



In a sentimental mood: memories as treasured objects

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ABSTRACT. It is common for people to view memories as ‘treasured objects’ or ‘cherished possessions’. Great care is taken to preserve such memories via scrapbooks, photo albums, or mementos. Despite the widespread nature of this phenomenon in human life, it has received little attention in recent philosophical discussions of personal identity. In this essay I consider the nature of these memories, asking what kinds of memories hold this status and why they are so highly treasured. I argue that at least one version of this phenomenon involves memories of autobiographically significant events that are experientially rich and evoke complex, multi-valenced affect. I then investigate the way in which such memories can be connected to a sense of personal identity and continuity, which explains their value. The conclusions reached are preliminary, and directions for further development are discussed.

Keywords: Memory; personal identity; imagination; continuism; nostalgia.

Em um clima sentimental: memórias como objetos valiosos

RESUMO. É comum que as pessoas vejam as memórias como ‘objetos preciosos’ ou ‘bens preciosos’. Grande cuidado é tomado para preservar essas memórias por meio de álbuns de recortes, álbuns de fotos ou lembranças. Apesar de esse fenômeno ser amplamente difundido na vida humana, ele recebeu pouca atenção nas discussões filosóficas recentes sobre identidade pessoal. Neste ensaio, considero a natureza dessas memórias, perguntando que tipos de memórias têm esse status e por que são tão valorizadas. Argumento que pelo menos uma versão desse fenômeno envolve memórias de eventos autobiograficamente significativos que são experientialmente ricos e evocam afetos complexos e multivalorados. Em seguida, investigo a maneira como essas memórias podem ser conectadas a um senso de identidade pessoal e continuidade, o que explica seu valor. As conclusões alcançadas são preliminares e as direções para desenvolvimentos adicionais são discutidas.

Palavras-chave: Memória; identidade pessoal; imaginação; continuísmo; nostalgia.

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Introduction

It is common for people to view memories as ‘treasured objects’ or ‘cherished possessions’. Folk wisdom tells us that whatever happens, ‘we will always have our memories,’ and that ‘being rich in memories is better than being rich in money’. People seek to preserve their memories by keeping scrapbooks, journals, or photo albums, listening to old songs, or reminiscing with old friends. The celebration of memory as a treasured possession is a frequent theme of story, song, and poem in both ‘high’ and popular culture. There are, of course, important individual differences with respect to the kind of value placed on memory, as well as variations between cultures, and over time. Still, practices like reminiscing, keeping mementos, and otherwise seeking to hold on to prized memories are remarkably widespread across cultures and over history. Treasured memory as a phenomenon has, however received relatively little scrutiny in recent philosophical discussions of memory.

In this paper I turn my attention to this class of memories, asking what kinds of memories tend to hold this treasured status and seeking to understand some of the reasons they are so highly valued. I suggest that one important factor is the role they play in creating and maintaining a sense of personal identity and continuity. Exploration of treasured memories thus yields insight not only into the nature of these memories, but also into the widely held, but poorly understood, view that our memories ‘make us who we are’. Section one clarifies and delimits the phenomenon at issue, providing a preliminary classification of the kinds of memories that tend to be seen as cherished objects. This discussion reveals the importance of the affective

component of these memories and suggests a preliminary hypothesis about one source of their value. Section two refines this hypothesis and describes a complex, mixed-valence affect associated with treasured memories. This refinement points to a connection between these memories and personal identity, which is explored further in section three. The Conclusion points to work yet to be done which, as will be clear by that point, is considerable. The questions I am raising become very complicated very quickly, and so my conclusions are highly provisional, but nevertheless, I hope, point to a fruitful area of investigation.

1. What are Treasured Memories Like?

We actively endeavor to preserve and recall all kinds of memories for all kinds of reasons. Remembering my passwords, where the car keys are, what I need to get at the store, what I promised to whom, and a host of other such things is of undeniable practical importance and many memories are valued because they provide information we require to function effectively. It is characteristic of treasured memories, however, that they seem to possess intrinsic value as well as any instrumental value they may provide. When people pour over photo albums or reminisce with friends the goal often seems simply to remember, not to remember for some further purpose. My first question is thus: What kind of memories (or memories of what kinds of things) are such that we tend to actively seek to retain and evoke them just for the sake of recollecting them? As already indicated, I do not have a list of defining features, nor am I at all sure one is possible. At the very least, I am sure that there are important distinctions to be recognized within the category of treasured memories. Still, there is a good deal we can say about the kinds of memories that typically fall into this category, and this can provide a starting point.

