

THE MNEMONIC POWER¹

1. THE MIRACLE OF MEMORY

The mnemonic power defines the very essence of the I insofar as it has become what it is, i.e. insofar as its possibility has been actualised. And what shows that the I is actualised as spirit and not as [a] thing is that recollection subsists nowhere but in the power I have of evoking it and giving it a meaning that is always new. The link between the I and memory is so strait that if memory were suddenly abolished, I would also be incapable of representing to myself the future, which is only an anticipated past; I would have existence only in the instant and I would be reduced to the state of [a mere] body. Reflection on self, meditation on self, is the employment of the mnemonic power. And if I identify myself with my powers, I experience them only in the use I make of them, or in the use I might make compared with the one I have made. Far from [the idea] that my being can be distinct from my life and contrasted with it, the mnemonic power teaches me that on the contrary my being is nothing more than my very life such as I have made it, which is progressively confounded with [my being].

¹ Chapter Fourteen, Book Three “New Classification of the Soul’s Powers”, Section Two of “The Constitution of the I”.

But the mnemonic power appears as a kind of miracle of all instants, though all the problems of existence and destiny must be considered in its light. For it is also a miracle that there is a world and that on opening my eyes this world is revealed as a spectacle I have not created, [one] that continually offers itself to me and continually amazes me: indeed perhaps philosophic thought consists chiefly in recovering the sense of this miracle which habit and daily activity constantly dull. But it is a miracle produced in front of me and for me, of which I am witness without rightly being its target or agent. It ends up becoming for me a familiar existence, the only one that can support and explain all others, as materialism shows. That this existence now begins to crumble, that becoming abolishes the least thing that was given to me a little while ago, and [then after having been] enters again into nothingness – is this a new miracle which is produced or is it simply that the first is suddenly effaced? Yet this return of an existence to nothingness demands closer examination. For what do I mean when I maintain that what was just now here is no longer anything? Doubtless I mean that this existence ceases to be imposed on me, that it is withdrawn from me, as part of an experience that I was obliged to undergo. But I mean also that it *still* resides in me, or that it resides in me *from now on*, and no longer resides in me except in the form of an image that I have the power of producing and that [simultaneously] reveals to me the absence of the thing and my own presence to myself. Moreover it is that absence which creates this presence; and I take consciousness of my own subjective existence only in my connection with an objective existence that in disappearing leaves me the recollection of it, which now constitutes my own reality. Doubtless it is not this recollection as such – considered in its content so to speak – which is me. The I is not a sum of recollections. This way of speaking conceals a singularly false idea of recollection which is not like a thing susceptible of being added to others in order to form a sum: for [the I] cannot be distinguished from the mnemonic power in which it is linked with all the other [powers] by way of an involvement infinitely more strict and subtle. Still it is true that the I discovers itself in this power it has, in evoking an absent thing, of evoking all absent things. It then discovers a world that is no longer its own; rather, the [vanished] world has suddenly become its own. Not that [the world] has undergone a kind of spiritual mutation [sufficient] to ground my existence; for the I is the author of [this mutation] and, in accomplishing it, it discovers itself in its opposition to the world and in its invincible rapport with it. For its existence springs from the very negation of the world's existence. And yet nothing in [that existence] does not involve a reference to the world, so that [the I] seems to nourish itself on everything that appears in the world – but by way of its disappearance, as we see in the body's nourishment which feeds us only in being effaced.

But if memory reveals to us [both] our independence from and our solidarity with the world we should not be surprised that the I then discovers itself as engaged in this world, which was for it at first only a spectacle from which it succeeded in distinguishing itself with difficulty. It is distinguished

from it now and perhaps begins to suspect that the world is for it only a representation: which means, as Bergson has so perceptively noted, that recollection of the world is already present in the worldly spectacle and in some sense ready to be detached from it. Moreover this separation of subjectivity and objectivity realised by recollection will permit us not only to distinguish the subject of representation from the represented object but to define the I as an activity that opens before it a purely represented future whose subjective existence precedes objective existence and determines it. For it is inevitable that by interiorising itself in recollection the world returns toward that internal activity of which it is only the phenomenal and manifest form, and that this interior activity can in its turn always assume a new external form (as long as our life is not finished) and that it is consequently always put back to test as a possibility that constantly sustains us. The mnemonic function shows how the world which is a spectacle common to all changes little by little into a secret peculiar to each [person], yet in such a way that each person must produce it outside, i.e. must act, so that [the secret], instead of isolating him from the world and being extinguished by degrees, is a living secret that goes on enriching by communicating itself.

