we recall an object which persists across events in time and which one could perhaps re-encounter in the future, I want to suggest that it is still possible to ‘make concrete to oneself’ that what one has in mind is something which in some sense lies in one’s past.

In recalling Mademoiselle, Nabokov is not simply visualising a face which strikes him as familiar. He is carefully reconstructing the visual appearance of a person he knows he encountered throughout his early years. There is an awareness of pastness associated with this activity which derives not merely from some ‘warm and intimate’ simple quality of his experience but from poised knowledge concerning roughly where his encounters with Mademoiselle lie in his past. In the context of Conway’s (2005) Self-Memory System framework, the retrieval of memories about Mademoiselle’s appearance will be nested within lifetime period knowledge. In objectual recall, one knows (‘by description’, we might say) that there are some experiences in one’s past which had this approximate type of phenomenal character, so to speak. But it does not follow that such experiences are what one remembers.

There is a general consensus that experiential remembering is a complex cognitive activity requiring the exercise of various functionally and neurally dissociable but interacting processes, of which imagery represents just one important element (Vannucci et al. 2016: 456). Our appreciation of the pastness of what we recall when we experientially remember requires employing a rich and varied set of cognitive capacities. Insofar as experiential recall involves being in a position to know that what one remembers is located in the past, we need not think of this as enabled by the mere awareness of certain qualities of one’s experience. It may involve phenomena discussed under the ‘source monitoring’ framework (Johnson et al. 1993), according to which subjects use content-based markers to determine whether they are remembering rather than, say, imagining. Perhaps objectual recall additionally involves appreciating that what is recalled is not confined to the boundaries of any particular encounter; that objects and persons have a life beyond our encounters with them.

We can appeal to the above facts about how experiential recall is bound up with the retrieval of autobiographical knowledge in order to explain how objectual recall can equally be remembering per se. The subject, activating knowledge of what it was (in general) like to perceptually encounter the object recalled, will similarly be in a position to know that the object was encountered in the past, and will be disposed to also form beliefs about when the recalled object had the perceptible qualities characterising one’s recollective experience—even if it is no more specific than ‘at some time in my past’. Objectual recall at least involves an appreciation that the object did possess the relevant perceptible qualities but that it may no
longer do so. The knowledge one has concerns what it was like—that there are, at some point in one’s past, encounters with the object in which it had these perceptible qualities—and in mobilizing this knowledge one will at some level be aware that the object may have since changed beyond one’s capacity to recognise it.

To summarize this section’s proposal, a simple story about objectual remembering can be told once we are no longer wedded to **EVENTISM**: to experientially recall an object is to activate knowledge of what it was in general like to perceptually encounter that object; knowledge that the object has on some occasion(s) in one’s past exemplified these perceptible qualities. This knowledge involves a kind of direct reference to the object but is about the relevant series of encounters only ‘by description’, and this is reflected in the absence of certain spatial-perspectival imagery from one’s recollective experience. Such knowledge will be embedded within a wider network of autobiographical knowledge concerning the object being something one encountered at some earlier stage in one’s life. And it will often also be associated with an array of event memories which one may, but need not, go on to experientially recall.

### 5 Against arguments for **EVENTISM**

This section undercuts the two most convincing considerations in favour of **EVENTISM**. The first concerns the nature and role of imagery in experiential remembering. The second concerns what we might call the metasemantics of remembering, and in particular what the causal aetiology of a representation retrieved in the course of remembering may or may not entail about what is remembered.

#### 5.1 Experiential recall as recalled experience

An appealing idea is that experiential remembering is the recall (or, metaphorically, the **replay**) of experiences. If there is an argument behind the appeal, it is presumably that the imagistic character of experiential recollection is best explained by supposing that what is recalled is an experience. In Martin’s (2002) discussion of the following thesis,

\[
\text{DEPENDENCY: } \text{“to imagine sensorily a } \varphi \text{ is to imagine experiencing a } \varphi^{“} (2002: 404)
\]

according to which an act of sensorily imagining a red apple has a red apple *experience* as its object, Martin (2002) suggests that the thesis is supported by its capacity to explain the experiential character of sensory imagining: “sensory imagining is experiential or phenomenal
precisely because what is imagined is experiential or phenomenal” (406; emphasis added).

