Memory in the Ontopoiesis of Life

Book 1.
Memory in the Generation and Unfolding of Life

Edited by
Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka
MEMORY IN THE ONTOPOIESIS OF LIFE
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Memory in the Generation and Unfolding of Life

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A-T. T.
TOWARD THE REFORMULATION OF A CLASSIC PROBLEM: MEMORY IN THE ONTOPOIESIS OF LIFE

DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLE OF THE PAST IN THE TEMPORAL SUCCESSION OF OUR LIFE COURSE

In the concise sketch that follows, we consider memory to be an essential function of life by which the storing, renunciation, reframing of the otherwise irremediably lost past promotes the progress of life and sustains its continuity. As the temporal unfolding of the course of life proceeds, memory, our experiences, now past and receding further and further from the actual, could fall into oblivion. But as it happens, memory crucially sustains the present and future in life’s development, indeed, guarantees their unfolding.

Our primary attention to memory proceeds directly from our concerns in our present situation: our attention to remembering an event, an experience, a thought or impression brings to the fore an instant of the timing of the course of life. This attention pinpoints the moment of a present phase of timing. It strikes the actual moment of our experience, and yet simultaneously our attention pulls up reflections “images,” “traces” of what is actually gone, what has lost its active power, its active role within the circumambient milieu, and what has lost the striking appeal of reality as well. It is now only a remembrance of the past.

A glance at the course of our lives makes it obvious that attention always favors the present instant of active becoming or duration, given its concrete facticity. Further, life’s timing in the course of its becoming is oriented toward the future. All of life’s functional tentacles, its functional line, extend the present into the future, projecting through imaginative planning, but they also rooted in the past, from which that line derives its constructive-destructive direction or tendency. Indeed, the foreseen future completes the past, and that in numerous ways.

VITAL MEMORY AND THE LIVING AGENT OF LIVING BEINGNESS ESPECIALLY

We spontaneously see memory as a special human functional prerogative—the storing of traces of experiences, understandings had and interpretations made

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in the course of life in such a way that these images, impressions, thoughts can be restored in “re-membering” in some or other fashion to yield a fuller “picture” of one’s life horizons. But we do have to take into consideration that animals, even those of the simplest constitution, being endowed with a minimal degree of conscious sentience, do manifest reflexes manifesting the retrieval of past instants in the present, so that the urgency of acting in the present becomes apparent to them. Witness the alert response of a fly or a bird before danger, the ability to differentiate among foodstuffs, even the refusal of food by a pet on the basis of preference alone. This facility enables us to solicit the collaboration of dogs in tracking a fox or a criminal, in retrieving fowl or detecting illegal drugs. We cannot deny that there is here a sort of storing of impressions or at least a residual virtual reactivity to present/actual situations that is “revived” in further appropriate situations, which indicates that there is an essential provision for such in life’s process, that life advances through returns to past experience that establish a habitual reaction. In brief, we have to consider this residue of consciousness in the living agent to be a vital, life-promoting device for securing the living being’s maintenance/advance or preventing its regression or death.

It seems obvious that this reactivity joining the present actuality and the past is, first of all, an innermost, already there in wait, device of the vis viva in the form of a vital consciousness/sensitivity; here is a principle for a constructive line of succession, one allowing, facilitating, if not guaranteeing, advance/progress or strategic regress.

Secondly, however, there may be a coordinative function played by the living agent’s higher conscious activity that goes beyond the retention of the past and which during its constructive activity aims at the conscious discovery of a surmised active past, that searches the active past actually seeking its constructive meaning, a search primed for the re-constitution of the sense of experience.

With this step we reach the question of the “truth” of the past, that is, of the past’s resuscitation in the present. But before we focus on this classic issue, we have to conclude our discussion of how vital memory promotes the continuity of the living agent’s functioning. This vital memory—the conscious trace, and even more particularly its less than fully conscious prototype—lacks an obvious, empirically traceable continuity. If we would seek for the interconnections in the organic constitutions of living beings accounting for their interaction in their environments and allowing for their survival and coexistence, we would get too involved in the infinitely complex network of nature, extending from the local environment to the cosmos, so that no clear passage between virtual vital experience and its focused re-actualization in the midst of life’s events would emerge from the picture.
An empirical search for this passage would lead scientific investigators further and further into an infinite regress yielding no identifiable, that is, palpable congenital linkage among life’s continuous elements. The functional steps of life do follow each other sequentially and constructively, but this continuity relies precisely on active vital memory, the crucial instrument of the life process, without which growth and progress/regress would not occur. This coherent connectedness we can see does follow a constructive design that varies in concrete singular instances according to the available circumambient conditions, certainly, but also and foremostly accords with the more general constructive laws governing generation and decay. Yet as we follow these laws the crucial point of contact that would make the status quo self-explanatory eludes us.

