



R. A. H. KING

Aristotle and Plotinus
on Memory

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by
R. A. H. King

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To G. and Ellie, with love

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While the book was going to press, my sister Geraldine died of cancer. It is dedicated to her and her daughter, Ellie.

Preface – Abbreviations and conventions

Abbreviations

Aristotle's works referred to

Cat.	Categoriae
Anal. Pr.	Analytica Priora
Anal. Post.	Analytica Posteriora
Top.	Topica
Phys.	Physica
De cael.	De Caelo
Gen. et Corr.	De Generatione et Corruptione
Meteor.	Meteorologica
De an.	De Anima
PN	Parva Naturalia
Sens.	De sensu et sensibilibus
De mem.	De memoria et reminiscencia
De somn.	De somno et vigilia
De insomn.	De insomniis
De divin.	De divinatione per somnium
De longaev.	De longitudine et brevitate vitae
De juv.	De juventute et senectute, vita et morte
HA	Historia animalium
PA	De partibus animalium
De mot. anim.	De motu animalium
De inc. anim.	De incessu animalium
De gen. anim.	De generatione animalium
Met.	Metaphysica
EN	Ethica Nicomachea
EE	Ethica Eudemia

Other Abbreviations

- AHA Armstrong, A.H. 1966–1987. *Plotinus. Enneads*. VII vols. Cambridge, Mass./ London.
- Bonitz Bonitz, H. 1870. *Index Aristotelicus*. Berlin.
- Bréhier Bréhier, E. 1924–38. *Plotin. Les Ennéades I-VI. Texte établi et traduit par E. Bréhier*. Paris.
- DK Diels, H. and Kranz, W. 1951. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*. III vols. (6th ed.) Berlin.
- HBT Harder, R., Beutler, and R, Theiler, W. 1956–1971. *Plotins Schriften. Neubearbeitung mit griechischem Lesetext und Anmerkungen*. Hamburg. IV vols. Text (Ia-IVa), IV vols. Notes (Ib-IVb).
- HS Henry, P. Schwyzer, H.-R. 1964, 1977, 1983. *Plotini Opera*. Oxford. (Editio minor).
- LS Long, A. and Sedley, D. 1988. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. Cambridge
- LSJ Liddell, H.G., Scott, R. and Jones, H.S. 1990. *A Greek English Lexicon*, Ninth Edition, Oxford 1940 (often reprinted), Suppl. 1968 and 1996.
- MacK MacKenna, S. 1956. *Plotinus. The Enneads. Second edition revised by B.S.Page*. London.
- SP Sleeman, J.H., Pollet, G. 1980. *Lexicon Plotinianum*. Leiden.
- SVF Arnim, H. von. 1903–1905. *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. IV vols. Leipzig.

Conventions

Aristotle's writings, notably *De memoria et reminiscentia* and *De anima*, are referred to by title (in the notes as De mem., De an.), without noting the author. Editions and translations of Aristotle's *De memoria et reminiscentia* are cited merely by the name of the editor or translator. "Ross" refers to Sir David Ross, G. Ross to G.R.T Ross (for exact references, see the Select Bibliography). As is customary, Aristotle's works are referred to using page, column (a,b) and line of Bekker's edition.

Plotinus' writings are referred to using Porphyry's arrangement of his work into Enneads, along with chapter and line from Henry and Schwyzer's *editio minor* (Oxford). Thus "IV 3 30 11" refers to the third treatise in the fourth Ennead, Chapter 30, line 11. "I 1" refers to the first treatise in

the first Ennead, and “I 1 12” refers to the twelfth chapter of that treatise. “HS” refers to this edition.

Translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted. Greek, even when quoted, is not placed in quotation marks.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Six problems about memory

The two short treatises on memory by Aristotle and Plotinus which are the subject of this study raise interesting conceptual questions about memory. There is an intuitive view of memory which one could describe very briefly as follows. A living thing perceives something; residues of this perception are preserved and may serve an act of memory. Very roughly, this is Aristotle's view. Plotinus opposes it, above all because he thinks the subject of memory is simply the incorporeal soul, and this cannot be affected and so preserve residues in itself. The present study is an attempt to describe and contrast these two ancient theories of memory.