One feature is that they are autobiographical memories. Treasured memories are memories of people, places, and events in one's own history, and that one has experienced first-hand. They tend, further, to be memories of events that are autobiographically significant for the rememberer. Frequently these are culturally recognized benchmarks or occasions in a human life, such as weddings, graduations, the birth of a child, or holidays. But they are also often memories of people, places, or things, that simply matter to the rememberer, or are seen as representative of what is important to her, (e.g., that long, glorious summer, the perfect peace of a mountain hike, a vacation with friends, a typical family dinner or day at the park with the children).

A second important feature of treasured memories is that they are richly experiential. It is tempting to say that they are episodic rather than semantic memories. According to a standard understanding of this distinction, semantic memory involves recall of propositional information (e.g., The capital of Idaho is Boise; I remember *that* we took a camping trip in 1975), while episodic memory involves imagery and/or affect (e.g., I remember *our* camping trip in 1975, how it rained, how we fought, and then how wonderfully crisp the air was the next day and how delicious the freshly-caught fish cooked over the campfire tasted) (e.g., Tulving, 1972, 1985). While there are ongoing disputes about the taxonomy of memory, this broad distinction will suffice for present purposes. Treasured memories are like episodic memories insofar as they contain imagery and a reproduction of qualitative, first-personal experience of what is remembered, but they comprise a broader class than episodic memory insofar as they need not be memories of particular events. There are many complexities about how to characterize the contents of memories, but I want to leave it open that treasured memories can be memories of people (my friends from high school) or places (the cabin we used to visit) or life phases (when the kids were young) or repeated events (playing basketball with my graduate school friends), none of which would, on at least some accounts, count as episodic memories.

The experiential character of these memories is critical, since the value that is attributed to the mere recollecting of the past is connected with an ability to reexperience or relive past experiences. One of the countless webpages offering quotations about memory provides a nice example of the kind of sentiment that is often involved when people seek to capture events for later recollection: "Do you sometimes want to stop time because life is so beautiful? Some moments in life are so delightful and precious that they should never come to an end" (Mueller, 2020). The advice implied is that while stopping time is not possible, such precious moments can be preserved in memory and in this way experienced once again. It is not unusual for someone to say that they never want to forget how they felt on their wedding day, or what it is like to hike to their favorite lake.

This analysis seems to suggest a simple way both to delimit the class of relevant memories more precisely and to explain at least one source of their value. If the value of these memories is connected to reliving the experience associated with what is remembered, it would seem that treasured memories would be memories of autobiographically significant events that are especially positive or joyful, and that we value them because in recalling them we relive the happy time and feel that joy in the present. I do not want to deny that this is

part of what is going on. This way of understanding treasured memories comports well with the common wisdom that we should hold on to memories of the happy times in our lives so that we can use them to lift our spirits on inevitable future occasions when we are discouraged or sad. The idea that memories can be used in this way is expressed in self-help books, magazines, websites (e.g., *150 Sweet Memories Sayings and Messages*, 2016), and popular song lyrics (e.g., from the Jerome Kern classic ‘Just the Way You Look Tonight’: ‘Some day, when I’m awfully low/When the world is cold/I will feel a glow just thinking of you/and the way you look tonight’). While this account of the reasons we cherish treasured memories is attractive, and undoubtedly partly correct, there is reason to think it is not the whole story, as I explain in the next section.