THE TRACE OF THE PAST

*HOW ARE WE TO UNDERSTAND THE THREAD OF LIFE’S CONTINUITY?*

The “traces” of past occurrences that we find in our present-day reality are slightly incongruous with the present, that is, their witness is somewhat faded. Their objects do not have the vividness of immediately present impressions. There is not in them the feeling of awakeness that immediate experience has. The particularities that these “traces” of our past becoming exhibit have an element of conjecture or inference in them, a reliance on a somewhat conjured familiarity with real objects; we have here suggestions of real objects, forms and existence that are analogous to what we identify in our present reality, which analogy may be too far fetched. By this surmised identification, these imaginative inferences, we place things by correlation within the network of the flux of becoming of the real world. Whatever we consider to be the origin of the trace, it is basically the fruit of conscious activity at various levels. There would be no trace of a child’s feet on the wet seashore, no monuments of past cultures, no records of famous battles transmitted in chronicles, etc. without this conjectured, imaginative retrieval of their sense within the logoic network of the real. What is lost in the transformability of becoming and what may be restored to our view of the world? The trace is the intermediary key to the past. What is being retrieved is clearly an imaginative conjectural presentation of the past that takes the trace as its reference point, but what is the thread of continuity between past experience, events, thought, etc. and its re-membrance in a given actual present?
And so, as noted above, the past assumes in our experience different roles within innumerable perspectives arrived at in our life courses, but, as Erwin Straus emphasized, it is the trace itself that has been the chief focus of our philosophical as well as scientific ponderings. As Straus brings out in his historical review of the development of the issue, the matter of memory requires a basic reformulation.

Already in the oldest conception of memory, that left us by Aristotle, it is seen as an image left by affect (pathos) not only in that part of the body that generates (entsteht) it but also in the soul correspondingly. Thus memory was conceived as a lasting image and an inclination to retrieve it, and so the bringing together of two different phases of temporal becoming, a bridging involving two changeable networks of reality—bodily/physiological processes that imprint an image as a trace of the actual as it vanishes, on the one hand, and the canvas of the psyche, which despite its streaming, changeable nature maintains an often lasting inclination to recall that particular impression, on the other. It is in terms of these two basic and intimately intergenerative functional schemata that memory has been conceptualized over the centuries, whatever the modifications made on Aristotle’s thinking. The differentiation of the corporeal/physiological and the conscious/psychological operations of becoming still stands in that our contemporary exploration of memory’s physical aspect down to the neurological level has not superseded this groundwork separation in the account of how the trace that is a memory originates. This means that the continuity between the physiological and the psychic remains inexplicable. A grounding of that continuity is called for.

Should we pursue the long series of interconnections in the physiology of memory in nerve and brain on the one side and the series of psychic/mental operations on the other, we will not find the passage between them we are seeking other than in life’s ontopoietic constructivism. But to say that still does not yield to us the linkage, the steps by which a memory is constructed.

It is first to be asked how even a vaguely recurring image generated by this physiological-psychic process within a series of the living agent’s moves within a particular circumambient conditions could come to be summoned up in psychic experience at a different phase of the flux of becoming. First of all, it is within the groundwork of the originating lifeworld itself that we may seek the general constitutive directives and framework of becoming as well as specific genetic sequential patterns to be followed in singular lines of becoming. But how then can we bridge the hiatus between the two temporal phases of the process of memory, the instant of the image’s physiological imprinting and the moment of the psyche’s recall? With that question we realize more deeply
the nature of the situation. If the trace of the “image” is recurringly recalled at different phases of the temporal flux of the becoming of life even though both the individual subjective psyche as well as the objective circumambient world have changed and have changed independently, then we do not have in the constructive orchestration conducted by the brain-psyche sufficient explanation for the linkage we find made in remembrance. We are compelled then to seek the passage from physiological imprint to psychic recall not in a genetic linkage but within the all-embracing sense of the world’s becoming and of life, in what I call “the ontopoietic sense of the logos of life,” which sustains the expressions of becoming at their originary level. Trying to explain memory in terms of linkages or steps of becoming yields but fragments of a picture. It is rather the sense of the ontopoietic memory of the progress of life that carries our re-membering.

The crux of the enigma of memory is not, therefore, the origination of particular images or traces, for that first imprinting is already mysterious, the gulf separating the corporeal and the psychic being already there. The ground of memory is rather to be sought in the logos of life’s becoming, its timing itself in accordance with its sense. This sense runs through the fragmentary traces of becoming later retrieved as the human mind retrieves the past.