However we will not forget that the peculiarity of memory is above all to bring to light the true meaning of time, which also imparts meaning to each thing but is not simply directed, as we almost always believe, from the past toward the future. For when we seek the goal of our actions in the future, or the goal of existence itself, [we are always deceived]. It is doubtless only a mediate or apparent end: and it is an illusion to think that in going ever further into the future we will one day suspend the course of becoming and find that state we seek and will want to make an eternal resting place. The future of the future is not a new future, it is the past, where all futurity finds its destination and ends by being consumed. And this past is not a lost present, and in any case the present it has made us lose is only that instantaneous present which can be defined in no other way than by its own ruin. The past is an established present of which we can say that we are assured it will no longer be lost to us. We can no longer subtract it from our life: it is at once immutable and available; and we could say that it is the substance of the universe converted into our own substance² if it were not preferable to consider it as phenomenality itself, insofar as it has been dissolved into its essence. Not that this transformation is produced by itself and without our cooperation. On the contrary we can make the most diverse uses of the past, and always corrupt it by [our] indulgence in the instant from which it is detached or in the new instant that solicits us. It then becomes an illusion which precisely points to the destitution of an existence [reduced] to the phenomenon or the instant.³ But it is all the more pure [to the degree] it is changed from state into act in a more [nearly] perfect fashion, so we understand without difficulty that there are degrees of memory; in its most

² This recalls the perspective of Rainer Maria Rilke in his later poetry.

³ The author has apparently abandoned, or temporarily set aside, his findings in *Of Time and Eternity* with respect to the instant, namely that it has a pivotal role and is the site where the act is engaged.

common form [memory] is hardly detached from the lost representation it always tries to recreate, and in its highest form it becomes a spiritual⁴ operation capable of henceforth sufficing itself. Thus memory seems to fill [three functions] with respect to the given: [that] of interiorising it, [since] it is at first presented to us as coming from outside, [that] of spiritualising it, [since] it always assumes a material form; [and that] of immortalising it, [since] it belongs to [the realm of] becoming and continually perishes.

2. IN MEMORY, EXISTENCE CREATES ESSENCE

But memory is almost always considered an auxiliary power whose role is to try, by way of thought, to save the reality that departs us and to provide it with a kind of substitute or sign that permits us to restore its presence in a certain manner. This role of memory cannot be denied; it associates memory with the becoming of phenomena: [memory] becomes therefore an instrument that up to a certain point allows us to govern [phenomena] instead of contenting ourselves with submitting to them. But [this] conceals [memory's] metaphysical character: for we cannot be mistaken that everything we think is effaced is changed for us into memory, and in such a [routine] fashion that we cannot say it is effaced only in the measure that we directly or indirectly know it to be changed into recollection. We have many times insisted on this idea that nothingness is a secondary idea which supposes the [very] being it effaces [for] we know that it effaces it only by way of memory. So *nothingness itself is no more than a [remembered] being*⁵. Yet it is there an inward and spiritual being of which phenomenal being was nothing more than that manifested form which allowed us to discover it through its relation with the outside, before being incorporated in our essence, i.e. made our own. Thus memory is our unique access to that world which we have always situated beyond phenomena but of which we know nothing before traversing them, [a world] revealed to us not as world of stable things, of which phenomena gave us only a fleeting image, but a spiritual world where everything exists purely through an inward operation we must always accomplish anew.

