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Mnème and hénosis.

Dynamism of Memory in the Thought of Plotinus

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1 Memory and Time

Imagination is proverbially without limits. People can imagine the wildest things and have the most unbelievable ideas, all surpassing the limitations of place, time and reality. If, however, this psychic faculty (or one similar to it) focuses on *truth*, while reaching back to *the past*, according to some Ancient philosophers, it comes very close to what we call memory.¹

Aristotle was the first to relate memory, *mnème*, with *tò phantastikón*, the representational faculty of the soul, often translated as “imagination.”² He was followed by others, Plotinus among them.³ According to Aristotle, the act of remembering belongs to the faculty of the soul called “primary sense perception” (*prôton aisthetikón*; *Mem.* 450a 11–14). As such, it is closer to the thinking than to the perceiving faculty, but contrarily to the latter, it can be activated voluntarily. It recalls a mental representation (a thought, a theorem or an image). Aristotle separates this recollection of, for example, a theorem, from reconstruction of the process, through which a person reaches back to the first acquaintance with this theorem. In the first instance, he is talking about memory, in the second, about reminiscence, *anámnēsis* (*ibid.* 451b 16–22).

Another palpable trait of memory is its dependence on time and, more particularly, its link to the past. The paradox of memory is that, being a kind of time machine that

1 Cf. Slovene noun “domišljija” (imagination) and the verb “domisliti se” (to recall, to remember).

2 The word *phantasia* has the meaning of bringing to mind a thought or an image, which is the object of a previous thinking or perception. King (2009, 6s.) argues against the translation of *phantasia* as imagination, since the latter depends more on the mental images which are not necessarily part of the process of remembering. Cf. also Emilsson, 1988, 108s. The word “representation” (*Vorstellung* in German, *représentation* in French) is also the preferred alternative in other modern translations.

3 See Emilsson, 2017, 274–276 and *Id.*, 1988, 109s. on Plotinus’ theory of representation and on how representation is related to sense-perception.



enables a man to cross over the limits of time into the past, it is also a prisoner of time, since its very existence depends on it. The Presocratic thinkers had already discovered the epistemological meaning of the memory, for which time is a double-edged sword. Paron the Pythagorean had defied a general opinion that “Time is the wisest:” he had claimed that time is the most ignorant, as people forget in time (*DK*, 26). His words express a belief that we do not learn because of the time, but in spite of it. If we wish to remember something, we have to forget it first.

Memory is also an instrument of travelling to the past and getting to know it. This is either a collective memory, reawakened in a poet by the Muses lead by Mnemosyne (the Muse of Memory), who bestow on the elected individual the knowledge of “the Origins,” or an individual memory which, according to the Orphic-Pythagorean belief, helps a man to remember his past lives and thereby his personal history. Plato’s philosophical use of the term *anamnesis* (reminiscence, or recollection)⁴ represents a turning point in the history of the word, because his “recollection,” notwithstanding its relation to the doctrine of reincarnation, is not directed to the insight of the past lives. Instead, its goal is the true knowledge, obtained by souls after they have reached and behold “the plain of Truth” (i. e. the world of Forms), according to the central myth of *Phaedrus* (248b). Thus, Plato has paved the way for the Neoplatonic timeless memory, for the word of Forms is eternal, whereupon the knowledge of this world is whole and timeless, too.

Aristotle had also made a point that memory, since it is given not only to man, but to other living beings as well, cannot belong to the pure Intellect (*Mem.* 450a 15). By that he is referring to the active, impassive Intellect which is forever thinking and therefore neither needs nor recognizes the ability to keep what it was thinking before, since there is no “before” for it (*De an.* 430a 25ss.). Memory is a state (*héxis*) proper to a living being having a mind, but also everything else: therefore, it does not belong to the intellect alone (*De an.* 408b 25ss.).

