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Editorial: On the Nature of Human Memory

Martin A. Conway and Mark L. Howe

As long-standing Editors of *Memory* occasionally there are areas, usually controversial ones, to which, in our judgement, the journal should be making a contribution. After some consideration we usually back off and let the excellent contributions to *Memory* speak for themselves. Recently, however, a view has been presented to the community of memory researchers and to those who rely on an understanding of memory in their professional activities, that there exists (1) a basic agreement about the nature of memory and (2) this agreement's central tenet is that memory is 'basically accurate' (e.g., Brewin et al., 2020; Diamond et al., 2020). In passing, we note that this view is based on a very highly selective sampling of research findings and theory in the science of memory. Nonetheless, there is some truth to the first of these propositions, although agreement is highly nuanced (as the papers to follow show). The second proposition represents, as we shall see, an oversimplification of what is a highly complex mental process. This is something that not only memory researchers have long been aware of but so too have writers, artists, philosophers, and many other groups, for literally hundreds of years. This view is neatly summed up by the noble laureate Alexievich in her outstanding book on the memories, many deeply traumatic, of Russian women soldiers from the Great War (2nd World War): "... memories are neither history nor literature ..." (S. Alexievich, 1985, 2017, p. 19). As we shall see, they are mental or psychological representations with their own peculiar properties to which simple binary notions of 'true' or 'false' do not apply.

In order to provide a scientifically informed counterpoint, we invited a range of the world's leading memory researchers to give us their view, in summary form, of the nature of human memory. Their views are presented in the papers that follow. Yet, it should be noted that not all the leading memory researchers we invited contributed, so there may well be some researchers who have other theories about the nature of human memory but who are not represented here. We also wish readers to note that the invited contributions to *On the Nature of Human Memory* were subject to peer review by us the Editors-in-Chief of the journal. For complete transparency, this was explained to the authors prior to submission. We are positively disposed to consider any views researchers feel have not been represented. However, many of the leading theorists did contribute, and in our view as the Editors of *Memory*, they provide a broad and comprehensive view of the nature of human memory.

References

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