In memory therefore we seem to apprehend existence in its highest and purest form: it banishes from things only what we were subjected to, which had connection only with our body and concealed their essence from us like a kind of veil, so that this essence is suddenly shown to us at the moment when—coming to meet our own essence in order to shape it—[memory] abolishes the interval between the outside and the inside and, while taking nothing from us in withdrawing the thing, on the contrary presents it to us in a kind of meaningful operation where we [seem] to recognise what had

⁴ Or mental.

⁵ More literally, “a being of memory”. Though the argument is awkwardly stated its import seems clear. The idea of nothingness derives from thwarted expectations and the recollection of things that were but are no longer. Both cases depend on positive recollections.

escaped us at the moment we perceived it; [the thing's] opacity seems to disperse leaving subsist only a pure inward light. Thus memory, far from subtracting reality from the phenomenon, reveals it, and far from impoverishing the given, resolves it in an act of spirit that adds to and transfigures it.

3. INVOLVMENT OF ALL THE POWERS ALREADY DESCRIBED⁶ [IN] THE MNEMONIC POWER.

If the I is constituted, or if its existence becomes essence, in the mnemonic power it is clear that this power supposes and in some way includes all those we have previously described, since the activity of consciousness is itself indivisible. Thus its originality is to be a cognizance, but a cognizance that puts our unique life into play, i.e. that in some fashion concerns our will, either with regard to the represented object, in so far as it is correlative of an accomplished or suppressed act, or with regard to the operation that disposes or revives it. Memory is cognizance considered no longer in its objectivity but in its relation to our own subjectivity, i.e. not simply to our power of conceiving of the world as a spectacle but to the power of constituting that very being which is our own. It is the conversion of objectivity into subjectivity, the return of existence to essence, the reduction of the represented object to the act that represents it.

Also the moment seems to recall, in a kind of total picture, the relation between the powers through which the I is constituted and the powers through which the I obtains [a] representation of the not-I. In a [sweeping] fashion one can say that participation supposes a not-I which exceeds it, and exceeds it infinitely, but which it precisely aims to render its own. It succeeds in that only owing to [a] cognizance that is realised in two successive stages: in the first it appears in the form of the representation of a given object, i.e. which is imposed on me independently of my will, and in the second [it appears] in the form of a concept through which I become master of this object by way of both thought and action but without the object as yet losing that character of exteriority which allows me to have a grip on it, i.e. without its ever becoming confused with me. –By contrast the peculiarity of the constitutive powers of the I is to impose the imprint of the I on the not-I, to transform that simultaneously theoretical and practical action, whose simple possibility is expressed by the concept, into a real action for which the I assumes responsibility and provides itself with [a] reason, or again, for which it affirms [a] value: [the initiative] is for it a test (whose repercussion it always undergoes) which, in transforming the world, goes on shaping [the I's] own being. Memory achieves this formation of self by stripping the self of all material constraints and giving it so to speak [its own make-up].

⁶ This refers to powers treated in previous chapters, i.e. the representational, noetic and volitional powers.

Nonetheless the various degrees of this creation of self by self through participation need to be spelled out. Everyone will recognise that the simple representation of the object is already a subjective seizure and that this seizure admits, through the concept, a kind of virtual interiorisation which extends our power not only to the real object but to all possible objects. However we already see that, if this representation and that concept are nothing apart from the activity which produces them, then it produces them with certain ends in view, in which it finds itself engaged. That is to say the representation and the concept, considered in their proper originality, are already under the sway of the will. But they express only the first two steps of its exercise. For if will is often defined as a "practical" concept, i.e. which should connect back with the sensible from which it is drawn, it is not in that case a sterile return to the immediate given from which the concept had precisely delivered us. It is only because the concept has delivered us from it that we can make of the concept [whatever] use we will: it permits our freedom to act on appearances and express itself in them by modifying them. *It gives us the means of acting, as value gives us the reason for acting.* Thus we see how will not only implies and produces both the representation and the concept but moreover reverses their theoretical order in an initiative, rightly creative, which takes the concept as its point of departure so as to embody it in an represented object; and as we have already shown, it is indispensable that the object be raised from the object to the concept, i.e. from the real to the possible, before the possible can be put to work, i.e. before acting on the real in order to adapt it to the will's designs.