Plotinus has picked up the idea and given it further development. He keeps memory out of the realm of Intellect and Soul, and refuses to view it as something acquired, which comes *from the outside*, affecting the subject. As has been observed in his previous tractates,⁵ the eternal entities are impassive, being unable to give up or receive anything. He begins his discourse on memory⁶ with the statement that he is not particularly interested in memory as the object of the act of remembering.⁷ He prefers

4 See, for example, *Phd.* 72e, *Men.* 85e, *Phlb.* 34b.

5 See, particularly, *On the Impassivity of the Bodiless* (III 6 (26)).

6 In the sense of capacity to remember, as in: “He has good memory.”

7 As in: “He has many beautiful memories of that event.”

to discuss the subject of this act, and he particularly desires to distinguish which ones among the real beings (*ónta*) have memory.⁸

There is, of course, a difference between the act of remembering, *mnemoneúein*, which results from the ability to have a memory (*mnéme*), and recollection in the philosophical sense of Platonic *anámnēsis*, which brings out the anagogical role of memory, leading up/back (*ana*). Plotinus himself distinguishes between two types of *mnéme* (or two ways of *mnemoneúein*): the first one belongs to the representational faculty of the soul and depends on her ability to preserve the mental images from the past (IV 3(27).29.22–31). The other one, which he refers to in the following passage, is a different kind of memory, one that has nothing to do with time, but is nevertheless even more important for the human soul, being a source of knowledge for it, according to Plato.

One must not say that it [*sc.* the Intellect] remembers its own thoughts: for they did not come, so that it has to hold them fast to prevent them from going away; or in this way it would be afraid that its own essential nature might go away from it. In the same way, then, the soul must not be said to remember, either, in the sense in which we are speaking of remembering the things which it possesses as part of its nature,⁹ but when it is here below it possesses them and does not act by them, particularly when it has just arrived here. But as for its activity, the ancients seem to apply the terms “memory” and “recollection” to the souls which bring into act what they possessed. So, this is another kind of memory; and, therefore, time is not involved in memory understood in this sense. (IV 3(27).25.24–35)¹⁰

Plotinus conceives Plato's *anámnēsis* primarily as an activity (*enéргеia*) of the soul, returning to its true nature through the process of recollection.¹¹ This article will expound Plotinus' conception of memory in view of a soul's various stages of its “journey” between the intelligible realm of Forms and the sensible world. Since this journey implies a separation from unity, leading into the multiplicity, we shall

8 After demonstrating that the only real being capable of memory is the soul, more particularly the soul of the living being, he continues to search for the faculty of the soul, which is responsible for the memory. Blumenthal (1972, 83–87) observes that it is only in discussing the question of memory that Plotinus first comes to wonder about the subject of the particular faculty of the soul. Consequently, he begins to distinguish between desire and that (part of the soul), which is aware of, and therefore remembers desire.

9 I. e. the Forms, which dwell in the soul as *lógoi* (see the commentary to Harder's translation in Beutler and Theiler, IIb, 499). See also below, n. 23 in the third section.

10 All the passages from the *Enneads* of Plotinus are taken from the English translation of A. H. Armstrong.

11 For the difference between *mnéme* and *anámnēsis* in Plotinus, see D'Ancona (2007, particularly, 72–76).

focus on the role of memory in the process of Plotinus' emanation, which includes the procession from the First Principle, as well as turning back and returning to it.