Now there is a notorious Berkeleyan dispute concerning whether and in what sense imagining an object entails imagining perceiving it. And I do not wish to engage with that dispute here. Instead, I want to examine whether there is support for an analogous thesis in the case of remembering, in virtue of its capacity to explain the imagistic character of experiential recall, and, if there is, whether this offers support for EVENTISM (experiences being events).

In fact, we see something like this transposition in Martin (2001), where he argues that the imagistic character of episodic recall is owed to the fact that what is recalled is a past experience: “an episode of recall has as its object the initial experience which was the apprehending of the event” (2001: 278); “memory imagery [...] represents particular encounters in sensory experience from the past” (279). And this notion of “acquaintance with a past episode” is intended to be “explanatory of a sense of pastness” in episodic recall (269).

At first pass, then, one might suggest the following analogue of DEPENDENCY:

**EXPERIENTIALISM:** To experientially recall x is to recall experiencing x.

To what extent is EXPERIENTIALISM supported by a capacity to explain the imagistic character of experiential remembering?

Like DEPENDENCY, EXPERIENTIALISM leads to unnatural consequences when we substitute in what is already an experience, e.g., a visual experience of a red square. We would not want to say that to experientially recall a visual experience of a red square is to recall experiencing a visual experience of a red square (Soteriou 2013: 162). Moreover, just as Martin (2002) is aware that applying DEPENDENCY to cases of imagining ‘from the outside’ may not be straightforward, nor is applying EXPERIENTIALISM to cases of remembering from the outside.

However, the principal issue with EXPERIENTIALISM emerges when we try to substitute in non-episodic events. Suppose one experientially recalls a general event such as swimming in the nearby river in one’s childhood town. According to EXPERIENTIALISM, the character of one’s recollective experience is determined by an experience one had in the past of that general event. But this at best false, and perhaps simply incoherent. We do not experience general events.

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20 Martin (2002) does not argue for this thesis in its full generality. He regards it as plausible “at least for those cases where one imagines a situation ‘from the inside’” (Martin 2002: 404).

21 In favour, see *inter alia* Peacocke (1985: 22) and Soteriou (2013: 159ff). Against, see *inter alia* Gregory (2013: 69) and Noordhof (2002).

22 As others have noted (Soteriou 2013: 173), there is a problem with Martin’s (2001) account, insofar as it relies crucially on the idea that what is retained in memory is “the past apprehension of the event” (267). Retention involves states, whereas a “seeing, feeling, [or] tasting” are “events or occurrences” (265).
What we experience is, perhaps necessarily, particular (though of course particular events vary in duration). Even if EXPERIENTIALISM is adequate for cases of episodic recall (from the inside), it simply does not seem applicable to non-episodic remembering. The naïve idea that experiential remembering consists in the ‘replay’ of past experience cannot be maintained in general. Experiential recollections of repeated or general events have too much in common with episodic cases to be considered fundamentally different in this respect.\textsuperscript{23} If EXPERIENTIALISM cannot explain the experiential character of experiential remembering \textit{in general}, any truth it has is insufficient to support EVENTISM as a general claim about experiential remembering.\textsuperscript{24}

It is tempting to offer defenders of EXPERIENTIALISM the reply that sense can be made of remembering ‘experiencing a general event’. After all, one will have experienced the particular events which it generalizes. However, once this concession is made, a very similar claim, no less motivated, can be used to reconcile EXPERIENTIALISM with objectual remembering. And, in that case, EXPERIENTIALISM no longer provides sufficient support for EVENTISM.

Insofar as EXPERIENTIALISM is an appealing thesis, I want to suggest that it is ambiguous between a true-but-harmless reading and a harmful-but-false reading. The harmless reading simply observes that experiential remembering necessarily involves imagery, appropriate to the kind of thing recalled, which \textit{presents} an experience of \(x\): imagery which purports that \(x\) once looked or sounded (etc.) way \(W\), where way \(W\) is the type of phenomenal character corresponding to one’s present imagery and which may include spatial-perspectival qualities. The harmful reading suggests that experiential remembering necessarily involves imagery which \textit{represents} an experience of \(x\) as lying in one’s past: imagery which purports that, in the course of one’s stream of conscious experience, \(x\) looked or sounded (etc.) way \(W\) to oneself. This harmful reading ignores the potential divorce noted in §2.1 between the way things are sensorily \textit{presented} as having once looked/sounded and the way things are \textit{represented} as having been by means of visual/auditory imagery. This divorce is necessary if we are to properly distinguish remembering from the inside and remembering from the outside, and to properly characterize experiential recollection of non-episodic events and objects.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} See Andonovski (2020: 343) and Rubin & Umanath (2015: 4).