The following six problems will serve as a framework for our investigation:

(P1) The derivation problem:

Memory requires certain other cognitive faculties as no one could just have memory and no other form of grasping things. This may be called *the epistemological dependence* of memory. How can memory be derived from these other faculties? What is the nature of this dependence? This derivation can be taken to be an aspect of explaining memory. If memory is not primitive (inexplicable, an element in the system), we need explanatory resources. A central part of the answer to this question in both Plotinus and Aristotle lies in representation. For representation shows how memory is derived from and connected to thought and perception.

Another, related form of dependence is ontological: memories are not independent entities; they depend on the subjects they occur in. Nonetheless, memory is in one sense primitive. For its relation to the past belongs to it alone, and is not derived from anything else, although it may depend on the grasp of time.

(P2) The present-past problem:

I remember getting up this morning. How is my getting up present to me now, when it is past? While sceptical approaches use this problem to deny the reality of the past, neither Aristotle nor Plotinus has inclinations in

this direction. For both, part of the answer to this problem lies in the continued existence of the subject of memory. This is a necessary condition for memory. Furthermore, this continued existence must in some way provide a link – a chain of causes – between now and then. But clearly the actual existence of such a chain would be insufficient for memory to occur; the traces have to stand in explicit relation to that of which they are the traces.

(P3) The memory-representation problem:

A face appears before my mind's eye; as we might say, I am thinking of a face. How does this differ from a memory of Socrates' face? An answer to this question would also be a contribution to a solution of P2, since representations can contribute to providing an explicit connection with the past.

(P4) The memory-recollection problem:

At the moment, I remember having my breakfast this morning, without searching for this memory. So I have some things, past perceptions, in mind without any searching (memory). Other things require a search (recollection), for example having breakfast on Tuesday last week. So can this distinction between memory and recollection be explained? It might look merely arbitrary. For does one really think of anything without wanting to, even if one is prompted by external influences? For example, I might think of Socrates' face, being prompted by the sight of Theaetetus.

Explaining the relation between memory and recollection requires more than the concepts of capacity and activity: recollection is not simply the activity of the capacity to remember. Yet there must be one capacity with several realisations. And the way in which it is realised may differ. For example, one might think that while recollection is an intentional action, memory is something that happens to one. However, both are clearly end-directed.

(P5) The self-memory problem:

I can only remember things I have undergone myself. This seems to be part of what *memory* means. But what exactly is the relation between my self and my memory? This question is connected to the present-past problem in that a necessary condition for solving that problem is the continued existence of the subject of memory.

(P6) The universal-memory problem:

I have capacities (e. g. counting) which can be realised without any reference to (mention of) my perceptions. Is the exercise of such a capacity memory? In modern discussions, “semantic memory” is an expression used for stored information without any explicit relation to my perceptions. If memory can be split in two such radically different aspects, this is an important fact about the concept.

A comprehensive discussion of these six problems would take us some way towards a systematic account of memory; of course, that lies beyond the scope of the present work. Nonetheless, a brief discussion of some relations between these points can serve as an introduction to the historical work that follows.

The fundamental thing about memory is its derivation. Memory is derivative from other ways of my interacting with things around me. For memory has no way of its own to attach things I have in mind to things outside my mind. This implies that perception is a useful lead into memory, insofar as it is the fundamental way we and other living things have cognition of the way things are.

Because memory relates to perceptions (P5), universals as such cannot be in my memory (P6). The memory we are dealing with here is what is called episodic, autobiographical or experiential; this requires that memory is closely connected to perception (P1); but on the other hand, perception also requires the use of concepts, if not always, and perhaps with different degrees of clarity. For example, the perception can happen before I acquire the concept to describe it; I can see a red balloon before I have the concept of a balloon. And still I can remember the perception without the concept, for example something red, spherical and light, when in fact it was a red balloon.