With respect to memory it is now necessary to say that it simultaneously supposes cognizance and will. It is a variety of knowing but [one] that amounts neither to a mere spectacle nor to a conceptual system, for it retains from cognizance only what it has in common with will, which always finds in [memory] a representation it revives or uses: and we could in a sense say that, as will is constantly changed into memory, memory constantly contributes to the will, which never does more than put [memory] to work and promote it. However memory is ever the final end of willing, as if will were a still-ambiguous activity which needs to be embodied in order to become determinate but which [enjoyed] in memory only a mental⁷ existence and meaning.

4. THE PRIVILEGED RELATION BETWEEN MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION: PERCEPTION IS TO THE OBJECT WHAT MEMORY IS TO PERCEPTION.

But memory can [have] a more or less pure form. It maintains a singularly close relation with representation, which is the primitive mode of cognizance and seems also the goal of the voluntary act, as if in representation the real was presented to us in a concrete form and the concept was only a

⁷ Or spiritual.

kind of abstract means destined, in taking us back toward possibility, to allow us to introduce the mark of our action on the real. Also one can say that there is no recollection apart from representation and that recollection itself is a representation. But the affinity between representation and recollection can be displayed in different ways. Not only do I happen to employ the same word, sometimes “representation” and sometimes “image”, to designate both the content of perception⁸ and the content of recollection, [and] not only does recollection, as we have noted, appear already included in the representation from which it is detached when the object withdraws, but the representation itself already appears a kind of *replica* of the object, and we cannot conceive of it as anything other than a subjective presence in which the object seems to be *reproduced*: it is therefore like a recollection beginning to take shape but still without breaking away from that passivity on which it depends with respect what lies beyond it—before our activity is separated from it and has reduced it so to speak to its own operation.

There is even in representation a relation between the object and the perception of the object which is symmetrical with the relation that exists in memory between perception and the recollection one retains of it. This symmetry is met again in many aspects, at once various and inseparable:

1. As representation involves a distinction between perception and the object perceived, so too memory involves a distinction between the perception we had of the object and the memory we have of having perceived it.

2. However we have to do, in both cases, with a single state: and just as we can effect no real separation between the object of perception and the perception itself, since this object is known only by way of perception, likewise we can effect no separation between the recollection and the perception it reproduces, since this perception has existence for us only in memory.

3. In perception there is a distance between the perceiving subject and the perceived object, and this distance is a spatial distance which, in representation itself, determines its external character with respect to our body. Likewise there is a distance between the subject who recalls and the perception he recalls: and this distance is a temporal distance which assures the internal character of recollection, since the same subject perceives and [then] recalls.

4. One can rather easily conceive of the passage from perception to recollection, i.e. from spatial distance to temporal distance. For on the one hand, spatial distance is at the same time always temporal, since it must be crossed by a movement and, in the most favourable case, by the movement of light which always requires a certain [amount of] time to occur. And on the other hand, as the object draws away and we see it dwindle then disappear, space is converted into time, without our always being able to place an absolutely sure line of demarcation between the perception that dwindles and

⁸ Apart from those thinkers (e.g. Malebranche and Bergson) who entertain some notion of direct perception, philosophers routinely treat perceptions as representations.

the recollection that replaces it. Which demonstrates not only the deconstruction into consecutive images but also, there at the interior of perception itself, the presence of recollection which often holds [the image] almost in place.

5. Perception is only ever an incomplete view of the object, and inseparable from the perspective from which we behold it. Thus it seems that a process of selection eliminates certain features from the object: and this elimination, according to Bergson, would suffice to explain its subjectivity. But one can say as much of recollection in relation to perception. It is incapable of reproducing all the features that pertain to perception; it is employed to that [end] nonetheless, and because it never succeeds, or in other words because it is incapable of bringing [the features] back together, we might say that it is subjective *to the second degree*, or that it is a secondary image that we never succeed in [equating] with the primary image.

