

Memory: The History of a Concept

Edited by Dmitri Nikulin

for the Oxford Philosophical Concepts (OPC) series

Main Goals of the Series:

The main goal of is to offer philosophically subtle and historically sound accounts of central concepts in the history of philosophy. Each volume will be a history of its concept in that it will offer a story about the most significant events in the life of the concept from its original inception through its transformations to its modern use. The point of this narrative is to deepen understanding of the concept and explore its role in the history of philosophy. Volumes will include the best international scholars, “extra-philosophical” material or Reflections, a lexicon mapping the relation between the concept and terms referring to it, and thorough indices.

Overview:

One should welcome the new OUP series “Oxford Philosophical Concepts,” which intends to show that although philosophical concepts can be used systematically, they each have their own history. On this reading, each concept has an origin, or several origins, which can be reconstructed only retrospectively, from the point of view of the concept’s current use. For this reason, it is important to trace the ways in which a concept has been meant and used in various historical periods.

In recent decades, memory has become one of the major concepts and a dominant topic within the debates in many different areas of human activity: in philosophy, sociology, politics, history, science, cultural studies, and literary theory. In contemporary discussions, the concept of memory is often used rather broadly and thus not always unambiguously. Hence, clarification of the range of the concept’s historical meaning is a useful and urgent task. In particular, it is important to show how the concept of memory has been used and appropriated in different historical circumstances and how it has changed throughout the history of philosophy.

In contemporary philosophical and historical debates, memory frequently substitutes for reason by becoming a predominant capacity to which one refers when one wants to explain a historical, political, or social phenomenon. It is thus memory, and not reason, that acts in and through human history and deeds. This position might be a critical

reaction to the overly rationalized and simplified concept of reason and its functioning within the Enlightenment. Moreover, memory has taken on one of the most distinctive features of reason: it is thought of as reflective, i.e., capable not only of recollecting past events and meanings, but also itself and hence is capable of giving an account of itself as memory in memory.

In this respect, the proposed volume can be also taken as a reflective philosophical attempt by memory to recall itself, its functioning and transformations throughout history. In the last century, and especially in the last two decades, there have been a number of significant discussions of the concept of memory in its various aspects. One need only mention the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, Jan Assmann, Mary Carruthers, Yosef Yerushalmi, Ross Poole, Eric Kandel, J. Sutton, Yirmiyahu Yovel, and many others who come readily to mind. However, memory was already a central concept in ancient philosophy: the Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle all attempted to appropriate and clarify the concept of memory. As this collection intends to show, there is more continuity in the understanding of memory throughout the historical periods than one usually presupposes.

One of the main theses of the book is that memory in its various historical representations moves between the two poles of its understanding in Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of memory, which to a great extent set the tone and provide paradigmatic theories for much of the later debate, not only in the middle ages but also in the Renaissance, early modernity (in the idea of scientific method as a logical art of ordering and recollecting things), and right through the phenomenological tradition (as a capacity that signifies our access to being through structures of temporality).

In its most general sense, memory is a capacity to retain and reproduce things and events of the past in various ways. Therefore, memory can either be taken as a personal ability, i.e., as the faculty everyone has as a rational being, or as an extra-personal capacity that we all share and in which we all participate. The former is the Aristotelian account, which is developed, in particular, in phenomenology and early 20th-century philosophy (e.g., in Bergson). The latter, on the contrary, is the Platonic understanding, which takes memory as retaining and bringing back what always is (being) in an atemporal way. This more-than-personal understanding of memory leads later, in the 20th century, to the development of the ideas of collective memory (in Halbwachs and Nora's "memory sites" approach) and cultural memory (in Assmann), a memory that we share, reproduce, and transmit as members of a particular social group.

Memory as a capacity to retain things of the past also needs to be organized, in order to be reliable and function properly. In antiquity (in Simonides and Hippias but especially in ancient rhetoric) and later in the middle ages and the Renaissance, such an understanding of memory leads to the development of mnemotechnics as the *ars memorativa*. Since this art has its own logic of functioning, the study of its application to various disciplines, including rhetoric and dialectic, gives rise to the thorough investigation of the method itself, which leads to important insights into the role and functioning of method as the universal scientific method in early modernity.