What serves as the basis of this uncovering of the lost forms, colors, and sense of past life is the subjacent network of the ontopoietic logos subtending both impression and sense. The forms indirectly “re-cognized” in the present are marshaled by the lived network of the organizational forces of the logos of life that subtend life’s lawfulness and functional sequences.

ORGANIC MEMORY

As we have seen, traditionally the emphasis in philosophers’ consideration of memory’s temporal development has fallen on the conscious aspect of memory, that is to say, on memory as exercised by living agents that either at least sense or are fully aware. Memory is thus seen as aiding in the direction of life. Our own attention, however, is turned toward a contrasting type of memory, one in which it is not the living agent’s conscious direction, to whatever degree consciousness be developed, that is key. Rather, we consider this agent—living consciousness, the “I”—as a differentiation of the circumambient world of life in which it is active. As Erling Eng put it, “My usual experience of the organic is that of waking consciousness, while the condition in which the organic remembers me lies outside of consciousness rather like dreaming or trance awareness.” Thus, an organism has its particular past and in its genesis establishes a memory of its stages and phases, to begin with the differentiation of
the embryo and all the prenatal developments of life, the phases of the con-
stitution of the functional apparatus of life leading to the entire apparatus of
organs comprising the newborn individual fitted upon his or her entrance into
the postnatal round of life, the life system of the world.

Fascinatingly, as Eng continues his argument, in the postnatal period we find
the infant continuing its prenatal condition, its “foetalization.” Eng insists, “To
the extent of this interpenetration of prenatality with our postnatal world, we
are never finished with our birth.” It is, indeed, through the organic “memoriza-
tion” of our prenatal stages that we advance thereafter. Owing to this organic
memory—owing to an implicit use of our organs—we participate in the world
in which we continue, by which we are as if “remembered” without our willful
effort or consent, without awareness. We are not even aware of our prenatality,
where awareness as such does not occur, sensing does not occur in an inter-
subjective way, not beyond some rhythmic exchange with one’s mother. The
organic progress takes place owing to the repetitive continuity of the steps of
organic growth.

The obvious manifestation of this genetic order is seen in the hierarchical
organization of the central nervous system, in which more primitive levels
are preserved, replaced, and transformed by subsequent levels. The growth-
sustaining fetal stage of our organic unfolding comes to light in our childhood,
adolescent, and adult lives in aspects of our stress, fatigue, trauma, psychosis,
and in nocturnal dreams.

It would seem, then, that it is the maintenance of the organic genetic phases
that sustains our continuous existence—in which that organic growth and
habits can unfold in our constructive progress.

However, the organism which carries the beingness of the living is not iden-
tical with the conscious center of the agent, its conscious directional motor, its
“self”, the self of the living agent, the human self. The self cannot be subsumed
under organic constitutive prerogatives. The constitutive, constructivism estab-
lishing the orchestration of organic moves and maintaining its progress, does
not explain what is the key factor of this orchestration which is directing the
individual’s unfolding within its circumambient conditions. Such a unifying
factor, which would conduct well the continuity of the organic bio-memory.
What is the continuity of the steps of the unfolding for the future usage is an
open question.

When it comes to the organic, bio-memory continuity, it is no longer the
image, and its original experience that would allow us to overcome the hiatus
between active consciousness and a retrieved trace for which we would seek a
bridge between consciousness and re-cognition of the real fact, an event, a real
object, etc. We have here not the question of congenital continuity between a
trace and its prototype, but the *continuity of an actual functional becoming in two of its temporal phases of accomplishment.*

This continuity cannot be other than the thread of sense being installed by the logos of the temporal unfolding (3).

In conclusion: memory emerges as the crucial instrument of the ontopoietic becoming of life.

To be continued in Book Two

Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka

NOTES


2 Ibid., p. 12.

A group of participants; among them: in the back Eldon, Wait, A.L. Samian, Piotr Mroz, Leszek Pyra, Thomas Ryba, Thomas Ryba, Ayhan Sol, Funds Nesgogliu, -in the middle row:Maja de Keizer, Erkut Sezgin A-T. Tymieniecka, Aleksandra Pawliszyn, Virpi Yliraudansoki, Clara Mandolini, Maria Chiara Teloni, and others
SECTION I
MEMORY ALONG LIFE’S GENESIS
MEMORY AND THE MYTH OF PROMETHEUS