6. However we cannot reduce perception to a simple impoverishment of the object. It adds to it as well: for the subject imprints on it certain traits deriving from his nature, to such a point that a certain form of idealism believed it could make perception completely a creation of the subject, or what amounts to the same thing, a systematic organisation on the part of the subject of a primitively indeterminate matter. Likewise recollection adds to perception, not only in that it disposes time so as to analyse a fugitive perception which globally contained elements memory regained over time, but in that it is my entire being which remembers, with all the powers of my consciousness and all the experience I have acquired since the perception disappeared.⁹ Also recollection is always new and never finishes revealing to me the meaning of the thing formerly perceived.

7. Finally it seems that a perfect perception would be obtained only through a coincidence with the object, which is chimerical since it would abolish the perception itself¹⁰ [as well as] the perfect recollection coinciding with the perception which was realised on a single occasion before recollection was detached from it, yet from which we indefinitely distance ourselves so to speak.¹¹ However it is perhaps possible—instead of giving way to that common tendency¹² which consists in first positing an unknown object in-itself, from which perception would be an initial distortion that would then be [again] distorted in recollection in a more and more sensible fashion—to reverse the order of these different [phases]; for what we call “the object” is at first nothing more than a touch of the not-I which stirs our passivity and begins to reveal to us a determinate reality solely through the operation it arouses in consciousness; [though] still enchained in perception, it

⁹ An important point. Recollections do not occur in isolation. Other recollections, and indeed an entire lifetime of recollections, are required for them to be intelligible, *even though the related recollections may not be explicit*.

¹⁰ Apparently a reference to Bergson’s doctrine of sympathy, coincidence or direct perception. However the argument shows little attempt to sympathise or coincide with the doctrine’s drift.

¹¹ The sense of this is unclear to me. To my knowledge Bergson does not speak of “perfect recollection” in relation to coincidence with the object. But even if such a recollection were supposed it would—virtually by definition—not fade in time, though my relation to it might.

¹² Dating back to Kant, the tacit reference of what follows.

little by little releases a recollection more and more [nearly] pure: the object then ceases to be a phenomenon and is changed into an idea. And we understand that there are two opposed conceptions of memory according to whether in our eyes there is only the reality of the phenomenon, [of which] recollection is a distant and pale image, or whether there is reality only in the spirit's¹³ operation which memory teaches us little by little to accomplish, i.e. to liberate, and for which the phenomenon is only an occasion.

We are at the point where we can say that perception gives the object that material character which expresses the limitation of the act of participation. But memory dematerialises it or reduces it to its pure form, [which is not] to say that there is, as in the platonic myth¹⁴, [an idea that pre-exists] perception so that our spiritual activity is then capable of recovering the idea upon contact with perception, for the idea is non-temporal only because it has become; and before the recollection appeared there was nothing more in us than perception, which was born of the very act of participation in that it made bloom, [there] within the whole of being, a pure possibility destined to receive a purely representative actualisation while awaiting that wholly internal actuality we gave it, of which perception was so to speak but a degree. Thus when we spoke of the coincidence of perception with its object, it was a coincidence that could only be found in the completely opposite direction from the one in which we sought it, that is to say in the absorption, not of perception into the thing-in-itself where it would lose its subjectivity, but of perception into the idea, where it would lose its objectivity; and in this reduction recollection provides the mediation so to speak.

5. FROM REPRESENTATIVE MEMORY TO NOETIC MEMORY.¹⁵

The preceding analysis prepares us to solve the classic problem at the heart of all researches on memory, that of knowing what one remembers, whether one remembers the representation alone or only oneself. But we will show, on the one hand, that one cannot choose between these two resolutions because they correspond not rightly to two different theories of memory but to two different kinds of memory which are so to speak implicated in one another, for which we can retain the names familiar to everybody of "representative memory" and "pure memory", one or the other of which is considered the "true" memory in debates that will never reach an end; and [we will show] on the other hand, that in all justice the formula that one remembers only oneself should be transposed so to speak so that *it is necessary*

¹³ Or mind's.

¹⁴ The Myth of the Cave in Book Seven of Plato's *Republic*, according to which people held in a cave behold only reflections on a wall, mere likenesses of the real world of ideal forms that lies outside.

¹⁵ I regard this as the key section of this chapter.