2. Mixed Emotions

Despite its initial plausibility, reflection on the connection between affect and memory reveals that the simple picture outlined at the end of the last section is too simple. To begin, the affect we experience in remembering is not always the same as the affect experienced at the time(s) remembered. This is something that philosophers of memory have observed (e.g., Debus, 2007; Goldie, 2012) and is also readily available to introspection. Remembering the ecstatic days of a fabulous romance may bring pleasure, but it might also bring torment after one’s beloved has ended the relationship and found someone new. Parents whose children have moved away may become melancholy recalling the joy-filled days when they were growing up. The memory of happy days with a friend who has died may be the occasion for overwhelming grief; and remembering past successes may be depressing if things have not gone well lately. This happens also in the other direction. Remembering difficult times can bring happiness and satisfaction in the present. Recalling how discouraged I was when I thought I would never get a job may make my current professional triumphs all the sweeter, and remembering how devastated I was when I thought my relationship was over may make me that much happier about the fact that we are going strong now. So, while memories of some happy events make us happy, and this may be one reason we value them, we need a more general principle that explains, also, why we sometimes do not treasure memories of past happy events and do treasure memories of unhappy past events.

The required principle may appear blindingly obvious. The relevant factor, we might think, is not whether the events remembered were ones that made us happy or unhappy when they occurred, but whether remembering them makes us happy now. We treasure *memories* that bring us joy, whatever the affective valance of the events of which they are memories. This proposal solves the immediate problem but does not get to the heart of the matter. Sometimes, indeed often, we treasure memories that will predictably bring us pain. We have already seen some examples of this. Earlier, I gave examples of memories of happy experiences that do not bring happiness. This discussion may have implied that they are not, therefore, treasured. But this inference is too quick. On reflection, it seems clear that some of the painful memories in these examples are memories one would actively cultivate, and with which one would not willingly part.

Think, for instance of the memories of the joyful time spent with children who have grown up and moved away, or of happy days in a homeland devastated by civil war from which one has been displaced and which one may never see again, or of the last days one spent with a loved one who has died. It is difficult to think of these memories as joyful, or to say that remembering them makes the rememberer happy, or even that the rememberer *expects* that remembering them will bring joy. Still, it is utterly natural to classify these as cherished memories. Some painful memories are, of course, overwhelming and emotionally destructive. These are not treasured memories. There may well be circumstances under which people would do well to forget some parts of their lives and may make efforts to do so. But there seems also a significant number of memories which are treasured despite causing pain. The idea that painful memories can be among the ones we value most is found in many places from poetry to popular culture. It is famously expressed in Tennyson’s observation that “’Tis better to have loved and lost/Than never to have loved at all,” something he feels, he says, “[...] when I sorrow most” (Tennyson, 2022). In popular culture it can be seen, for instance, in the film *The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, as well as in pop psychology books and magazine articles (e.g., Wallace, 2011). The idea that we should hold on to memories of our autobiographically significant joys and sorrows, the ups and downs that make up our lives, is by no means an alien one.

Once we recognize this, it becomes puzzling that people are so keen to relive or reexperience the past in these memories. There seems no consistent affective valance to either the times remembered or the times at which they are recollected, making it natural to wonder whether we might not have been looking in the wrong place by trying to understand the value these memories hold in terms of their connection to affect. I do think that affect is not the only relevant factor here (more on this in the next section), but we should not give up so

quickly on explaining an important part of the value of these memories in terms of the affect they evoke. The difficulty we have uncovered is not really that the affect in these cases is inconsistent; it is rather that it is complicated. The 'reliving' component of treasured memory is genuine, but it a vast oversimplification to think of recalled affect as *replacing* the affect of the present with the affect of the time remembered. It is instead a matter of regaining access to the emotion connected with what is remembered within the context of the present, so that the overall nature and affective valance of recalling a treasured memory is a complexly structured mixture of (reanimated) past and present experience.

A treasured memory of a lost happiness thus includes, as part of the overall experience, a reexperiencing, and so a reclamation, of the past joy, albeit one that is tempered by the context of the present, which layers the happiness with a painful experience of distance. These are the sorts of memories that bring a wistful smile to our faces even as they bring a joyful tear to our eye. Similarly, when a memory of a painful period gives us happiness now because it is in the past, what we experience in the memory is often not simply unmitigated joy, but rather a joy that contains within it access to the painful period, and so a joy tinged with sadness for all that we went through and all that was lost. This is still a crude account of the emotion experienced in these cases, and there remains a great deal to explore about the kinds of complex affective states that memories of this sort engender. For now, however, we can get a fair distance by recognizing that the affective states elicited by these memories are typically not simple 'happiness', or 'sadness', or 'joy', or 'sorrow' as implied earlier, but something more like 'wistful happiness' or 'bittersweet joy' or 'poignant nostalgia'.