Suppose I have some representation in mind, how do I attach it to a past perception, in an act of memory? Is that something that some things just have as it were, simply a verb in the past tense which *eo ipso* means that a connection is being made to the past? This problem touches both the past-present problem (P2), and also the memory-representation problem (P3), and also the derivation problem (P1). To begin with the last point, we need to move beyond a present perception to something that lasts; and a first step in this direction lies in a representation of the perception. But even once I have the representation, it need not tell me itself that it could serve to make a memory claim. Indeed, a *representation* does not *say* anything; *I* do that, when I make a truth claim. And in order to

make a truth claim, at least in the case of memory, I need a representation, among other things. That is not to say that there is a process of deducing from the evidence of a present representation to a past perception. But the representation can form part of my capacity to have memories and play an essential role in my actually having them; and hence explain in part what memory is. So representation contributes to capacities to do things, without being a capacity in its own right. But representation can serve as a bridge between something I have in mind now, and something I wish to remember. To show how this is possible requires a solution to the memory-representation problem (P3).

Some things in my past are available without anymore ado; others require looking for (the memory recollection problem P4). Whether things have to be recalled or are there, available without a search, they seem to remain in some sense. This is the present-past problem (P2). Memory is not just the remaining of the thing to be remembered; some states do not need any activity to remain. My curtains do nothing but do stay green. The retention involved in memory is different, living things are continually active. So retention and retrieval may be related in a very different way from the way the butter is kept in the larder and may be fetched when needed. (This is the treasury or store house view of memory, a view we shall not be concerned with.)

1.2 Representational theories of memory in Aristotle and Plotinus

Two short works on memory have come down to us from pagan antiquity, Aristotle's *On memory and recollection*, and Plotinus' *On perception and memory*.¹ One very obvious connection between these two theories is that they use *φαντασία*. The claim that I will try to establish in this study is that the account of memory developed by Aristotle and adapted by Plotinus using *φαντασία* is not to be understood as an image theory of memory. Here I take an image theory in the following very simple sense. Socrates remembers Theaetetus, only if, when Socrates perceived Theae-

1 My interpretation of Aristotle's theory below in 2.1 and 2.2 is, in large part, a reworking in English of my commentary on *De mem.* in King 2004 (reviewed by Tsouni 2005 in English). The treatment of Plotinus in the present study is much closer to the text, since less work in general has been done on his treatises which touch on memory; see, however, Brisson 2006, Taormina 2010.

tetus, an image was fixed of Theaetetus in Socrates. The presence of this image is the presence of memory. This will act as our stalking horse, to set off two much more sophisticated theories.

First, some preliminary remarks. In a representational theory of memory, φαντασία, representation, provides part of the capacity to remember things. By this I mean something quite simple. We need to distinguish between actual remembering and the capacity to remember. Actually remembering things is not the presence of an image; rather it is saying that something is the case, or a perceptual analogue of such a propositional attitude. However, in order to say something about Theaetetus, Socrates must have a representation of him. So representation forms part of the capacity to remember and actually remembering things is a matter of saying or perceiving that things are the case. So φαντασία is part of a propositional and, thus conceptual, capacity.²

“Representation” is a translation of φαντασία. In both of the theories we are dealing with, in different ways, it is dependent on (sense-) perception: a φαντασία is what remains when perception is over, and requires a preceding perception to exist. So to start with, the approach we are following is epistemic, concerned with memory as connected to perception as a form of cognition. For, of course, the fact that we start from a concept of representation that is explained in terms of perception should not preclude a conceptual aspect to the theory. For we cannot simply assume that perception occurs without concepts; we can see a red balloon without the concept of a balloon, but we cannot see it as a balloon. For instance, someone who believes that concepts – those defined in an Aristotelian science, for example – are gained by experience should believe that in perception, conceptual elements are present in some way.³ Another alternative is that innate ideas play a central role in perception. On either count, perception is a faculty that works with concepts. So if memory relies on perception, there will be conceptual aspects to this capacity. This

2 It is a difficult question as to whether φαντασία is itself conceptual; on the one hand perception is conceptual, at least in the sense that in humans concepts can be distilled out of perception using memory and experience (see below in main text). It seems an exaggeration to say that φαντασία *itself* is what allows humans at least to interpret perception (cf. Nussbaum 1978: Interpretive Essay 5); it is part of the perception *itself*; I think, for Aristotle, that we perceive things *as* something. De An. II 6 on incidental perception makes no mention of φαντασία. Klaus Corcilius has been insistent that I make this point.