*to say, not that there is an already constituted I that one recalls, but that there is an I that is constituted in the very act by which it remembers itself.*¹⁶

It is obvious that memory can primarily be regarded not only as a transfer¹⁷ of representation but as a representation that is prolonged in the absence of the represented object, or at least when this object actively ceases to impact our body. But when memory is considered as exclusively representative, i.e. as always evoking images, it is difficult to distinguish it from perception other than through a difference in degree.¹⁸ [However] one could well say, as did Bergson, that there is an absolute difference between presence and absence, and not just a simple difference in degree: the question is, how can one recognise the presence of absence when one has to do with representation alone; for that always refers to a present object, if one is concerned with its content, and it is always a negation of the object's existence, if one is concerned with the very character that defines [representation], which is to represent [the object]. We go no further if we say that representation relating to the present is therefore a perception, and [representation] relating to the past is therefore a memory. For the question is still, what in representation allows me to attach it entirely to the present, or obliges me to relegate its object to the past?¹⁹ Now, though all representation necessarily implies a kind of act of retrospection, without which there would be no difference between the subject of representation and the represented object, representation is nonetheless only realised in the presence of a currently-given object. And as soon as [the object] flees us, i.e. as soon as the content of representation ceases to be given and we have to look within ourselves in order to present it to ourselves through an act of imagination, this content becomes indeterminate and uncertain. It is abolished in the very act that tries to retrieve it and that we judge impotent in that it does not succeed, whereas its proper [role] would be precisely to leave [the object] behind²⁰, to reduce it to a pure operation which would be transformed [back] into a given solely by way of its limitation.²¹—Whence the idea of two memories, always associated in some fashion [so that] neither of them is ever exercised in isolation and [so that they] represent so to speak two extremes within which is contained every real mnemonic operation: one is that memory which wants to be a faithful image of the object and is so disposed that it is realised only in the perceived presence, before it is detached from [the object],

¹⁶ The assertion seems to require an “already constituted I” to ground the act of self-recollection but perhaps the main thrust of the statement is that my ever-growing essence comes to light only when I become inwardly active, i.e. renew my engagement in being.

¹⁷ In the sense of an image that is lifted from one site and imprinted on another, e.g. by way of a decal.

¹⁸ This is in fact how David Hume distinguishes mental images from perceptions.

¹⁹ The question under consideration throughout is: How can mental images be distinguished from perceptions? At least in some cases (e.g. that of hallucination) they cannot be. But what about the majority of cases?

²⁰ Curiously Lavelle's doctrine of memory appears to advise forgetting! That is, it advises a letting-go of what is most commonly taken as memory.

²¹ Lavelle's answer to the above question is that the remembered image differs from the perceived image in that it is simpler (rather than dimmer). For him this is the proper function of memory: to take things back toward their image-less meaning.

or when it is reproduced anew by word or picture; the [essence of the] other resides in the idea of the object insofar as it effaces the representation to profit of the meaning, giving us the very being for which the representation was only the configuration, whose image [memory] no longer needs to support or supplant it.

We see therefore that the peculiarity of representative memory is to be incapable of separating itself from the object or spectacle. It ever relates to the not-I, to that from which the I is separated. It always tries to obtain pictures. It follows, [at one remove] so to speak, the same occupation as representation itself, without ever completely succeeding in it. It is interested only in what experience has to offer the I from the outside, to which it always tries to impart a kind of survival. But the venture can never succeed because it is contradictory: for not only has consciousness already imprinted its own stamp on the primitive representation in order to make it precisely a representation—and this imprint alone subsists when the matter to which it had been applied has fled—but what representative memory tries to retain is the perishable and not the very act that apprehends it and that, as soon as it is freed from [the perishable], reveals to us an internal meaning that can no longer be effaced. Also there is in [representative] memory a kind of hesitation, a painful effort that never reaches the mark, [namely] to summon to the [mind's eye] the image of an event that is no more: we always finish by replacing it with a rudimentary knowing, and we believe we hold the image when we hold only the sign. But this sign is still turned toward the object whose place it occupies so to speak. By contrast, in the measure it is interiorised, memory retains from contact with the object only its pure relation with consciousness, which by means of [the object] does not cease to put its own power into play, to feel and to enrich [the object] indefinitely so to speak. Therefore one can well accept the formula that one remembers only oneself, [so long as it is understood] that it is a question not of the recollection of a transitory psychological event that was abolished at the same time as the circumstances that produced it but of an internal activity inseparable from the event which was the occasion [for it] and which we can always deploy now that [the event] has perished.