The complexity of the emotions that can be engendered by episodic memories, particularly those which come from the juxtaposition of the past and present affect associated with what is remembered, has been noted by Goldie (2012) and Dokic and Arcangeli (2018) among others, including in my own work (Schechtman, 2020). Filipe De Brigard has also emphasized the multi-valenced affect involved in his insightful treatment of nostalgia (De Brigard, 2018). Nostalgia, as De Brigard defines it, is not the same as treasured memory. For one thing, we can experience nostalgia for times and places that existed before we were born, and so which we cannot remember (De Brigard, 2018, p. 160-161). Nevertheless, the two concepts are closely related in ways that will be further explored in what follows. To avoid ambiguity, I will refer to instances of nostalgia about our own pasts in the form of treasured memories as 'nostalgic recollection', rather than 'nostalgia'.

My suggestion is thus that our mistake was not to think that the affect evoked by treasured memory is key to their value, but rather to assume that only positively valenced affect is relevant. This value is connected instead to the ability to evoke specifically these kinds of complex, multiplicitous emotions. This last claim will, of course, require some explanation. It is not so difficult to understand why we would value experiencing happiness or joy, but why would we seek out these complicated states? There may well be many reasons for this, and it may well also be the case that in some instances it is a simpler form of recollection that people are after. In what follows, however, I explore one important source of value which is suggested by thinking of treasured memories as a species of nostalgia. Nostalgia has been connected not only to complex affect, but also to a feeling of wellbeing that is linked to a sense of personal continuity and identity (e.g., Wijnant A.P. van Tilburg, 2018). It is not immediately obvious why nostalgia should generate such a sense. Since it is often experienced as a yearning for a past from which one is cut off, it seems more like an experience of discontinuity or lost identity. Our analysis of treasured memories can, however, help us to understand why nostalgic recollection should provide a sense of identity and continuity and this will in turn provide insight into why these memories are so highly valued.

3. Identity

We have characterized treasured memories as experientially rich, autobiographically significant memories of people, places, or events that evoke complex, multi-valenced affect. I have suggested that one reason we value these memories so much is that, as a form of nostalgic recollection, they provide a sense of personal continuity and identity. The aim is thus to connect this sense of identity to the complex structure of the affective experience they generate. To make this connection I begin by seeking a better understanding of how such memories, as a form of nostalgic recollection, can provide a sense of continuity and identity despite being also an experience of distance from the past.

To gain such an understanding, it will be useful to contrast the kind of distance from the past experienced in nostalgic recollection from another, deeper form of experienced distance. This will allow us to see why the form of experienced distance found in treasured memories does not threaten a sense of continuity but, to the contrary, is critical to it. One description of the kind of experienced distance from one's past that I wish to

contrast with that found in nostalgic recollection occurs in Galen Strawson's objections to narrative accounts of personal identity. Strawson describes himself as having an 'Episodic' experience of self. This means, he says, that he has no real sense of himself as having existed in the further past or existing into the further future. He realizes that he, the human person Galen Strawson, has a past, and recalls key events in his personal (human) history. He experiences himself, however, as though he is a different *self* from the one who had those experiences (Strawson, 2004, p. 430-431). Strawson argues further that the way he relates to his past is not uncommon, and provides examples of figures throughout history who have reported similar attitudes (for instance Henry James remarking that he thinks of one of his earlier works as having been written by "[...] quite another person" (Strawson, 2004, p. 429).

Another version of this kind of distance from one's past is described by Nichols and Klein, who report on R.B., a neurological patient who develops an unusual memory disorder after a biking accident. "R.B. was able to remember particular incidents from his life, accompanied by temporal, spatial, and self-referential knowledge, but he did not feel the memories he experienced belonged to him. In his words, they he lacked 'ownership' (Klein & Nichols, 2012, p. 678). R.B., for instance, describes recollections of studying with his friends or going on a picnic. He says he "[...] can picture the scene perfectly clearly" and "[...] 'relive' it in the sense of re-running the experience of being there", but he also says that, although he knows that the events he is "[...] re-running" occurred in his life, reliving them had "[...] the feeling of imagining, [as if] re-running an experience that my parents described from their college days" (Klein & Nichols, 2012, p. 686). Eventually, he started to regain a sense of ownership for individual memories, and ultimately all were reclaimed.