ABSTRACT

In Aeschylus’ interpretation of the myth, Prometheus is depicted as having bestowed upon humankind not only the technē of reproducing and using fire for any conceivable art, but practically all arts and sciences. Memory, in this interpretation seems to be the necessary condition of all sciences. If any systematic inquiry is possible only through keeping past experience in memory, then Prometheus’ keeping the fire in a narthex must be a metaphor that refers to “keeping” in a universal sense. Hence, what Prometheus stole away from Zeus by keeping it in a narthex is not simply fire as a tool, but the method to reproduce that tool. The ancients seem to have drawn relations between keeping characteristic features and orders of phenomena in memory and mastery in arts, but do not seem to have thought of an evolution of the human capacity of reasoning, they simply assumed that that power was a godly gift. Prometheus’ contrivance of carrying the ember in a hollow narthex, similarly the Lockean conception of memory as storehouse for ideas refer to locations and distances for things which can hardly be in space as actual objects of perception are. It is possible to conceive the capacity in question as a product of the entities that are said to be stored, that this power of keeping evolved through repercussions of past perceptions. Further, against skeptical arguments concerning the reality of the past, the reliability of memory can be shown in terms of mastery in technai: if one has the power to employ efficient tools to change the course of events, either in nature or in society, the reliability of memory is justified in Promethean terms.

According to the myth put into verse by Hesiod, Titan god Prometheus saved the human race from corruption by giving them the fire he has stolen from Zeus. The king god, already furious with Prometheus who took part with human race and deceived him for his share in sacrifices, decided not to send his bolts and bereaved men of fire. Prometheus carried the fire from the mount Olympus to the earth by keeping it in a hollow fennel-stalk. Fire, the use of which is the means to any conceivable practice for the amelioration of human life, has a great metaphorical power; for, the art of kindling fire, the first significant technē, appears to embody the archetypical method necessary for all kinds of arts. Keeping ember in a closed space as in a fennel-stalk suggests an
ancient technology to reproduce fire, hence a method to keep both the burning object in a closed space, and the knowledge of the causal order in memory.

In Aeschylus’ interpretation of the myth, Prometheus is represented as having bestowed upon humankind not only the technē of reproducing and using fire for any conceivable art, but practically all arts and sciences. Aeschylus makes the god speak of the former state of humankind as devoid of any capacity of reasoning necessary for protection from and command of natural events:

First of all, though they had eyes to see, they saw to no avail; they had ears, but understood not; but like to shapes in dreams, throughout their length of days, without purpose they wrought all things in confusion… They had no sign either of winter or of flowery spring or fruitful summer, whereon they could depend, but in everything they wrought without judgment, until such time as I taught them to discern the risings of the stars and their settings, ere this ill distinguishable

The command of a language, the capacity of distinguishing and relating seemingly distinct phenomena like vocal signs and mental images, or risings and settings of stars and seasons, are all marks of understanding. Understanding appears to be possible through the recognition of similarity between distinct events, through the recognition of a past in distinction from the present and the future. Without a reference to this past one could hardly distinguish an appearance as a sign, let alone interpret it as indicating the verisimilitude of related phenomena. Aeschylus emphasizes that the most important of Prometheus’ benefactions is the science of number and writing, the greatest aid to memory:

Aye, and numbers, too, the chiefest of sciences, I invented for them, and the combining of letters, creative mother of the Muses’ arts, wherewith to hold all things in memory.

Memory, in this interpretation seems to be the necessary condition of all sciences, both of those which we share with the ancients like medicine, and those which have lost their meaning with us, like the art of soothsaying. Apparently, the Greek verb promētheomai, “to show forethought for”, is a key to understand the significance of Prometheus’ boons for the human race. If any systematic inquiry is possible only through keeping past experience in memory, then Prometheus’ keeping the fire in a narthex is a metaphor that refers to “keeping” in a universal sense. One keeps ember to kindle fire again, one keeps things, tools or memories of regularly ordered appearances to make use of them in further similar settings; hence, all techniques are possible through such keeping. The method of keeping fire in the form of ember seems to be more important than fire itself; for, fire will never be extinguished as long as one knows how to keep it. Therefore, what Prometheus carried away from Zeus by keeping in a narthex is not simply fire as a tool, but the method
to reproduce that tool. Putting a piece of ember in a hollow fennel-stalk is a totally different kind of act than kindling fire. Success in this reproduction seems to be possible only through the assumption that the future will be like the past: it must always be possible to light a new fire with ember as has always been. Even prophecy must be based on the assumption that a particular order of appearances as signs will be associated with a set of appearances similar to those formerly perceived.