\textsuperscript{24} I doubt that there is much reason to broach the issue of what relation general events bear to particular events here (e.g., type and token, or determinable and determinate). It seems that the category is used for myriad purposes by psychologists, and there may be no privileged answer.

\textsuperscript{25} There is an implicit hang-up which might underpin some of the attraction to EXPERIENTIALISM; that unless the phenomenal character of one’s recollection involves imagery which is \textit{preserved} from a past sensory experience (of the very event now recalled), the imagery must be currently constructed (or repurposed) and so fail to comprise a properly recollective experience. This is reflected in remarks made by Martin elsewhere (2015: 41–3). However, I take one of the lessons of the increasing emphasis on the (re)constructive character
5.2 **Causal aetiology and the content of remembering**

In §2, we saw Debus (2007) claim that whatever spatial-perspectival characteristics Mary’s experience has, those characteristics cannot be explained claiming that Mary is recalling some past perceptual experience(s) of the painting. One might reply that it must be so-explainable. After all, the reason that Mary cannot recall the canvas as viewed from behind is that she has not visually experienced it from that perspective. This observation might lead one to wonder whether her recall of the painting really is, after all, just the surreptitious recall of her past perceptual encounter(s). In this way, one might suppose that our apparent cases of objectual recall suffices for being the recall of the relevant past perceptual encounter(s), i.e., in virtue of being appropriately caused by such encounter(s).

The supposition here rests on something like the following general principle: if the causal aetiology of a representation retrieved in the course of remembering originates in an experience of event E, then the subject recalls (among any other things) event E.

The first thing to say about this principle is that it is not sufficiently strong, on its own, to entail EVENTISM. EVENTISM claims that experientially recalling an object requires experientially recalling some event(s) in which one encountered it. And experientially remembering an event plausibly requires more than remembering an event per se.

However, a far more serious problem with the proposed principle is that it is already hopelessly strong. Even supposing that we impose a requirement on the representation’s being reasonably accurate with respect to the relevant event(s) (Martin and Deutscher 1966: 166), the principle still makes event recall much easier than its use in psychological theories requires. It has been emphasised throughout this literature for some time that the ‘one trace per experienced event’ picture is “both conceptually and empirically highly dubious” (Sutton and Windhorst 2009: 86). It is likely the norm for multiple experiences to contribute to the content of a single stored trace, and for multiple traces to contribute to the content of a single retrieved representation (Michaelian and Robins 2018: 21). Tolerance of minor inaccuracies would entail, given the causal principle above, that recollection of particular past events is seldom achieved. In short (and as much of the discussion in §3 suggests), we cannot simply look to the causal aetiology of a state to determine whether it is a memory of such-and-such an event. The correct observation that Mary cannot remember the canvas as viewed from behind because she has not visually experienced it from behind in no way entails that what Mary is doing when she

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of remembering to be that this sort of requirement is simply far too stringent: “memories are blended, not laid down independently once and for all, and are reconstructed rather than reproduced” (Sutton 1998: 2).
experientially recalls the painting is recalling her past perceptual encounter(s) with it, much less experientially recalling such encounter(s).

6 Conclusion

Philosophers have often approached experiential remembering as though it were not merely the recall of things encountered in one’s past in an experiential manner, but as involving a phenomenology of “reliving the circumstances” of one’s encounter (Klein 2018: 121). This conception limits the scope of experiential recall to more or less specific episodes in one’s past, a claim which would require substantial argumentation which has simply not been provided. I have argued, against this, that while some episodic recollections may have this character, and while this may be an instrumentally useful focus for some empirical investigation, experiential remembering more generally cannot be understood as being constrained in this way. The recall of repeated events, general events, and objects look, in many ways, like differences of degree rather than of kind, and these instances of recall pose many of the same philosophical questions as episodic recollections. If we are to understand what remembering is, how it differs from imagining, how and what kind of knowledge it affords, whether it is fundamentally representational or relational, inter alia, then we must pay more attention to experiential remembering in its full generality. It is with this mind that the failure of EVENTISM should be instructive for future research. Remembering might necessarily involve ‘re-experiencing’, but it need not involve ‘reliving’.*

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