These two cases are, in different ways, extreme: Strawson's with respect to the scope of his feelings of distance, i.e., he has almost no memories to which he feels connected, and R.B.'s because of the completeness of his feeling of disconnection from the past. The phenomenon itself is however, as Strawson insists, quite common. Most people have had the experience of encountering an old photo or piece of schoolwork and recalling the occasion full well, but nevertheless feeling like it occurred in 'a different lifetime'. Moreover, our attempts to preserve treasured memories do not always succeed in evoking a rich experiential state with complex affect. Sometimes we pull out a scrapbook or memento and find that we are just left cold (for want of a better term, I will call these cases of 'unsuccessful' treasured memory).

These cases show that there are two different ways in which one can experience oneself as cut off from one's own past. Strawson and R.B. describe an experience of being cut off from one's past *self*. While each recognizes a literal sense in which he is the same person involved in the events remembered, both describe a lack of experienced identification with the subjects of memory. In successful nostalgic recollection, however, one experiences oneself as cut off from past *events*, or *places*, or *people*, but not from *oneself* in the past. This distinction not only allows us to explain how such recollection can engender a sense of personal identity or continuity despite also involving a sense of distance; it also suggests a role the complex affect it evokes might play in generating this sense of identity.

What is present in nostalgic recollection but absent in the relation to the past described by Strawson and R.B. is precisely the reanimation of past affect. Strawson and R.B. make it clear that they know that the events remembered are part of their personal history, and R.B. makes it explicit that he can 're-run' the events and 'see the scene clearly'. It is not perceptual imagery that is missing, nor is there any error about the source of the imagery. I take R.B.'s comment about his memory being like re-running in imagination an experience described by his parents to indicate that while he can construct the scene, he experiences himself, as he is now, reacting to it rather than experiencing the reaction of the person at the time. Presumably, this was also James' point about his distance from his previous work. He can construct the scene, and imagine what it felt like at the time, but he does not have direct access to those attitudes and emotions. It is therefore plausible to suppose that the absence of the experience of reanimating past affect is at least part of what causes (or perhaps constitutes) the sense of being a different person. Since it is one of the defining features of treasured memory that it involves replaying the affect associated with what is remembered, it is plausible to suppose that this is a difference that makes a difference with respect to a sense of personal identity and continuity.

While I think this is the right direction to go, there are a couple of reasons to think that this basic idea requires further refinement. First, the discussion of the form of distance found in memories like James' and R.B.'s seems to point to a lack of access to past subjectivity that goes beyond affect alone. Second, I have emphasized that treasured memories do not simply reproduce past affect, but do so in the context of the present, yielding a mixed-valance state. It is not yet clear how this aspect of treasured memory fits into the picture suggested above. Getting clearer on the first point will help us speak to the second.

The idea that what is absent in the kind of connection to the past described by Strawson and R.B. goes beyond a lack of first-personal access to past affect can be made somewhat more precise by looking at one more example of a memory of this kind. In her essay *On Keeping a Notebook*, Joan Didion advises that it is a good idea to keep in touch with the people we used to be and describes one past self with whom she has lost the relevant form of contact, her seventeen-year-old self. Her teenaged self, she says is relatively unthreatening, but she adds that

[...] it would be of some interest to me to know again what it feels like to sit on a river levee drinking vodka-and-orange-juice and listening to Les Paul and Mary Ford and their echoes sing 'How High the Moon' on the car radio. (You see I still have the scenes, but I no longer perceive myself among those present, no longer could even improvise the dialogue (Didion, 2006, p. 107).

Her journal entries, she says, are intended to help her recapture the kind of connection that is absent in this case. They are, in other words, meant to remind her “[...] how it felt to be me” (Didion, 2006, p. 102).