One could present matters in yet another way. One could say that representative memory can be exercised only with respect to the world, considered as a sensible spectacle such as we have described in chapter XI²², while pure memory has more affinity with the noetic activity described in chapter XII²³. Nonetheless this two-way comparison comes with certain reservations, for [where memory is concerned] we are dealing only with the constitution of the I and not with knowledge of the not-I. Therefore representative memory is a venture condemned in advance since it tries to preserve [something] whose essence is to slip away, and to preserve as ours [something] whose essence is not ours. Do we need to draw from this the conclusion that true memory is that noetic activity which we know very well

²² “The Representative Power”, not included in these translations.

²³ “The Noetic Power”, not included in these translations.

survives the instant and pertains to consciousness and not to the object? However it is still impossible to confound [noetic activity and true memory], for noetic activity is turned toward the object; it is expressed in the formation of the concept, which is the object itself considered in our potential to think of it [again and again]. Pure memory, in so far as it is constitutive of the I, is completely different: it is thinking of self and not of the object. It is in reality the discovery of self, i.e. not of what we have done or of what we can do but of the very being we have given ourselves after the will has traversed the trials of the real. Yet this being we have given ourselves is not a being that is *completely made* and that we have only to endure; it is a being that we continue to give ourselves through an act we are never exempt from accomplishing.

In other terms, the connection between will and memory is much straiter than we think. Memory is not a simple effect of will; that [would reduce] memory to a stratified deposit of event[s]. Will is nonetheless present in memory: memory is a will tested by the event but also purified and stripped of the materiality inseparable from the event: thereafter [memory] takes possession of it. But if in its veritable employment it is purely interior to self and nothing more than the will to *preserve self*, one can say that as long as our action can, that is to say *should*, embody itself in an experience, memory is indivisibly memory of what we have done and of what we ought to do. And no one has gone far enough in showing that duty itself is doubtless nothing more than the memory of what we are but which the novelty of event always risks effacing. Memory gives us access to eternity because it is turned toward the future as well as toward the past. Hence those familiar [incitements] to which we are never [sufficiently] attentive and by way of which we *remember to act*, and not only having decided to act; [remember] the action to be done, and not only the action already done. Thus memory vouchsafes the very continuity of our temporal experience, ahead as well as behind, precisely because time is indivisibly the condition of our forming being and of our already-formed being. Identity [over] time can be maintained only through an act that is an act of memory, i.e. of fidelity to oneself. “Remember” is always for me a prescription, where what I mean is: I ought to remember myself always²⁴ and not let my essence—in the measure I discover it, i.e. form it—be dissipated amid the external, fleeting accidents it constantly hurls itself against, which always threaten to devour it. When I say “Remember God” that means: God insofar as he has already become the light of your life; when I say “Remember death” that means not only “remember you must die” but that death is part of your life’s essence and gives it its meaning, not only its term.²⁵

²⁴ Words to this effect are the constant refrain of Lavelle’s writings. “Remember yourself” is the essence of his practical advice. Interestingly the very same prescription is given by the Armenian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff who lived in and near Paris during the years Lavelle was composing the bulk of his philosophy. It is doubtful the two men knew each other or would have fully endorsed each other’s teaching. Nonetheless there are some important similarities between the teachings.

²⁵ A form of memory distinct from representation accords with the non-representational thinking mentioned in the preceding translation. In trying to make sense of such a memory I observe the following. When I face present experience in a self-collected mode I feel that current perceptions are backed up by a history, i.e. as if my entire past were present to the event, *though not in explicit form*.