2 *Léthe*

The idea of overcoming the limits of time is closely related to the aspiration to immortality. We can observe this connection in the portrayal of Homeric heroes trying to attain immortality through heroic deeds, by which they would be remembered forever,¹² or in the verses of Archaic poets, assured of immortal glory which their poems would bring them.¹³ At the bottom of these convictions lies the idea of Death as the end of everything: not only of physical existence, but also of reason, understanding, knowledge...and memory. This is the meaning of the underground river Lethe (Oblivion), which must be crossed by shadows of the dead on their way to Hades.¹⁴ With death are associated oblivion and ignorance, and with life, memory and knowledge. However, scholars have pointed out the reversed role of Lethe in Plato's *Republic*, where it stands between the soul and its reincarnation, which means that the soul crosses the river Lethe on its way to *life*, not death.¹⁵ Consequently, it is not Hades, the place of oblivion, but the upper world itself. In reality, it is Lethe which is subjected to this reinterpretation, for it remains connected to death: what we are dealing with is a reinterpretation of the basic concepts of life and death, following the introduction of Orphic and Pythagorean beliefs in Greek thought. These beliefs had made a man reconsider his physical existence and regard it as the state of captivity, or even death for his immortal soul. As a fragment of Euripides puts it: "Who knows if to live is to be dead, and to be dead, to live?" (fr. 638, see Plato, *Grg.* 492e). The life on earth, subjugated to time, thereby assumes the role of Hades, realm of death, and each reincarnation marks a commencement of a new cycle, which the incarnated soul, oblivious, believes to be the only one.

In this sense, Hades is viewed also by Plotinus, who points out its alleged etymological link to "invisibility" (*aïdés*, invisible)¹⁶ and connects it with ignorance, brought on by the association of the soul with a body. In the tractate, *On Beauty* (I

12 The first among them is Achilles, who is destined a short, but renowned life. The same idea is conveyed in the words of Zeus' son Sarpedon, also destined to die in battle (*Il.* XII, 322–328).

13 Sappho, for example. Several fragments of her poems hint at this, as well as some indirect sources (Aristides in fr. 193; on how the performance of her poetry influenced her assurance of her poetic immortality, see Lardinois, 2008, 79–93).

14 Circe reveals to Odysseus that the Theban prophet, Teiresias, is the only one left with unshaken reason, "but the other ghosts fleet about aimlessly." (*Od.* X, 490–495, transl. by S. Butler).

15 Vernant, 1959, 12; Eliade, 1963, 334.

16 VI 4(22).16.36. For this etymology, see Plato, *Phd.* 81c and *Cra.* 403a.

6(1)8.12–16), the fascination with corporeal beauty is described as blindness, which causes a man, or rather his soul, to end up in Hades. Thus, to death, oblivion and ignorance, body is added, from which a soul can reawaken to life, memory and knowledge. Here, Plotinus is following the tradition that goes well beyond the limits of Greek cultural space: parallels had been drawn between Greek and Indian motifs, describing the human condition with images of bondage, sleep, death, oblivion, ignorance, etc. They are all conveying the same message, which appears not only in Ancient Greek literature, but also pervades Gnostic and Hermetic texts, which were more or less contemporary to Plotinus.¹⁷ It is no surprise, therefore, that he was able to combine the traditional motif of the soul, trapped in the oblivion of the body, with Plato's epistemological concept of recollection:

What is it, then, which has made the souls **forget** their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him? (V 1(10).1.1)

And the intellection of the authentic reality of each thing which the soul derives from itself, from the contemplations within it, and from **recollection**, gives it an existence prior to body. (IV 7(2).12)

In the first passage, the stress is on oblivion, in the second, on memory, which means that Plotinus' theory of memory comprehends both pivotal moments in the life of the soul: its departure from the First Principle (the One) into oblivion and ignorance, as well as its return to the knowledge, first of itself, and consequently of its Origin. Memory is therefore present at different stages of the soul's voyaging between the sensible world and the intelligible realm. Plotinus takes up the Homeric motif of Heracles, or rather his shadow in Hades, who remembers the great deeds of the hero in this world, while Heracles himself (*autós*) is on Mount Olympus, enjoying eternal life in the company of Gods.¹⁸ The discussion thereby converges on the double subject of remembering: the two souls, so to speak: the higher soul, "more divine," and the lower one, "coming from the All" (IV 3(27).27.1s.).¹⁹ Essentially, he is referring to the rational and the sensitive part of the soul (Warren, 1965, 254). A closer look at the text, however, reveals that the higher soul, which is capable of returning "there" (in the