3 Cf. Scott 1995: Chapter 5. Discovery and continuity in science.

in fact is quite obvious, if one accepts that actual remembering consists in making a propositional claim, at least in the case of humans.

The present approach might be thought open to the criticism that a novel translation of φαντασία – “representation” rather than “imagination”⁴ – is being introduced in order to present a theory of memory that has nothing in common with modern representationalist theory except the name.⁵ Let me try to banish this impression. For a start, at a colloquial level, *representation* and its cognates are closer to what is meant by φαντασία than *imagination* and its cognates.⁶ And one should not exaggerate the similarity of “representations” in the present context with the entities in modern discussions of mental representation.⁷ But there are things which are sufficiently similar to make it seem worthwhile to pursue this line, and reasons enough to claim that in so doing we are presenting a view of Aristotle and Plotinus that is novel. No serious attempt has been made to show how taking φαντασία as representation would work in the case of memory. The standard assumption is that φαντασία is to be understood as a faculty of images in Aristotle’s theory of memory.

-
- 4 Burnyeat 2008a: 47 note 15 argues that *imagination* only fits III 3 427b17–24 in the treatment of φαντασία, and that *appearance* is the proper translation for the noun for the verb φαίνεσθαι, referring to Plato’s usage at *Theaetetus* 152BC, *Sophist* 264AB. “Appearance” is, however, problematic, in that it is unclear what a potential appearance is, as it were, one that does not appear, now, but may do so later. Since Aristotle’s theory of dreams requires that movements from perceptions remain in the living thing (see esp. Ins. 3460b28–461a8), to reappear in sleep, and these movements are certainly φαντασῆαι, we have to allow for non-appearing φαντασῆαι. Surely, for an appearance, apparere is esse. See also the discussion in Lefebvre 1997.
- 5 Another possible line of criticism is that in two main areas of cognition Aristotle is not a representationalist, since he thinks that thinking is identical with what is thought, and the perception with what is perceived. Firstly, this does not apply to memory. Secondly, it is not *prima facie* clear that the identity precludes representation. In the case of thought representations are certainly necessary (De anima III 8, De mem. 1 449b31).
- 6 See the definition in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* s.v. represent: 1. call up by description or portrayal or imagination, figure, place likeness of before the mind or senses, serve or be meant as likeness of. S. v. Imagination: mental faculty forming images of external objects.
- 7 See e.g. the essays collected in Stich and Warfield 1994. Thomas Johansen has argued to me that in the modern sense perception and thought are representational, whereas these faculties do not involve φαντασία for Aristotle. Clearly, I agree that φαντασία is not involved in Aristotle’s account of all phenomena which fall under the modern concept of mental representation (and the same applies to Plotinus).

The fundamental weakness of image theories of memory is that the presence of an image is neither sufficient nor necessary for remembering to take place. I can remember without an image. My memories of breakfast this morning (tea and toast) need be neither accompanied by nor constituted by gustatory, olfactory, visual, tactile or auditory images: no need to go through an experience as if having breakfast again. I can just say to myself or others: I had tea and toast for breakfast. And many images go through my mind, (for example when I am dreaming), without these being cases of memory.

Nonetheless, some residue of perception is required for us to be able to remember things. This residue is what I am calling a representation.