The interpretation of the myth of Prometheus by Hesiod and Aeschylus suggests the idea that the ancients drew relations between keeping characteristic features and orders of phenomena in memory and mastery in arts of all kinds; hence, all inductive and deductive reasoning, all arts and sciences, or, in general, all purposive activity is thought to require such keeping for success.

But to have such a capacity to keep is to have the consciousness of having had the experience of similar settings in a determinate whole which one calls one’s life, or one’s past. It appears that no phenomenon can be identified without various references to this whole; for, features and orders of things are distinguishable as what they are, if one can connect the present to the past through relations of similarity. Of course this does not mean that novel aspects or relations of things cannot be discovered. However, since it is impossible to conceive of a discovery without employing the tools already at one’s disposal, without theories, without logic, or without the most general assumptions that have proved to be reliable, it seems natural to argue that what is dissimilar is also identified through similarity in a higher order.

The totality which one calls the past is constituted by memories which appear as independent and isolated facts or sequences of events. On the other hand, none of these distinguishable parts can be identified as what they are, without reference, at least to previous similar and related phenomena. An important question that the myth of Prometheus suggests is the following: is it because one has a capacity of memory that one can learn and practice a method, or is it because one repeats certain order of phenomena in practice that one can build oneself a memory? In other words, is the faculty called memory a prerequisite of orderly practice, is it a product of practice? The answer to this question would depend on general metaphysical assumptions concerning the nature of human thought. The ancients, the anonymous thinker who first conceived of the myth of Prometheus, and the Greek poets who elaborated it, for example, seem to have assumed that memory is a faculty causally independent of its contents, since they thought that before the Titan god’s boons no systematic practice was possible. The ancients do not seem to have thought of an evolution of the human capacity of reasoning, rather they seem to have simply assumed that that power was a godly gift. Whoever thinks that memory is an innate faculty, either those who think that it has been bestowed by some
benevolent deity, or those who simply take it to be innate without a question of etiology, will argue that one can store in an orderly fashion and use what one has marked as an effective contrivance because one has such a capacity. This conception of memory refers to an original capacity of storing, in analogy with a space reserved for storing tools. In this sense the hollow narthex represents a capacity for keeping fire. Analogously, the power to keep the order of phenomena related to kindling fire in mind is a capacity for the art of kindling fire.

But visualizing the storehouse metaphor in all the details it brings to mind would rather blur our picture of memory. It may be necessary to draw analogies between the spatial concept of containing objects and keeping thoughts, perceptions, that is to say, non-physical objects in a space of a peculiar sort in order to conceive how the faculty of memory operates. However, it seems possible to increase the explanatory power of this spatial representation by rejecting the idea that memory as a capacity, as a holding power is “given”, or innate. Memory may not be given; it may be a product of orderly and prominent phenomena. In other words, it is possible to conceive of memory as a capacity, a power formed by what it is said to contain. Hence, this faculty comes to be what it is as the shadows, so to speak, of phenomena of actual experiences keep echoing, as if in a hall that continually increases its extension. Thus, memories would be echoes in an imaginary hall where all significant speech, all beautiful tunes reverberate as long as one is capable of hearing them. This conception of memory too seems to imply that a hall, a space is necessary to produce the echoes, but this would be a misleading interpretation. We are inclined to think of a closed space for those echoes to exist. But the metaphor is intended for something else.

This view of memory as repercussions of the past may also seem to imply that there must at least be a power to distinguish and find particular sequences that form distinct entities. Although this may be true, that there is a power to recall these entities and measure them to be at a distance in time does not mean that there must be a space, a “place” of some particular sort to store these entities. Of course, the narthex, or the Lockean storehouse view of memory too, in the final analysis, employs the concept of physical space as a metaphor: the use of a tool, the habit of starting a course of events which would enable one to regenerate certain phenomena cannot literally be kept in a space.

A spatial conception of memory cannot, of course, be referring to a space to store things in the literal sense; for, what can be stored therein are ideas, distinguishable order of phenomena, habits and the like. But, such a metaphorical reference nevertheless seems to be natural: as one speaks of a distance between past events, or of keeping them in memory, an analogy with three dimensional space is readily drawn. Prometheus’ contrivance of carrying the ember in a
hollow narthex, John Locke’s conception of memory as storehouse for ideas, the metaphor relating memories to echoes, all such imaginative descriptions of memory refer to locations and distances for things which can hardly be in space as actual objects of perception are. Although almost all conceivable discourse on memory would employ extension as an image, memories cannot be in space as the objects of which they are memories.