The field of memory studies has currently become one of the most diverse and interdisciplinary ones, which is reflected in the structure of the proposed work, whose contributors will include philosophers, historians, literary scholars, specialists in film studies, psychologists, and scientists. In 2008, the Oxford University Press published a much quoted and discussed *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*. The proposed collection may be considered be a complement to this handbook in that the OPC volume intends to present *a* history of the concept of memory (*the* history of it seems to be hardly possible) through its various historical appropriations. Hopefully, the picture that will result from a number of historically situated debates might shed light on the continuity of the use of the concept from one epoch to another, and as also stress the moments of radical innovations in the understanding of memory.

General summary and structure of the volume. The structure of the book reflects the traditional division of the history of philosophy into the periods of antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, early modern philosophy, the Enlightenment, and contemporary philosophy. However, modern studies in the history of philosophy suggest that such a division is itself only a useful heuristic and descriptive device and that the exact limits of each epoch can shift and in fact are quite permeable.

The chapters of the volume will be written by an international group of scholars, some of whom are already widely recognized as living classics in memory studies (Marry Carruthers, Paolo Rossi, and Jan Assmann). Their participation in the volume alone should assure that it will become a notable event within memory studies. They will be also joined by younger scholars (Angelica Nuzzo and Nicholas de Warren) who have already established themselves in their respective fields of studies. All of the potential authors have expressed their interest and willingness to participate in the project.

In the general introduction, I will situate the concept of memory within the history of philosophy in an attempt to show the continuity of its appropriation, and will further contextualize various approaches to memory. At the same time, I will also argue that there are important topics in modern debates on memory (such as collective memory, memory as constitutive of history) that are quite new and do not so evidently fit within the standard history of philosophy divisions.

Chapter 1 of the book on memory in antiquity will be written by me. I have already published several books and articles in which I discuss the role that reason and imagination play in the constitution of the objects of knowledge, particularly in mathematics, in classical and late ancient philosophy (in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus). The discussion of memory follows naturally from the consideration of imagination, which, as I will argue, plays a key role in the constitution of memory and its functioning. I want to begin with a brief discussion of the role of memory in Homer and Hesiod, as well as in the tradition of the so-called “catalogue poetry,” which preserves important items—such as names of people, events, memorable things—in memory, inscribed into the (originally oral) lists that are transmitted poetically. From here, I will move on to the discussion of memory in the Presocratics, as well as in the early accounts of history in Hecataeus and Hellanicus, which are all based on orderly mnemonic

arrangements of memorable things. Plato takes memory as a capacity that allows us to save events from the futility of oblivion by achieving being itself, which comes in the famous metaphor of recollection (anamnesis). Memory thus becomes one of the major philosophical categories. In the *Phaedrus*, where Plato closely follows a famous account of the Sophist Alcidas, memory becomes the central category in the critique of writing, as the first attempted “cultural critique,” where memory is opposed to a mere reminder (hypomnesis) that only gives us an illusion of being but in fact does not save us from forgetting the really important things. However, memory as reminder provides a mnemonic device that becomes significant for the constitution of philosophical, logical, and mathematical proofs: in order to keep an argument in its entirety, we need to preserve a carefully constructed and memorized proof, either orally or in writing. In the later philosophical tradition, such a process of preservation of thought becomes constitutive of the scientific method. Memory is also exceptionally important in Aristotle’s psychology and is discussed in the *De anima* and at length in a special treatise (*De memoria et reminiscencia*). Here, memory becomes a mental capacity of preserving and recollecting various events as mental representations and images. The reception of this concept later by the Stoics, by Cicero and Quintilian in Roman times, forms the basis for the medieval and Renaissance concept of memory, central to the art of mnemonic and also to rhetoric (where memory becomes one of five major rhetorical constituents). Finally, memory plays an important role in Neoplatonic doctrines of the soul, particularly in Plotinus, who refers to memory many times in his *Enneads* and argues that it is indispensable for the soul (*psyche*) yet is absent from the intellect (*nous*), which is pure atemporal activity of thinking.