This study is an examination of representational theories of memory,⁸ such as those developed by Aristotle and Plotinus. A representational theory of memory is one in which memory is a representational faculty, that in some sense “pictures”, presents or represents the things to us. Versions of this theory are nowadays widely held to be untenable; usually such theories are held to operate with mental images, for the capacity to represent something may be held to be the imagination. Four difficulties with a representational theory may be mentioned:⁹

- How are we meant to have a picture gallery in our heads, which one inspects in memory acts?
- How is a present occurrence connected with the past?
- How is it possible to remember without images occurring in one’s mind?
- How does one distinguish memory representation from other representations, e.g. imaginary ones?

These four problems in fact derive from a view of representation which borders on a parody, since, of course, for one thing there is no picture gallery in one’s head which is inspected in acts of memory.¹⁰ However, consideration of these problems, or ones like them, while using a more serious view of representation, will guide our discussion. Much depends on the way we understand representation. The most important questions are:

Does it only involve images?

Does it involve concepts?

⁸ Sutton 1998 is a large scale defence of the idea of memory traces.

⁹ See Audi 1998: 60–2.

¹⁰ See e.g. Mackie 1976: 41–47.

Can it be true and false?

From what has been said already, it should be clear that of these three questions, only the first is to be answered in the negative. But these epistemological aspects of representation do not exhaust its capacity to explain memory. A further aspect concerns the ontology of things that remember. For what we need is some form of bridge to the past. The representation is part of what has to be preserved from the past to the present for memory to be possible. So, remembering things persist through time. And they produce (under the right conditions) changes which serve the reconstruction of the past.

We need an example of memory to articulate the conditions under which someone can be said to remember:

Example (E) Socrates remembers (at t_2) that he saw Theaetetus two days ago (at t_1).

Three times are necessary for memory – t_1 and t_2 , and the time span in between. Thus cognition of time is necessary, whether determined (this *amount* of time) or not. A theory which concentrates on t_2 , what we do when we actually remember may be called *a constructivist theory*: at its most extreme, such a theory might claim that all that is required is that one do something special at t_2 , namely, construct one's memory.

Some theorists tend to emphasise the activity at t_2 , as it were, the reconstruction of what happened. Socrates must do something when he remembers at t_2 , otherwise at all times of t_1+n he would be remembering. Others concentrate on the nature of what happened at t_1 : something at t_1 affected Socrates. And a third area is what happens between t_1 and t_2 . That is to say, it is possible to insist on a certain configuration of the persisting causes.

We have said that part of the virtue of representation is that it can explain one of the things that have to exist, if there is to be memory. But of course representations do not occur independently in the world; they always belong to a subject. The approach we will follow essentially involves things capable of cognition. In other words, it is both epistemology and ontology. Furthermore, living things have an interest in the past, and the way they are affected by the past. Memory is in some ways unique, as it were, a bridge between past events and present behaviour: there are some things which, if we do not remember them, can no longer affect our actions. So memory provides at least in some cases a causal chain.

But in the reverse direction memory requires causal conditions to hold in the past: Socrates remembers seeing Theaetetus (in part) *because* he saw him. This is a necessary condition, but not sufficient. For we do not remember many things we see. But the force of demanding that there is a connection in Socrates between t_1 and t_2 is to insist that there can be no gaps in a causal chain. Causes must be continuously connected with their effects. They do not act at a temporal distance.¹¹ Thus our interest in representation lies at least partly in this aspect of the causal role it fulfils, that is the continuity it may provide. Not of course that one image persists from t_1 to t_2 , but that there is a continuous chain which can preserve something of the original perception and constitute in part the capacity to remember it. Part of the causal story of how we can now at t_2 remember what happened at t_1 is a story involving representation.

The kinds of explanation in Plotinus and Aristotle are not restricted to causality in the modern sense. But the ideas of continuity, and passing on of information, and of the avoidance of acting at a temporal distance are present.