17 See Jonas, 1958, 68–73; Eliade, 1963, 330–332.

18 "After him I saw mighty Hercules, but it was his phantom only, for he is feasting ever with the immortal gods, and has lovely Hebe to wife, who is daughter of Jove and Juno" (*Od. XI*, 601–603, transl. by S. Butler). Ancient commentators had already doubted the authenticity of these verses, for it had never been clear what the *autós* of Heracles (lit. "Heracles himself") represents. The doubt is still alive today, although there have been attempts to reintegrate the episode into the poem (Gazis, 2018, 205). Scholars have also highlighted the complexity of Homeric heroes' personality, by interpreting different mythological characters as various aspects of hero's Self. (see Škamperle, 2015, 78s.). The double Heracles was frequently object of allegorical interpretations, such as Plotinus' (for the latter, see Pépin, 1971, 174–178).

19 For the same motif in the context of Plotinus' theory of the double inclination of the soul, see I 1(53).12.32).

intelligible realm) is the bearer of man's individuality,²⁰ while the lower soul is actually its vegetative part (*phytikón*), emanating from the soul of the Universe, and giving life to the body.

3 *Mnéme*

Since the soul is an intermediate entity between the sensitive world and the realm of intelligible truths, it is always journeying there and back again, as illustrated by Plato's well-known metaphor of the winged chariot (*Phdr.* 248a). According to Plotinus,²¹ the soul is the last *lógos*²² in the intelligible world and the first one in the sensitive universe. Since it belongs to both worlds, it has some knowledge and memories of both. The double effect of these memories is visible in that they keep the soul in the middle: when the soul descends (into the sensitive world), the memories of the higher world keep it from wandering too far off. On the other hand, the memories of the sensitive world and its existence in the body cloud the higher memories of what she has seen above. The journey of the soul and its reflection (*eidolon*) can be summarized in the following manner:

- 1 soul residing above: the higher memory is interpreted as a reawakening of the soul, which reactivates the expressions (*lógoi*) of the intelligible world, which it bears inside itself; this is the recollection (*anámnēsis*), presented more in detail in the next section of this article (cf. also IV 4(28).1–2),
- 2 soul descending into the body is drawn down by its former memories of the sensitive world (IV 4(28).3.1–5),²³
- 3 incarnated soul is coupled with the lower soul: it guides the latter and controls its memories (IV 3(27).31),
- 4 after the death of the body, the soul tries to shake off memories of its corporeal existence, unintentionally keeping some of them (IV 3(27).31.17–20, 32),

20 Brisson, 2006, 16s. This bipartition of the soul is very important for Plotinus' theory of Self (see Sorabji, 2006, 35–37).

21 See IV 6(41).3.5.

22 *Lógos* ("word, reasoning, explanation, description, expression" etc.), in Plotinus, has the meaning of a formative principle, thereby showing the influence of the Stoic *lógos*, which is affecting the matter, giving her form. The formative act of *lógos* proceeds from the hypostasis of Soul, which tries to imitate the Intellect in its fixed contemplation, but with partial success. While the Intellect holds and thinks all the Forms at once, the Soul deals with one after another: through its discursive thinking, the world of Forms is expressed in *lógoi*, which are Forms at the soul-level (see Rist, 1967, 94–97; Brisson, 1999, 89). Plotinus frequently dwells on the expressional function of *lógos* (see V 1(10).6.45). *Lógos* is also a reflection of the higher hypostasis (the Intellect) at the lower level (that of the Soul). In this sense, the Soul, contemplating the Intellect, is the *logos* of the Intellect. Similarly, the individual soul imparts the intelligible truths to the sensitive world (see V 1(10).6.4s.).

23 This shows that Plotinus is talking of the soul which has had previous experiences of incarnation. Plotinus' theory of memory, in fact, does not mention the first incarnation: the descent of an individual soul is comprehended in the emanation process, which is eternal and has no beginning in time.

- 5 reflection of the soul embraces the memories of this world, which are accompanied by affections (*páthe*; see IV 3(27).32.2).