Chapter 2 on memory in the Middle Ages will be written by Mary Carruthers, currently Erich Maria Remarque Professor of Literature at NYU. Her *Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge UP, 1990, 2nd ed. 2008) has become a standard reference in the currently thriving field of medieval memory studies. The uniqueness of this book is that it is historically exceptionally well informed and philosophically significant at the same time, making multiple connections to modern philosophical debates about the concept of memory. The chapter will discuss the transition to medieval theories of memory from ancient ones. In particular, it will address the accounts of memory in Augustine, Hugh of St. Victor, Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic thinkers who were influenced mostly by Plato’s and Aristotle’s accounts. The text will also discuss and show a decisive influence of medieval Arabic (Avicenna and Averroës) and Jewish commentators on the development of theories of memory. In most cases, *memoria* is treated as a trained and disciplined memory, which requires an elaboration of a sophisticated mnemotechnics and allows for further development of Renaissance and early modern theories and presents a continuity with them. Among other important topics that will be addressed in this chapter are the relation of memory to imagination and memory’s intermediate position in the process of cognition as standing between the senses and the intellect. Finally, the chapter will discuss memory as a cultural value and its role in the constitution of personal and public memory through interpretations of Scripture and public records.

Chapter 3 of the book will be written by Paolo Rossi, Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at the University of Florence, the author of *Logic the Art of Memory* (Chicago

UP, 2000, orig. published in Italian in 1983), which is one of the most significant contributions to the discussion of memory in the Renaissance and early modernity ever written, comparable in its importance to the classical work of Frances Yates. This chapter will discuss the transformation of memory into a prototype and blueprint for the modern scientific method. Such an understanding of memory, which comes from the tradition of the so-called *ars memorativa*, which was used for ordering and arranging things and meanings through signs, gives rise to the art of combinatorics and sophisticated methods of classification established by Raymond Lullus and later developed by John Wilkins and George Dalgarno. Eventually, the art of memory leads to the development of the universal language of science and scientific method in Descartes and Leibniz.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the concept of memory in Kant and the 19th century philosophy, including the Romantics. Angelica Nuzzo, Professor of Philosophy at the Graduate Center and Brooklyn College, CUNY, will discuss the idea of memory (as *Erinnerung* and *Gedächtnis*) in the development of classical German philosophy, from Kant to Hegel and Schelling, and will show that the concept of memory played a significant role in the philosophical debate of the time. The consideration of memory will move from Kant's transcendental transformation of the inheritance of Scholastic psychology (in Christian Wolff) to Hegel's logical and historicist use of the concept, up to the late metaphysical and aesthetic function that memory displays for Schelling as the privileged access to the Absolute. The chapter will also provide an account of the main Romantic positions on the topic and will argue that, under the alternating Aristotelian and Platonic influences, the notion of memory is a crucial and ubiquitous concept that finds its systematic place in metaphysics, logic, psychology, anthropology, aesthetics, and history.

Chapter 5 will be written by Nicholas de Warren, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Wellesley College, who is the author of a number of works on phenomenology and early 20th-century continental philosophy. Beginning with Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* and *On the Genealogy of Morals*, he will critically present and assess the wide range of philosophical conceptions of memory between the end of the 19th century and the mid-20th century. Nietzsche, Bergson, Husserl, Sartre, Heidegger, and Ricoeur were all concerned with the concept of memory, although for different reasons and motivations. Despite their different conceptions, they all shared a concern for outlining and understanding the temporal structure of memory. A robust historical reconstruction of the various approaches to memory by these authors should demonstrate that memory is constituted through the double movement of, on the one hand, distinguishing between memory and temporality (present in the distinction between remembrance and "retention") and, on the other hand, of integrating temporality into memory. In this way, memory increasingly becomes defined in temporal terms, as opposed to the spatial characterizations that prevailed in the history of philosophy. Moreover, the chapter will also address the way this re-structuring of memory also entails different descriptions of memory as an activity or force, namely, as projection, repression, synthesis, etc. Other central notions such as personal identity, narrative and history will also receive appropriate attention.