Thus this is primarily a study of the way these two thinkers tried to explain memory; in both cases one important part of this explanation lies in elucidating the connections between memory, and the conceptions of soul in each thinker. For memory is an obvious example of a cognitive capacity relating times in the lives of persisting beings. Indeed, memory may seem to be the only such capacity, but this is not the case. Thus an important theme is restricting memory to its proper sphere, and so of course, establishing just what this sphere is. In both Plotinus and Aristotle, we are dealing with *modest* theories of memory.¹² There are two kinds of modesty involved. Firstly, memory is only involved in some of our cognition. This is true even if it seems that we have cognitive capacities which exist over time. Thus a broad conception of memory is precluded which comprises all the information we possess.¹³ Secondly, in these theories memory is modest in that it requires a subject to do the remembering. For living things and in particular humans exist through time and possess persisting capacities which can be exercised without the exercise

11 On causation and memory see Martin, Deutscher 1966.

12 In contrast e.g. to the “memorism”, espoused by some ancient empiricists according to Frede 1990.

13 For such a broad conception, see e.g. Baddeley 1982: Ch. 1 What is your memory? The chapter begins (p. 11) with the words: “Memory is the capacity for storing and retrieving information. Without it we would be unable to see, hear or think.”

of memory. Not all information that we have available is in our memory. Thus memory proper has to be distinguished, for example, from changes in our striving, in what we want, and from the acquired capacity to think certain things. So modesty, when applied to memory does not refer to the restrictions of memory to certain objects; in that sense, all capacities are modest, since they are capacities for some things, not others, and so relate to certain objects.

The philosophy of memory may be treated as a purely epistemological question, and some treatments of memory in ancient authors bring out this side to the concept.¹⁴ Not so with Aristotle and Plotinus. The questions both authors are much more concerned with are ontological, namely what is memory and what are the subjects of memory. These are closely related questions. For memory, being what it is, makes certain demands of its subjects. They must be able to do certain things, as well as being persisting things. Thus souls or concrete living things in Plotinus and Aristotle respectively must, under the right circumstances, have a faculty for representing things and perceiving things. Characteristically, acts of memory are acts of saying that something is the case.¹⁵ Furthermore the question of interest is also central: if one thinks that living things are guided by what is good for them, or what they take to be good, as both our authors do, then it is reasonable to think that when memory occurs, it does so because it fulfils a function or because it is, in the given circumstances, a good.¹⁶

These two thinkers can be contrasted and compared with one another in many ways, but a central contrast, in their theories of soul generally, and in their theory of memory in particular is the question whether body is needed for the soul in general to exist, and for there to be memory in particular. We shall see that the price that Plotinus pays for a non-embodied soul is a certain sparseness of explanatory resources: Memory can be explained in terms of the activity of an embodied soul in a perspicuous fashion, where the theorist of the bare soul reaches base rock in the bare capacities of soul. It is remarkable how far these thin resources take him. Aristotle in turn reaches his limits in not cashing out the material metaphors he offers in explanation of memory. This is disappointing in that the reader might like an explanation in terms of concepts, not metaphors.

14 Scott 1995, Frede 1990.

15 But note that the concept of belief (*δόξα*) plays no role in either of the theories under consideration here.

16 Philebus IIA7. On the *Philebus* see below p. 18.

But we shall see that Aristotle is nonetheless able to present a view on central philosophical questions raised by the phenomenon of memory.

The aim of Aristotle's work is to offer a definition of memory using the causes or explanatory factors that are involved. In IV 3–4, part of the large work *On problems of the soul*, Plotinus assumes a definition of memory, as something that does not need further discussion. We shall have to see whether he himself ever does give a definition, particularly in IV 6 3. This study will omit three important influences on Plotinus: his more immediate Platonic predecessors, the Stoics, and Alexander of Aphrodisias. These will be left out, partly because of the paucity of evidence and partly, because investigating them would go beyond the remit of this work.

The main questions we will be considering is how two thinkers with such widely differing views of the soul, in particular, whether the soul needs a body or not, can produce theories of memory with so many shared features. These works have in common that they both present theories of memory based on *φαντασία*, a view of memory that Aristotle developed and which became, in antiquity and beyond, something of a cliché. This similarity might strike one as surprising, above all because an important target of Plotinus' criticism are views of memory which use the model of a seal leaving an impression on wax; and Aristotle is one of the most famous friends of this model. But a model need not always be understood in the same way; the obvious polemic of Plotinus masks a deeper agreement with Aristotle. Both believe that in remembering, living things are active. Aristotle thinks that such activity is compatible with the passivity he sees in the imprint on wax, whereas Plotinus does not. Furthermore, both have theories of memory that are forms of *indirect realism via representation*.¹⁷ Both think that we can remember the way things were, or be wrong when we remember.