With regard to the level of incarnation, the fifth stage coincides with the third, for the soul's reflection does not enjoy an independent existence: like Heracles' ghost in Hades, it is only an illustration of a semi-conscious representational faculty of the soul, clinging to the memories of the sensitive world. In the same way, the fourth stage concurs with the second one, in view of soul's association with the body. Still, there is a difference in Plotinus' presentation of the soul, which is on the verge of entering the body, and the one who has just left it:

The first passage refers to the soul *leaving* the intelligible realm:

But if it [sc. the soul] comes out of the intelligible world, and cannot endure unity, but embraces its own individuality and wants to be different and so to speak puts its head outside, it thereupon acquires memory. Its memory of what is in the intelligible world still holds it back from falling, but its memory of the things here below carries it down here; its memory of what is in heaven keeps it there, and in general it is and becomes what it remembers. (IV 4(28).3.1–6)

In the second passage, the soul is *returning*:

The more it presses on towards the heights the more it will forget, unless perhaps all its life, even here below, has been such that its memories are only of higher things; since here below too it is best to be detached from human concerns, and so necessarily from human memories; so that if anyone said that the good soul was forgetful, it would be correct to say so in this sort of sense. For the higher soul also flies from multiplicity and gathers multiplicity into one and abandons the indefinite; because in this way it will not be [clogged] with multiplicity but light and alone by itself. (IV 3(27).32.14–22)

Leaving the intelligible world is also moving away from unity, and this is the principal element of the Neoplatonic procession from the One.²⁴ The soul “cannot endure unity,” it “puts its head outside” and falls into the individuality. Plotinus tells us that the soul enjoys itself: “They were clearly delighted with their own independence” (V 1(10).1.1–5; cf. III 9(13).3). Memory is the result of their entrance into multiplicity,

24 Plotinus follows the Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean doctrine of the One and the Multiplicity (of numbers), the latter having their principle in the Duality (the Dyad). In the background lies Plato's so called “unwritten doctrine,” according to which the One, *qua* One, can only be the origin of something which is not one anymore. Therefore, anything coming next from the One is its opposite (with regard to its unity), and in this sense the Duality is also a principle, namely of multiplicity. The appearance of something other than the One is, of course, a threat to its uniqueness and, consequently, its unity. This is why Plotinus insists on its transcendental nature: the One is above Being and even above Intellect. See the tractate *How That Which is After the First Comes from the First* (V 4(7)).

and it is double, linking the soul to the intelligible world where it came from, and to the sensitive universe to which it is returning. These are the memories the soul has left behind upon the death of the body, because it preferred to be guided by higher memories of the intelligible realities and its own origins. The “flight from multiplicity” back to unity is tantamount to the rejection of the memory of the corporeal existence. The memory of such existence is actually oblivion.

4 *Anámnesis eis tò hén*

The passage quoted above mentions the lightness of the soul, after it had fled from the multiplicity, as if it had gotten rid of a burden. This image supports Plotinus' general conviction that the higher memory is not preservation of something acquired. In some measure, he extended this conviction to the temporal memory, i.e. memory of the sensitive world. The doxographers' interpretation of Aristoteles' theory of memory as state (*héxis*) had led to identification of Aristotelian *héxis* with *katoché* (preservation) of sensible and mental images (Taormina, 2011, 143s.) Aristotle himself had connected *héxis* with affection (*páthos*); and since some of his interpreters understood sense perception as physical “imprinting” into the soul, and memory as preservation of these “impressions,”²⁵ Plotinus decidedly rejected a theory of memory, according to which the representations are stamped into the soul as a seal into wax, because it went against the Platonic conviction of soul's immortality.²⁶

The concept of preservation implies a previous acquisition and possession, and, consequently, a distinction between the possession and the possessor. The Intellect has nothing, because it simply *is*. Its having memory would suggest that it has to keep its essence (*ousía*) within itself, which Plotinus discards as absurd. The intellect, therefore, does not remember: it just thinks. And the soul? In the passage IV 3 (27).25.24ss. (see above, the first section) Plotinus does not refer to the hypostasis of Soul, but to the individual soul, which joins the body and thus forms a link between the intelligible and the sensitive world. This soul is capable of a particular kind of memory, very similar to Plato's *anámnesis*, which leads it to thinking and understanding.²⁷