Chapter 6 will be dedicated to the current debates in the analytic philosophy of memory. There has been an extensive discussion of memory recently in the analytic tradition. Thus, Oxford University Press has just published a brand new book by Sven Bernecker, *Memory: A Philosophical Study* (2010). Michael Martin, Professor of Philosophy at the University College London, has agreed to write this chapter. He is well known for his work in philosophy of mind, particularly, on episodic memory. In his essay, he will focus mainly on two linked themes. First, he will address the most discussed problem of memory in the last thirty or so years: the connection between episodic memory, one's memory for particular events in one's past (what philosophers sometimes call 'direct' or 'personal' memory), and one's distinctively first personal knowledge of the world. Episodic memory has been central to discussions of Lockean and also reductive accounts of the nature and persistence of persons: many philosophers suppose that we need to employ a revised notion of episodic memory, quasi-memory as Parfit dubbed it (drawing on a discussion by Sydney Shoemaker), which allows the possibility of correctly recalling events from the past life of someone who is not identical with one, but with whom one is psychologically continuous; a small group of philosophers, though, question the coherence or centrality of the notion of quasi-memory. In this they are often concerned with the distinctive role that episodic memory plays in one's knowledge of oneself. The second theme is memory and mechanism. Apart from Russell's early writings, there has been little discussion in analytic philosophy of the nature and status of memory, and there has been little concern with a distinctive epistemology of our recall of the past. Probably the dominant conception of memory (both for factual or 'semantic' memory and for episodic memory) is that found in Martin and Deutscher's discussion of 'Remembering' in 1966 which simply extends the causal analysis of perception to the case of memory. The relation between memory, remembering and underlying causal mechanism is even more problematic than the issues raised in the theory of perception. In outlining these core concerns, the author will seek to throw more light on the debate about episodic memory and first person knowledge of one's past life.

The final, seventh chapter of the book will be authored by Jan Assmann, Honorary Professor of History and Sociology at the University of Konstanz and Professor Emeritus at the University of Heidelberg, who has expressed an enthusiastic support for the project. Jan Assmann is the author of *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Harvard UP, 1997), which was one of the mostly read and discussed books in the academic world of the last decade. The historical range of the discussion in the book is quite astonishing: from Egyptian texts (Assmann is one of the world's leading Egyptologists) to the Bible, from Ficino to Toland and Cudworth, from Schiller to Freud. Assmann has practically single-handedly created the whole field of cultural memory studies and is a major figure in the recent discussions of memory. The chapter will be dedicated to cultural memory and will summarize the discussion of collective memory in the works of Maurice Halbwachs and Aby Warburg, as well as the contemporary debate, including Bourdieu, Jack Goody, and others. "Cultural memory" stands for any form of knowledge that is variously present in life and the practical activity of any human community and is transmitted from one generation to another. Since one always belongs to different groups at the same time (professionally, linguistically, within the family, state, etc.), one always shares and further transmits

multiple collective memories. However, certain characteristics of cultural memory (such as concreteness of identity, normativity, reflexivity, etc.) appear to be invariant and independent of particular cultural and historical circumstances.

Conclusion. A brief conclusion to the book will summarize the debate and also suggest some questions and problems left open for future discussion and investigation.

Side Notes. Since the book is meant to be a history of the concept of memory and thus cannot embrace all the historical and extant uses of memory and cover all the debates around it, the Side Notes, or Reflections, will play an important role in the book. They are meant to complement the main content of the chapters by supplying brief yet condensed summaries of other ways in which the concept of memory is used, particularly, in contemporary discussions.

The following Side Notes might be appropriate as supplements to the main text. I have not yet approached any of the suggested authors from the below list, except one (Michael Iampolski, who agreed to write a Side Note on memory and film). I intend to contact the potential authors after (and if) the contract for the volume is issued by the OUP. I did quite a bit of research and contacted many people personally for advice, and as a result I came up with the following list of Side Notes with the names of the potential authors. I have reason to believe that they might be interested in joining the OPC project.