Representations of memory in metaphorical terms that refer to extension seem to derive their explanatory power from the analogy one is naturally inclined to draw between that which preserves, namely space, or room for things stored, and a power to store or to keep them. Recollections, unlike the actually perceived objects or successions of events, cannot be located in some extension; they are thoughts. But, as goods or tools are saved from the destructive power of nature by being kept in storehouses for future use, memories can be said to be kept or stored for the same end. It is generally taken for granted that experience is the prerequisite of the practice of any technē; all the intellectual tools one uses, language, all methods of inference and all techniques of artistic expression do necessitate practice. Hence, no method could be employed or developed if memories of such practices were not kept alive, just as no production could be possible without the proper preservation of necessary tools.

The analogy between memory and a space for preserving certain objects is informative in so far as it draws a relation between tools and methods. No doubt, the spatial metaphor in the myth of Prometheus has preserved its brightness until today. But the conception of memory as a capacity for storing objects brings to mind certain difficult questions. How could one conceive the art of kindling fire by using a piece of ember kept burning, for example, as an object to be kept in some closed space? A piece of fire can be preserved in a closed space, but we cannot think that the method of kindling fire by using ember thus kept burning is preserved in a space. A piece of ember can be said to be preserved as a “tool” in a hollow stalk, but the practice that makes use of this tool cannot be said to be preserved in a similar sense. Therefore, although the conception of memory as a closed space may be adequate for depicting how ideas as tools are preserved, the metaphor seems to lose its power as we try to envisage how memory is involved in learning the practice of an art or the application of a method.

In Aeschylus’ interpretation, Prometheus’ invaluable gifts to mankind are technai of all kinds; the poet does not seem to distinguish between practical arts and mathematics. Any conceivable art or science rests on a method which implies a capacity or power to repeat a series of intentional acts with necessary minor adaptations to particular cases. Historically speaking, these
methods or contrivances, as in the artistic representation of Prometheus’ stealing fire by putting it in a narthex, must have been discovered accidentally by some human-like animal. Seeing that the ember will thus be kept burning, this intelligent being must have conceived of a particular method of kindling fire. Indeed, this perception of the efficacy of the sequence of acts to attain an end seems to be requisite for mastering any technē. This must have been what took place in the consciousness of some intelligent being whose reasoning can, at least in principle, be conceived of. But, it is difficult to imagine this human-like animal as carrying out mental operations with an innate capacity of memory, as placing, so to speak, each significant perception in a memorial space it is endowed with. Rather, it seems more plausible that the capacity in question is a product of the entities that are said to be stored, that this power of keeping evolved through repercussions of perceptions of certain vital series of events, as it must have been the case in the discovery of the technique of keeping ember burning. The same evolution must have taken place in more abstract reasoning, in mathematical operations, in the discovery of a technique of addition or multiplication, for example. Hence, the power of keeping certain signs in memory could be conceived as causally linked to continued practice of techniques or methods, and the space where the memories are located as expanding with mastery of various practices related to human life.

Let us consider the art of cultivation, which is principally a set of methods to attain specific ends or products. It is evident that learning and teaching these methods are essential for the practice of an activity like agriculture. “Culture” requires memory as the capacity for learning and teaching. Similarly, memory appears to be the principal requisite for societal organization and hence for the distinction of the human being from the plain animal. The myth portrays Prometheus as the teacher of humanity, as a benevolent god who transforms the herd into a society. Prometheus’ gifts are not alms; the god offers keys to employ powers of nature for the benefit of human life. Everything Prometheus is said to have bestowed on humankind is a method, a technē to be mastered and developed.

Hence, the myth could be read as making memory the basic requirement of culture, that is, of organization in arts and division of labor. Learning and teaching of the technai necessary for human life must be possible only in organized communities. Therefore, according to the myth, Prometheus bestowed on the humankind the art of politics once he bestowed arts common to well-organized societies.

Let us now reconsider the metaphoric representation of memory as capacity in the spatial sense. No technē can have a place, as a tool has; the mythological account seems to suggest that keeping is vital for any method, but the act of keeping assumes a different sense if what is said to be kept is an order of
events, and not an actual spatial object like a piece of ember or a physical tool. On the other hand, it seems very natural to represent the past, or memory as a storehouse, or a closed space where the goods and tools have their appointed places. The hollow narthex provides a space to keep one of the most valuable goods. Similarly, storing tools and goods is necessary for all practical arts. But the act of keeping the order of events, that is, learning the practice of an art, as in learning to kindle fire with a piece of ember kept in a closed space does not admit of being placed. Hence, technai cannot be preserved in a space as goods or tools can. One may draw an analogy between methods and tools, but it is difficult to imagine memory as a repository of methods; for, methods are not tools, tools may be parts or products of methods, but neither the apprehension of the utility nor the practice of a method can be accurately depicted in terms of placing or storing. Prometheus’ contrivance cannot be conceptualized in terms of extension, nor could his political view on mankind. With fire and all the technai of an organized society, humans are no longer at the mercy of the gods, or of nature; with Prometheus’ help they attain a considerable power. Although the practice of these arts and primarily that of the art of politics necessitate ordering both in spatial (as in designing the physical environment), and in organizational sense (as in the allotment of rights and responsibilities in manufacture and services), it is difficult to conceive of memory merely as a place to store. Storing must be possible if there is a space, a capacity, a material ability to contain, but the ability to organize, use, and to enlarge that space appears to be more important than having that space at one’s disposal.