25 More accurately representations impressed into the soul (for this Stoic doctrine, see SVF I, fr. 64).

26 On the other hand, Plotinus was not above using this terminology in a figurative sense (see King, 2009, 110). He even applies it to his theory of higher memory (*anámnesis*), where he is speaking of “some sort of impressions” (*hoïon hoi týpoi*) of the Forms (see D'Ancona, 2007, 74). See also Taormina (2011, 150–158) who gives a thorough analysis of the Neoplatonic conception of memory as preservation (*katoché*), pointing out the difference between Plotinus' understanding of preservation of mental images as a passive state, similar to the unconscious memory, and materialistic conception of memory as preservation of physical impressions.

27 While there is no place for memory in the intelligible world, a soul's thinking is a kind of memory: “For remembering is either thinking or imaging.” (IV 4(28).3.6s.)

[The soul] is said to think the intelligibles when it arrives at memory of them, if it comes to be near them. (IV 6(41).3.10–12)

Plotinus understands it as “bringing into act” (*energeîn*) what the soul “possesses” (see above IV 3(27).25.33). With regard to this possession, we come upon one of Plotinus' paradoxes, which he explains in the following manner:

[The reasoning part of the soul] has what it sees and in another way does not have it; it has it by knowing it, but does not have it in that something is not put away in it from the seeing, like a shape in a wax. And we must remember that memories too, in our account of them, do not exist because things are put away in our minds, but the soul awakes the power [of memory] in such a way as to have what it does not have. (III 6(26).2.42)

This second half of this passage is referred to by Nikulin who understands it in the sense that the soul possesses, “what it does not currently have” (2015, 82). However, in the first part, Plotinus clearly understands the second kind of “having” as “keeping.”²⁸ Furthermore, King quotes another passage containing a line where the paradox is somewhat softened, at least in Greek.²⁹

It is not astonishing [...] that the soul has a power of this kind, if it receives nothing itself and contrives an apprehension of what it does not have. (IV 6(41).3.3–5)

King's explanation of this second passage throws additional light on the first one. In both cases, we have the verb *échein* (“to have,” “to possess”), but in the second one, the form of aorist is used, which hints at the possession of something obtained. What comes awake in the soul, on the contrary, has not been previously acquired, which is why its possession is not followed by preservation, for what the soul has, it has it inside. Essentially, we are dealing with the metaphysical terminology: the soul *is* what it *has*. The soul, therefore, either has something different from itself (coming from outside), or is itself, what it has. The following passage is making this very point:

For it knows them [*sc.* the soul knows the intelligibles] by being them in a way; for it knows, not because they settle in it, but because it has them in some way and sees them and is them in a rather dim way and becomes them more clearly out of the dimness by a kind of awakening, and passes from potentiality to actuality. (IV 6(41).3.12–16)

In the ontological reality of knowing, being, seeing and having (“in some way,” *pos échein*), memory represents a kind of awakening and marks the arrival of the soul into actuality. Therefore, the highest form of memory is bringing into act what the soul

28 If the first one is related to knowledge, the second one implies a change (see Fleet, 1995, 98).

29 King, 2009, 113.

has. It is different with the Intellect, which *is* eternally, what it *has*: inseparable from the objects of its thinking, the Intellect never moves from them. As is evident from the passage IV 3(27).25 (see above), the Intellect does not remember its thoughts, which are objects of its thinking: they are intelligible Forms and they are its essence (*ousía*). But in the case of soul, the object of its (hypothetical) preservation is not its essence, but “what is part of its nature,” *sýmphyta*. The preposition *syn* implies composition or addition, suggesting a lower level of unity from the *ousía* of the Intellect. The second part of the word *sýmphyta*, however, derives from the word *phýein* (hence, *phýsis*), which clearly indicates something inherent to the soul. What is inherent to it are intelligibles, expressed as *lógoi* at the level of the soul. What a soul remembers is, therefore, something which *is with* it and at the same time *is* it. This is why, in the case of the soul, too, we cannot talk of memory as preservation of an acquired object. Therein lies the main difference between the passive state of memory of sensible objects (*mnéme*) and the activity of the soul (*anámnēsis*), returning to the place of pure thinking, and not remembering:

But if, as we believe, every act of intelligence is timeless, since the realities there are in eternity and not in time, it is impossible that there should be a memory there, not only of the things here below, but of anything at all. But each and every thing is present there; so there is no discursive thought or transition from one to the other. (IV 4(28).1.12–16)

5 Unifying power of conscious and unconscious memory

The fact that, after the departure from the unity, memories of the sensible world reawaken in the soul is proof of its amphibious life between this world and the intelligible one. Physical life does not necessarily condemn the soul to one kind of memory only. Plotinus claims that the soul, if it so wishes, can shake off whatever makes it sink too low, even while still residing in the body. Consequently, the higher memory and pure thinking are not automatically reserved for the soul free of the body, which means that a man does not have to die in order to “wake up.”³⁰ His will and consciousness play an important role there, because they help him to give up certain memories, particularly those hidden within as some sort of passive disposition (*diakēisthai*).³¹ Comparing Plato’s and Plotinus’ theory of reincarnation, Brisson identifies the ethical component of this disposition, related to memory through the representational faculty of the

30 Such is the purpose of philosophical *áskēsis*; see the episode of Plotinus’ “awakening out of the body to himself” (IV 8(6).1.1).

31 On Plotinus’ differentiation between the active faculty of remembering and the passive memory as disposition, see Taormina, 2011, 152–154.

soul.³² But even this ethical trait does not necessarily mean that Plotinus is talking of an incarnated soul. Quite the opposite: it turns out that the soul's ethical disposition plays a major role in its drama of descent. (Blumenthal, 1972, 95). The life of a soul caught between two incarnations is displayed by Plato in the mythical testimony of Er the Pamphilian, according to which a soul chooses its next life in conformity with the previous one, which means that the memory of the previous life affects its choice.³³ Although this prenatal choice is irrevocable, the moral disposition greatly affects the quality of the chosen life. This is what Plotinus has in mind, when he focuses on the situation of the soul caught between two lives:

But when it [*sc.* the soul] goes out of the body it becomes what there was most of in it. (III 4(15).2.11)

The next incarnation, he continues, is in harmony with the “reborn” soul: those who have managed to preserve an inner man are reborn as men, the others as animals, etc. Of course, the soul can be true to the man within only if it remembers its human life. This is how we understand that the soul “is and becomes what it remembers.” Here, memory is presented in the positive context of a moral disposition, which helps a man to remain man and be reborn as one. Yet, since it is unconscious, it can be dangerous to the soul:

But one must understand memory not only in the sense of a kind of perception that one is remembering, but as existing when the soul is disposed (*diakéetai*) according to what it has previously experienced or contemplated. For it could happen that, even when one is not conscious that one has something, one holds it to oneself more strongly than if one knew. For perhaps if one knew one would have it as something else, being different oneself, but if one does not know that one has it, one is liable to be what one has; and this is certainly the experience (*páthema*) which makes the soul sink lower. (IV 4(28)4.8–14)

Here Plotinus warns against the double-edged dynamism of memory, which leads the soul, at the level of sense perception as well, to become one (*eis tò hén*) with the object of its remembering. In the intelligible realm this *hénosis* results in the mystic union with the intelligibles, inherent to the soul. In the sensitive world, however, this means that the soul adjusts itself (*diákeitai*) to something other than itself, and thereby risks becoming that other. This is the liability of the unconscious memory,³⁴ which can lead a soul into a very different kind of unity, one that is not to be desired. A man's

32 See Brisson, 2006, 23s.

33 See *R.* 619b–620d. There is Odysseus, for example who, after twenty years of exile and travels, prefers an anonymous and boring life of a private citizen.