Memory in rhetoric (to be included in ch. 1): Since memory plays a major role in classical rhetoric, from where it enters the debate about the role of memory in the scientific method, it would be important to mention this aspect of memory. George Kennedy, Professor of Classics Emeritus at the University of North Carolina, the author of the groundbreaking translation and commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Oxford UP, 2007), is an ideal candidate for writing this Side Note.

Memory and gender (ch. 2): I intend to ask Marianne Hirsch, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University, who specializes in gender and cultural memory studies, to write this essay.

Memory and neuroscience (ch. 3): Eric Kandel, Professor of Biology at Columbia University, a Noble Prize winner, famous for his work on molecular mechanisms of memory with Aplysia and a great popularizer of neuroscience, might be interested in writing a Side Note on memory research in neuroscience.

Memory in psychology (ch. 3): Endel Tulving, Professor at the Rotman Research Institute in and an editor and author of *The Oxford Handbook of Memory*, who works on the psychology of memory, might be asked to write an overview of various approaches to memory in contemporary psychology.

Memory and literature (ch. 4): Geoffrey Hartman, Sterling Professor Emeritus & Senior Research Scholar of English and Comparative Literature at Yale University, whose recent publications are dedicated to the topic, is an ideal candidate for writing such a Note.

Memory and political tolerance (ch. 4): Rainer Forst, Professor of Political Theory at the University of Frankfurt, the author of a foundational work on tolerance, *Toleranz im Konflikt: Geschichte, Gehalt und Gegenwart eines umstrittenen Begriffs* (Suhrkamp, 2003), the English translation of which is forthcoming with Cambridge UP, will gladly join the project.

Memory in film (ch. 5): Michael Iampolski, Associate Professor of Comparative Literature at NYU, the author of many books on film theory and history, provided the following description of this Side Note: “Memorization and mnemotechnics proceed with the selection and rearrangement of elements of reality. From Aristotle to Ebbinghaus, associative chains were considered to be the basis of memory. In cinema and photography, however, memory was usually associated with recording reality without any preceding selection similar to the famous wax imprint. André Bazin called this approach the ‘mummification’ of reality. I will look into Dziga Vertov’s experiments with documentary films that incorporate the whole structure of cuts and selections.”

Memory and trauma in Freud and classical psychoanalysis (ch.5): Eli Zaretsky, Professor of History at Eugene Lang College and New School, who works on the history of psychoanalysis and is the author of an international bestseller *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (Vintage Books, 2004), would be an ideal candidate for contributing this Side Note.

Memory site (ch. 7): This Side Note might be authored by Pierre Nora, Professor at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales and the author and editor of the foundational work, *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols. (trans. as: *Realms of Memory*, 3 vols. Columbia UP, 1992-1998). He originated the whole discussion of the “memory sites” (which can be any object, material or non-material, that transmits the memorial heritage of a community symbolically), which has become one of the most debated topics in memory studies in the last two decades.

Lexicon of special terms in various languages, a thorough *Bibliography* and two *Indices* (Index personae and Index rerum) will be included in at the end of the volume.

Illustrations. Illustrations should play a significant role in the book. Some of the potential authors I contacted (Mary Carruthers, Nicholas de Warren, and Michael Iampolski) expressed their strong support for the idea of adding visual materials to the text the book. I would suggest using two to three illustrations per chapter and one illustration per Side Note.

Length of the volume. The total length of the volume will be between 85,000 and 90,000 words: 7 chapters of approximately 9,000 words each, 9 Side Notes of 1,000–1,200 words each, an introduction and conclusion totalling approximately 10,000 words, to which a Lexicon, Indices, and a Bibliography, and 20–25 illustrations, will be added.

Workshop. A workshop would be very useful and desirable for the project. Once all the authors are ready with the drafts of their chapters, they will exchange them and get together for a day or two to discuss the project in more detail. Whereas each chapter in principle can be also read on its own, a general discussion will ensure a coherent and well-conceived structure of the book.

Proposed time-line.

Chapter drafts and workshop: fall 2012.

Completed manuscript, including Side Notes and Lexicon: spring 2012.

Corrected page proofs with indices: fall 2012.

Publication: spring 2013.

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