It is not just the emotions experienced by her seventeen-year-old self that Didion cannot access, but her hopes, dreams, and interests; what thrills her, what bores her, what she would say or do in a given situation, and how, overall, she experiences the world and herself in it. She may have some recollection of what she thought, but she cannot once again think herself into that perspective. The kind of failure to remember here is like that of a parent whose teenager accuses her of not remembering what it was like to be young. This parent may well recall things she did or thought in her youth, but this is not what her teenager means. The accusation is that she lacks subjective access to what it felt like, for instance, to be excited at the prospect of six months of backpacking, staying in crowded hostels and going weeks between a proper shower, bed, or meal; or how it felt to be so certain of her political convictions, seeing everything in clear, black-and-white terms; or to really believe that missing a party would ruin her life.

There are two features of this kind of broader perspective that are important for present purposes. The first is, as Didion's talk of improvising dialogue and the frustrated teen's complaint suggest, that reanimating such a perspective is not just a matter of what one experiences, but also of how one engages the world; what one is able, inclined, or impelled to do. It is not just that Didion cannot see the world as her seventeen-year-old self did. She also cannot speak for her; she doesn't know what she would say or do in response to possible scenarios. Similarly, the teenager's concern is probably not about what her parents can experience, but rather about the way their lack of access to their youthful perspectives prevents them from making (what are from the teen's perspective) the right parenting decisions.

This aspect of broad perspectives is connected to the second; that they are general, and so that remembering them in the relevant sense is a generic form of memory. It involves a very general way of experiencing the world, something at the level of 'what it's like to be young'. I say these two features are connected because the very general nature of the perspective remembered makes it natural that remembering such a perspective will affect how one engages the world in the present. Reanimating the perspective of my youth, when possibilities seemed endless, is not merely to feel again what it was like to be confident or excited about some specific opportunity, but rather to access from a first-personal perspective what it is like to see the world as full of potential, and that includes the world as it is now. It is no wonder that this should have some impact on my current motivation to consider or explore new endeavors, or to see affordances where otherwise I might not have.

We do seem to use treasured memories in this way. In order to psyche myself up for a difficult task when I am discouraged, I may seek to evoke treasured memories of a time when accomplishments seemed to come easily. To combat the oppressive stress of the daily grind I may look over pictures of that magical tropical vacation, seeking access to the sense of tranquility and relaxation. Frequently, people describe this, as Didion does, in terms of reencountering past selves. Someone depressed and insecure from a breakup may be taken out by her old friends for a night of reminiscing aimed at reminding her of what the world looked to her back then. If they succeed it would be natural for her friends to say something like: 'There she is! I knew my fun-loving confident friend was still in there somewhere.' De Brigard makes a similar observation with respect to the conative component of nostalgia. The desire at which nostalgia aims, he argues, is present oriented. "What the subject wants is for those features from past experiences she perceives as having produced gratification to be reinstated in the present, presumably because her current situation lacks them" (De Brigard, 2018, p. 168). Satisfying these desires will involve action to make the present relevantly like the past rather than reliving the particular past for which one feels nostalgia.

So far, this may sound like an expanded version of the naïve view of the value of treasured memories rejected earlier. Rather than valuing happy memories because they make us happy when we remember them, I am suggesting we value memories of positive generic perspectives or past selves because recalling them has a positive effect on the present. This is not entirely wrong as a starting point. What was correct in the naïve view was that these memories are valued, at least in part, for the way in which they can be used to effect positive change in the present. We can also see why, for parallel reasons to those given in modifying the naïve view, someone might treasure painful memories. Recalling how the world looked during a time of demoralizing setbacks may allow me to be more humble or empathetic in the present, or to feel and express gratitude for what I have now. Remembering a friend or loved one who has died may allow me to see the world as I did when in her presence, or to feel the security and love I experienced in the relationship. In this way I keep the relationship with that person alive not (or not only) by reliving in my mind our good times and conversations, but by approaching my present and future in ways that are informed by the perspective conferred by our past relationship (e.g., after recalling my lost friend I may ‘hear’ her encouraging me, as she used to, to stop feeling sorry for myself and go out and do something fun.)