34 For the thorough analysis of Plotinus' conscious and unconscious memory, see Warren, 1965, 255–260.

conscience is an instrument of distinction between what we are and what we have from outside us; it protects us from memories which would pull us (i.e. our higher soul) too far outside of ourselves.³⁵ This applies to the incarnated soul as well to the descending one.

In this sense, conscious memory is a power (*ischýs*)³⁶ which needs training and must be given focus. In the tractate, *On sense perception and memory*, Plotinus mentions the mnemonic exercises and (contrary to Aristoteles) points out that the faculty of memory is stronger in children than in adults, as the former are usually focused on one object at a time, while the memory of the adults is vacillating among many objects. The mnemonic exercises, therefore, contribute to our mental concentration, while the conscious memory keeps us virtuous, at least up to the final stage of mystical union, when, discarding every single piece of memory, it ends by discarding itself.

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35 See also IV 3(27).27.16–18.

36 IV 6(41).3.55 (see D'Ancona, 2011, 72). The meaning of physical force is also expressed by the verb *rhónymy* in l. 19.

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Sonja Weiss

Mnéme and hénosis.
Dynamism of Memory in the Thought of Plotinus

Keywords: Plotinus, memory, recollection, time, immortality, body, soul

This paper reconsiders the role of memory in Plotinus' philosophy, in view of the mystical unity (*hénosis*) of the soul with intelligible truths, and a less desirable unification with its objects of memory during its earthly existence. As a rule, the mystical experience precludes memory, since the latter is related to time and binds a man to his individuality. Nevertheless, the capacity to remember remains an important part of the philosophical *áskesis* leading to this experience, since the memory is the only faculty of the soul that is able to travel through time, even though it is part of the process of discursive thinking and consequently is in a way imprisoned in time. Memory therefore turns out to be a double-edged power, which leaves us to question when we can regard it as an instrument of preserving what is inherent to us, and when, on the other hand, it is simply chaining us to the lower reality of the sensible world. The difference between the anagogical power of the Platonic recollection (*anámnēsis*) and the memory as the state keeping us from unity with the intelligible world is important for identifying the moment when a man must let go of what he has been clinging to. This moment, however, is not set in time, but depends on the moral disposition of a man's soul leading a timeless existence outside, as well as inside, the body.

Sonja Weiss

Mnéme in hénosis. **Dinamika spomina v Plotinovi filozofiji**

Ključne besede: Plotin, spomin, spominjanje, čas, nesmrtnost, telo, duša

Prispevek obravnava vlogo spomina v Plotinovi filozofiji, natančneje, v okviru pojma *hénosis*, ki na ravni mistične izkušnje pomeni zedinjenje duše z umskimi resničnostmi, v kontekstu njenega zemeljskega bivanja v telesu pa manj zaželeno poistovetenje s spomini na njeno telesno življenje. Mistična izkušnja praviloma izključuje spomin, saj je ta vezan na čas in človeško dušo vklepa v njeno posamičnost. Sposobnost spominjanja kljub temu ostaja pomemben del filozofske *áskesis*, ki človeka vodi k mistični izkušnji, saj je edina duševna zmožnost (*dýnamis*), ki lahko tako rekoč potuje skozi čas, čeprav je – kot del diskurzivnega miselnega procesa – tudi sama ujeta vanj. Spomin se tako izkaže za dvorezen meč, zaradi česar se moramo vprašati, kdaj naj ga pojmuje kot sredstvo, s katerim ohranimo to, kar nam je po naravi lastno, kdaj pa je zgolj vez, ki nas priklepa na nižjo resničnost čutno zaznavnega sveta. Razlikovanje med anagoško močjo platonske *anámnēsis* in spominom kot vsebino oz. stanjem, ki nas ločuje od enosti z umskim kozmosom, je pomembno za opredelitev trenutka, ko mora človek izpustiti, česar se je še pravkar oklepal. Ta trenutek pa ni postavljen v čas, ampak je stvar človekove moralne države.