Aristotle's account of memory is part of his physics: a theory of embodied existence with its vital and cognitive activities. In contrast, Plotinus is discussing the difficulties associated with the soul, including not only the problems of defining memory under corporeal conditions but also the question of memory in the underworld and in the disembodied contemplation of ideas. Actually, this broadening of scope does not mean a radical revision of the account of memory.

17 The most famous direct realist is Reid (*Essays* III 7, p. 357). Direct realism would entail that there is a realm of timed facts which can be the content of memory. It is hard to find a place for such a realm in the world of either thinker.

In Plotinus' approach to memory, many of his most characteristic views are present:

- The impassibility of the soul.
- The role of soul as mediator between intellect and perception.
- the immortality of soul, involving different phases of corporeality and incorporeality.

Souls go through various stages, characterised by different activities or forms of life. The cycle is in some sense natural: it lies in the nature of the soul to go through this cycle. But equally importantly, the way any individual soul goes is a matter of its own choice.

Plotinus and Aristotle are both successors of Plato's: what do they owe him? This is a large question, not least because Plato's own use of memory is a large and complicated topic in its own right,¹⁸ but it is at least worth showing that Aristotle's approach represents a new start, above all in his use of φαντασία. In the case of both Plotinus and Aristotle the use of φαντασία shows their interest in what one may call the ontological side of memory: what must living things with memory be like?¹⁹ A further similarity, which masks more differences, is the following. Like (the late) Plato, both Aristotle and Plotinus distinguish between μνήμη and ἀνάμνησις. But in both cases, their distinctions are very different from Plato's.

The Greek words we will be dealing with are μνήμη and ἀνάμνησις and the associated verbs μνημονεύειν and ἀναμνησέσθαι. Apparently there was to begin with no clear distinction between the pairs of concepts: the idea was simply to remember someone. The capacity to do this was μνήμη. The precise distinction between the terms is a philosophical achievement of the late Plato in the *Philebus*.²⁰ Long before that he had talked about ἀνάμνησις in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*;²¹ μνήμη is first defined in the *Philebus*.²²

18 See Scott 1995: Section 1, pp. 13–86 for an excellent treatment of some aspects.

19 A parallel point to this is important in the *Phaedo*, insofar as ἀνάμνησις is meant to prove that the soul is immortal, even if in the end it does not.

20 *Philebus* 34A–B, 39A. On Aristotle and Plato here cf. Ross p. 243–4, Sorabji p. 5, 38, 89, 99, Freudenthal 1869: 403, Lang 1980, Van Dorp 1992, Labarrière 2000: 276 with n. 12.

21 Freudenthal 1869: 402 remarks that Plato tried to mark the distinction between μνήμη and ἀνάμνησις, and he refers to *Phaedo* 73B7–9: Simmias has to be reminded (ἀναμνησθῆναι) of the doctrine of ἀνάμνησις; he almost remembers (σχεδόν γε...μέμνημαι), because of what Kebes is trying to say. ἀναμνησέσθαι,

Some distinctions that will play a major role are the following. We can distinguish between the capacity to remember something (μνήμη) and actually remembering it (μνημονεύειν). Aristotle's enquiry into memory starts from a claim, stated in non-theoretical terms, about what we do when we are active with memory. Basically, I will be using the term remember (μνημονεύειν) as the activity of memory (μνήμη); and recollection (ἀναμνησθεσθαι) is a recollection that can end in memory, but starts from the unavailability of the content sought.²³

1.3 Platonic preliminaries

1.3.1 The wax block model for false opinion in the *Theaetetus*

In the *Theaetetus*, Plato describes how in the heart of each of us there is a block of wax, which we use to remember things with.²⁴ Perceiving something and remembering things are two ways of grasping them, and the question is whether these two ways can account for misidentifying something remembered with something perceived. Depending on what the wax is like, (hard or soft, plentiful or meagre) our memory is good or bad. The description is literary and light hearted.