These last examples suggest that, as with the naïve view, the juxtaposition of past and present perspectives is a critical part of the way treasured memories produce their effects, and so of the reason we value them. I have been talking about the way in which we can recreate or reanimate past perspectives or past selves in these memories, but we do not do that in a vacuum. It is not as if the old perspective simply replaces the new one. Rather, as described earlier with affect, the perspective of the past and that of the present occur together, and we experience their juxtaposition. The form of this juxtaposition is in some ways already built into the generic and action-oriented nature of the perspective. When someone recalls the enthusiasm, energy, and confidence of her twenties in a treasured memory, the world and its possibilities will look different to her, but it will not be exactly like she was in her twenties and, recalling De Brigard’s point about the conative aim of nostalgia, this is also probably not what she wants. It is common, for instance, to hear people say things like ‘I loved my twenties; they were great times, and I wouldn’t be that age again for anything.’ As much as one might want to recapture the carefree confidence of youth from the perspective of middle age, it is also likely that there have been experiences since then, and perspectives gained, that one would not want to lose. The aim and result of these memories, I thus suggest, is often not just to replace the past perspective with the current one, but rather to give the past perspective a voice in the present, so that it can be part of what influences affect, perspective, and action now.

An example of what I have in mind here can be found in the Richard Linklater film, *Before Midnight*. This is the third film in a trilogy that follows the romance of Jesse and Celine from a magical day and night in Vienna, during which they fall hopelessly in love during their twenties, through a missed connection that separates them, their later reunion, and finally into middle age where the realities of day-to-day life have complicated their relationship, leaving them in danger of a permanent split. Towards the end of the film, they take a romantic weekend together, a gift from friends, without enthusiasm. After a spectacular fight, they recall and reenact elements of their initial meeting. This allows them to remember, in the way I have described, what it was like to be young and crazy in love with one another. This seems to be enough to pull them back from the brink of divorce, but it certainly does not leave them giddy with new love. Too much has been said and done, and the realities of daily life are real. The contribution of access to how it felt in Vienna is to keep them from being overwhelmed by the negativity of the moment. Being able to see each other again as they did at the beginning remains an important part of a more mature and nuanced relationship in the present. It plays its role by being juxtaposed with the current perspective, and hence being able to influence it.

This suggests a new approach to thinking about how these memories produce a sense of personal identity and continuity. It is natural at first to think of a sense of personal continuity in terms of a connection to a past self. There is how I am now, there is how I was then, and in remembering the past self I somehow recognize that past self as *my* past self. According to the analysis of treasured memories I have offered, this framing of the connection leaves the past self too completely in the past. This is the sense of continuity described in traditional psychological accounts of personal identity, where what is involved is the ability to, as it were, draw an unbroken psychological line from the past events to the present. On the account I have given, however, the sense of continuity is stronger. It is not just, e.g., that there is a path from my youthful self to my present, quite different self, but rather that the youthful self never really went away – ‘that confident, fun-loving girl is still there’ to feel and act in the present.

This is going to sound hyperbolic if we lean too much on the metaphor of past selves. It is less mysterious, however, if we think instead of ‘parts of the self’, ways of being in and engaging the world. People are multifaceted and, over the course of a life, experience many different generic perspectives on the world. Over time, some of these are lost. Didion’s seventeen-year-old self may remain inaccessible; Jesse and Celine may one day no longer be able to access their earlier love. Others, however, continue, and what we thought was lost (e.g. youthful enthusiasm and optimism) can be reanimated to be part of how we engage and act in the world now. The sense of identity and personal continuity that comes from this is thus not a reidentification with some past self, but a much more immediate experience that the past self is still present in the sense that one can see through her eyes, feeling her emotions and inclinations. The experience is thus not of a string of selves tied together with some kind of strong thread, but of a single, complex, ongoing self.

Conclusion

Unfinished Business

There is a great deal that remains to be explained and developed in the view I have just sketched. I conclude by mentioning just a few challenges and questions that point to some future directions of exploration.