Neither memory as capacity, nor its contents as memories can be conceived purely in terms of extension, but the notion of order or arrangement seems to be underlying the act of storing in any functional sense. Thus, one could neither reach the required object or tool, nor recall the essential properties of objects and sequences of events without having an orderly collection of things of the peculiar sort at one’s disposal. A memory, no matter how much capacious, must be defective unless what is stored therein is in order; neither acting nor communication would be possible without such an ordered aggregate of memories. It is clear that any representation of the present or the past should be one in which proper signs or images are so arranged that they can be reckoned to signify what is or was the actual case. This must be true both for reflection and communication. The order thus represented must appear “objective”, that is, claims concerning the properties of particular things and events must be verifiable through various perspectives, either personally or with reference to those who communicate. Even the most ordinary form of communication, namely that of calling the other’s attention to something requires the employment of tools that would represent the order of things in the customary way.
Language admits only certain signs to represent things and processes, and dictates how and where those signs are to be employed: one is not at a liberty to use any temporal or modal sign to denote the characteristics of a particular set of phenomena, for example. One can hardly survive as a member of a community while failing systematically to represent the objective order of things and hence failing to make the others act in cooperation to attain a personal or a public good. Culture, both in the current and the archaic sense of cultivating, requires cooperation and hence communication.

Memory must be operative in communication in various ways; it must, for example, help one to represent to oneself the actual order of phenomena, that is, it must enable one to differentiate the significant parts of a perceptual flux and relate these parts to one another in a coherent manner; and it must also enable one to recall and apply the common signs to refer precisely to these parts and their relations. Objectivity and communication must be inseparably linked to each other; for, it is neither possible to believe that one can objectively represent the world without at the same time being convinced that one can make oneself understood, nor to believe that one communicates successfully if one has doubts about the general reliability of the representation in question.

The use of any language in an efficient manner seems to be the fundamental requirement for communication and hence for the practice of any art, neither of which is possible without a power that would enable one to remember what one has learned or discovered. One does not need a further proof that memory is the necessary condition for any practice. As an adequate power of “storing” and ordering is necessary for learning any practice, it is clear that this power is necessary for being recognized as a part of a community. For, without a capacity to learn, recall and employ common methods, life in a community is either a dependent one, or simply impossible.

Although it is obvious that memory is indispensable for competence in all these practices, its vitality in mastering any art might enable us to comprehend how a social order, and survival as a part of a community necessitates the power of relating the past to the present and to the future. It is impossible to imagine a qualified member of a community who cannot master certain mathematical and linguistic skills. This is apparent not only in the practice of a particular method of production, but also in ethical and political reasoning. No doubt, competence in language or the ability to use efficient expressions conducive to a particular moral or political aim underlies the power to determine the course of life with the others. Ethical and political judgments are put forward with a concern for the future; although they appear to be concerned with value attributions to acts or persons in the past, they are all intended to change the order for the future. Without a circumspect evaluation of the past, which certainly requires a sound memory, no reasonable value judgment is conceivable.
A power of retaining the tools for communication and for determining the future appears to be as indispensable for life as that of acquiring them. Discovery of how nature and society operate and invention of tools or methods to make them behave in a particular way necessitate a capacity to keep the order of events in memory. Further, it also seems to be necessary that there must be a correspondence between the order and presence of what is retained in memory and the order of things in reality. In other words, what one recalls must be a faithful copy of an actual past with its parts arranged in a particular order. This is so obvious that one only needs to consider whether the application of any method could be conceivable without repeating the steps of an operation in a fixed order which one remembers to have worked in previous cases. Needless to say, both these steps and their order of succession as a whole should have been experienced in the actual past as how they appear in memory. Otherwise, it would be impossible to speak of a power of keeping, but only of imagination.