The discussion between Socrates and Theaetetus reaches the conclusion that the model does not allow us to describe how we can have false opinions about things.

ἀναμνησθῆναι can mean “to remember something” (72Cff., 75E). But, as Freudenthal himself sees, Plato was not concerned with the details. He knows a distinction between μνήμη and ἀνάμνησις, but it plays no role in his theory.

22 Cf. also *Phaedrus* 249B-C: recollection (ἀνάμνησις) has ideas as its objects and the soul of the philosopher is close through his memory (μνήμη) to that which makes the divine divine, and 274E: memory (μνήμη) is damaged by writing; but the latter does serve recall (ὑπόμνησις). On μνήμη cf. also *Theaetetus* 163D, 164D.

23 A note on the translation of μμνήσκεσθαι, μεμνήσθαι: μμνήσκειν is a causative verb which means “to make someone think of something” (from the root *mna-). The passive may then have the meaning “remember” either in the sense of “to have in one’s memory” or “to recall”. The first is expressed in the perfect (e.g. Plato *Laws* 633D). And sometimes it is hard to tell which meaning is present (e.g. Plato *Philebus* 31A-B). Forms of μμνήσκεσθαι are used by Aristotle for both having in one’s memory (449b20, 452a7, 10, b27, 28, 29, 30 453a2, 3), and for recalling (451b26, 452a16, 18, 20, 22, 24).

24 *Theaetetus* 191A-195B.

In their explanations of memory, Aristotle adopts and adapts the wax block model, Plotinus criticises it severely.²⁵ Aristotle's use of it is closely connected to his use of the model of a sealing ring for the activity in perception.²⁶ This is not surprising, since the role the model has in the account of memory is to describe the initial perception. But, as we shall see, it would be premature to conclude that in the case of both Plotinus and Aristotle, the model is interpreted in the same way. Models need interpretation, and Plotinus' interpretation of the wax block model is very strict. He thinks that it precludes any talk of capacities of memory.

The reason, I suggest, that Aristotle can make positive use of it, whereas Plato and Plotinus cannot is that he is talking about the essentially embodied soul. Whilst for Aristotle as for Plotinus the soul cannot undergo change, this is obviously not the case for the concrete living thing made of the soul and the body. The concrete living thing, consisting of soul and body, undergoes a change. In other words, the wax block, if it is to make sense in the account of the embodied soul, must assume hylomorphism. The reason that the soul, as such, does not undergo change is that it is a form, in other words it is not material, and for Aristotle, matter is that which can be in two states.²⁷

1.3.2 The five conditions of ἀνάμνησις in the *Phaedo*

Plato nowhere develops a thoroughgoing *theory* of memory. What is often known as "Plato's theory of recollection" is actually a theory of what recollection does or can be used to do, namely, learn ideas, that is, recover cognition of ideas that dates from before our birth. What is usually called *learning* is thus really recollection, and takes place largely through dialectic.²⁸ The theory is first presented in the *Meno* (without any mention of ideas), in the main as an incitement to the hard work of research. It is then used in the *Phaedo* as part of the attempt to prove the immortality of the soul.

25 Aristotle's use is polemical: in Plato the model fails when used for false belief; Aristotle uses it with assurance for perception. See Burnyeat 1990: 101. The model goes back to Democritus (DK 68A135 = Theophrastus *de Sens.* 51–2).

26 De an II 8 423b19–21, III 12 435a2–3.

27 Plotinus: III 6 1, Aristotle Met. VII 7 1032 a18–20. On Aristotle, see King 2001: 56–59. Menn (2002: 92–94) also emphasises this point about the soul. For other sources in translation see Sorabji 2004: 217–220.

28 See esp. *Phaedo* 75C10–D4.