First, it might be objected that I have omitted a crucial step in my argument about the source of value in treasured memories. Even if we accept the connection I have drawn between these memories and a sense of personal identity and continuity, I have not shown that such a sense is valuable. This is not an uncontroversial claim. Strawson, for one, follows many Asian traditions in arguing that a sense of personal identity is misguided and potentially destructive (Strawson, 2004, p. 429). Derek Parfit (1984, p. 281–282) does likewise. The disagreement about the value of a sense of personal identity is a deep one, and I have little to add here. What I can do, however, is emphasize the descriptive character of the conclusion I have defended. My question was why people value these memories, not whether they are right in doing so. As the work on nostalgia and identity (among other work) shows, and as is evident from everyday life, many people *do* value a sense of identity and continuity. The account I have offered is thus relevant to explaining why such people value their treasured memories, even if they are misguided in doing so. It is, of course, ultimately of immense importance whether a sense of identity is a boon, or a burden or, as is more likely, some more complicated combination. It is not, however, something I need to address directly for present purposes, although I do hope that a better understanding of treasured memories will eventually have something to add to this discussion.

It might be further argued that I have missed a critical argumentative step even in the argument for the descriptive claim, however. Showing that people value a sense of identity and that treasured memories confer such a sense is not yet to show that this is the thing about treasured memories that people actually value. Perhaps people go to their scrapbooks not to recruit the past into the present, where it can be juxtaposed with an existing perspective, but rather to escape the complexities of life and mentally relive the happy, simple past just as it was. I concede that this is probably sometimes the case, hence my earlier caveats that there are probably many species of treasured memory, which we value for a variety of reasons. Undoubtedly a more precise taxonomy of these memories will be required as we move forward. I hope, however, to have given reasons to believe that at least one kind of treasured memory has the features discussed in this paper, and hence to have identified an intriguing phenomenon worthy of further definition and study.

Development of the view described here will also require a clearer articulation of its relation to nearby phenomena like nostalgia. De Brigard, you will recall, emphasizes that we can be nostalgic for times and places that we have not personally experienced, but have only imagined. His example is, Gil, the (present day) protagonist of Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris* who is nostalgic for 1920’s Paris. According to De Brigard (2018), Gil’s imagined trips to 1920’s Paris yield the same juxtaposition of an experience of how things are now and how he wants them to be that nostalgia for one’s personal past does, and so has the same kind of motivational force in the present. In the film, Gil’s imagined engagement with 1920’s Paris does, in fact, allow him to change his life in the present. In real life, too, people recruit imagination to evoke other perspectives that can be juxtaposed with the one they presently hold, leading to more complex ways of perceiving and being in the world (De Brigard, 2018, p. 168–170). I may try to mitigate discouragement by looking at a scrapbook of past accomplishments, but I might also do so by imagining a fantastic success. I might combat loneliness by looking at pictures of loved ones, or I might do it by vividly imagining meeting someone new. De Brigard argues that the fact that nostalgia for an imagined past works in much the same way as nostalgia

for an actual one fits well with the view, increasingly accepted in both psychology and philosophy, that memory and imagination are not distinct capacities but part of a single system for counterfactual episodic simulation, and suggests that we understand nostalgia using this framework. I find this approach extremely promising.

Taking a 'continuist' approach to the relation between memory and imagination does not imply that we cannot make a meaningful distinction between nostalgic recollection and imagination, but it does make the connection between the juxtaposition of multiple perspectives in nostalgic recollection and the generation of a sense of personal identity and continuity more complicated. Assuming a continuist framework about episodic simulation leaves two options: either (1) allowing that the sense of identity and continuity I have been describing does not require treasured recollection in which one reanimates a first-person perspective one has occupied before, but can be engendered by any form of simulation that is able to awaken or generate a perspective to juxtapose with the present one, or (2) arguing that despite what is in common between treasured memory and other forms of episodic simulation, there is something peculiar to the former that allows it to have a special relation to personal identity. I am inclined to support the second option. I think it likely that counterfactual thought and imaginative projection will have a closer relation to identity than they are usually taken to have, but that memory will continue to have a special role. There is, however, a great deal of work left to do in describing and defending this thought.

This and many other unanswered questions remain to be explored and developed on (real or imagined) future occasions. I hope, however, to have made the case that treasured memory presents a fruitful area of exploration, and to have taken a few steps to help chart a course.¹

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¹ I have been aided a great deal in thinking about these issues by feedback on related material from audiences at Issues in the Philosophy of Memory 2, Centre for Philosophy of Memory, Université Grenoble Alpes in July 2019 and at the Bochum-Grenoble Memory Colloquium on Zoom in November 2020. I would especially like to thank André Sant'Anna for his keen editorial eye.

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