The recognition of the past as the totality of phenomena whose arrangement can never be changed seems to be necessary to any conception of memory. There may not be any means to discover whether these are representations of past events that had really happened and that the whole past is composed of such real experiences, but it is beyond doubt that there is a temporal distance and an “extension”, so to speak, which is continually expanding. This “past” is readily conceived to be constituted of memories of perceptions and thoughts of every kind whose common feature is being prominent for some vital reason. One has this conception of past, if one has the consciousness of having experienced those entities that constitute it. Hence, what is called the past must be the totality of everything that appears to one as having once, that is, a measurable time before happened.

Whether this conception could be ultimately justified against skeptical arguments, however, is not clear. For example, it is conceivable that some entities that appear as having been experienced may just be arbitrary fictions of the imagination; the whole past may be a deception of some sort. Again, it is conceivable that the whole world was created only minutes ago, as Bertrand Russell entertained as a skeptical hypothesis. Similarly, if, as Descartes thought, an omnipotent being creates everything anew at each instant, then this being must also be creating the whole past for the meditator. If the creator of this moment is a deceiver (unlike the benevolent and veracious God of Descartes), then the location of all appearances on the time scale becomes dubious: a childhood memory, for example, may not have been experienced at the time one perceives as childhood; although it may appear that a certain number of years has passed, it may, according the hypothesis, be the case that those memories are created a moment ago, so that the past, or what appears to
be the past with the peculiar perspective of distances in a time scale, may partially or totally be different from what appears, or simply non-existent. Thus, it is logically conceivable that this instant is composed of things existing only at this instant without being dependent on a real past; it may be the case that this moment comes into existence as what it is along with what is ordinarily called the memory of a whole past.

How, then, could the reliability of memory be justified against such hypotheses? A plausible answer could be offered once more by referring to the myth of Prometheus: it may be argued that memory proves to be reliable as long as it constitutes the basis for any conceivable successful method. An ultimate justification that memory is a totality of discernible processes or successions as they are represented to have happened in a certain order, and that these entities have happened at the location or distance they appear to have happened may not be possible. But, all arts, all methods require a common understanding of what reality, needs and possibilities are. For an objective, that is, a common order of things it is essential that all arts and methods should be employed with a good will of veridicality. It is also possible to tell lies about reality, but persuasion by lying requires the power to misrepresent the order of events so flawlessly that an equally consistent counterfeit order can appear to be the original, which is practically impossible. Hence, in order to determine the course of events in common reality, either in nature or in community life, it is necessary to act as an equal member, to be honest and careful not to misrepresent what appears to be the objective order of phenomena. Of course one must also be vigorous enough not to fail in one’s serious attempt of veridicality. Therefore, mastery in \textit{technai} of natural or political order offers the principal means for justification of the reliability of memory. A reliable memory is one in which both the qualities of things and their common order are retained lively, which keeps expanding without breach, and therefore one which can serve the future.

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NOTES

7 In fact, Descartes did not formulate his methodological skeptical argument along these lines. But, if it is conceivable that a powerful evil genius deceives the Cartesian meditator, it is also conceivable that it deceives by creating everything anew each moment, as Descartes thought that some cause (the all-powerful and benevolent God) is capable (see Third Meditation, AT VII, 48–9). In this sense Russell’s hypothesis can be viewed as a derivative of Cartesian methodological skepticism and the view that time is discontinuous: I may be deceived by a powerful being about the reality of the past.
A HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF ORGANIC MEMORY

As there is a geometry in space, so there is a psychology in time, in which the calculations of a plane psychology would no longer be accurate because we should not be taking account of time, and of the forms that it assumes, forgetting

Proust, *The Fugitive*, III, 568

ABSTRACT

“Organic memory” means that I – more exactly me – am (or is) by memory remembered. Not I but the organic, namely that which has become differentiated in and through my own vital activity, and this must include the differentiated world, this memory remembers me. It is different from the way in which we ordinarily experience memory, namely as its users, hence the difficulty of conceptualizing it. Such memory involves the world as its medium, whether of our own body taken as part of the world, or of various parts of the world which emerge as something like “found objects”. In and through my own activity I am as it were remembered by my body and by parts of the world. “Organism” holds both the meaning of being remembered by its past, as well as meaning of the world construed in my “dismembering” of it, in and through my own activity. While I as it were dismember the organic, the organic is remembering me. My usual experience of the organic is that of waking consciousness, while the condition in which the organic remembers me lie outside consciousness, rather more like dreaming or trance awareness.

Transformation of the relatively undifferentiated embryo into the differentiated organism with its complementary envelope is that of a constantly enlarging and ever more complexly articulated sphere. Throughout however it retains the possibility of regression as well as of progression in organization. “Organic memories” are involuntary memories, memories mediated by, and touched off


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