6. MEMORY CREATES TIME AND ABOLISHES IT.

We can now more exactly define memory's relation to time. We can well assert, in a schematic fashion, that memory turns us toward the past while will turns us toward the future, and that [through] this conversion of the future into the past the I is constituted. That is possible however only on the condition that the past is not solely considered as a phase of time in which the present is abolished but also as the terminus of the course of time in which the present is realised and time is abolished. Now memory gives us as much the experience of time's genesis as of its extinction. For *on the one hand* we have consciousness of time only thanks to the opposition of a present that is no longer and a memory that represents it to us; and will shows us the future only through a conversion of this relation into that of a presence that is not yet and a representation that anticipates it. But on the other hand we can say that memory snatches the real from the vicissitudes of time, destroys the distinction between the present and the representation, and creates—if not from the content of the representation, in any case from the act whose limitation and face it displayed—our unique present. These are the particular representations, and all the states that depend on them, which succeed one another in time and mutually chase one another from existence, as if to show that they have no existence outside the phenomenon. But the soul itself, which cannot do without time, is above time: it engenders time as the condition that permits it both to express and to accomplish itself. It is, we might say, contemporaneous with all moments of time. Moreover we can see that the mnemonic power is ever the mark of an inward possession available from now on, [a possession] that no longer belongs to time, though it must be actualised in time. Consequently memory, without ceasing to [stand] in relation to time, which grounds its possibility and in which it ever evokes recollection, absorbs time back into eternity so to speak.

This connection between the mnemonic power and time prevents memory from being, as one too often believes, a permanent survival of the thing, the survival of its form deprived of its content. But this preservation of

Doubtless I could reach back and bring up particular recollections but that is often not wanted or needed. In other words perception seems to be accompanied by a summary or implicit memory of what has gone before. Such a recollection is not an image or representation but more like an attending presence, i.e. the presence of my so-far-accomplished self. Of course it is generally agreed that non-explicit memory plays an important role in present perception and explicit recall; what is original with Lavelle is the proposition that one's entire past can be accessed in capsule-form as the intuition of oneself so far. This strikes me as an idea worthy of investigation.

The notion anticipates a similar or identical notion of the controversial physicist David Bohm (d. 1992) who postulates an "implicate order" not only within the individual but extending on down to the foundations of the universe: "We see, then, that each moment of consciousness has a certain *explicit* content, which is foreground, and an *implicit* content, which is a corresponding background. We now propose that not only is immediate experience best understood in terms of an implicate order but that thought also is basically to be comprehended in this order." (David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, "The enfolding-unfolding universe and consciousness", ARK PAPERBACKS, 1983, p. 204.)

form is an action we always have the power to accomplish anew, and in achieving it we can follow intentions and consequently assign it very different meanings. For the recall of a recollection is turned toward the future in which, and in [light] of which, we evoke the past. And it is for that [reason] that memory so often has a utilitarian character, though it can also satisfy the aims of curiosity or pure contemplation. Sometimes it detaches me from myself in order to provide me with the spectacle of an event that is no more; sometimes it represents me to myself, at once with respect to what I was and what I have become, as if I were [someone else]; finally sometimes it cooperates in the sort of mental chemistry whereby I continually recompose my inner being thanks to a never-interrupted, living confrontation between my will and my recollections. There is more: memory allows me either to transport myself so to speak into my own past, thanks to a kind of dream, from which the present never fails to awaken me, or to transport this past into my own present, of which it constitutes the spiritual substance so to speak. The important thing is precisely to recognise that memory, which expresses our relation to time, nonetheless justifies a multiplicity of different attitudes toward time which all depend on an act of our freedom which gives a [certain] colouring to our destiny: it is above all a question of knowing whether the passing instant is for us the lone reality [so that] memory nourishes only regret in us or whether, there in the instant, memory retains what should subsist and guards the deposit, i.e. puts it in rapport with the eternity that gives it meaning and transfigures it.

If so, the peculiarity of memory is to apprehend within time and by way of time that which never belonged to time. It is to abolish that constant comparison between the vanished present and the unreal image of it that lingers, from which proceed all our sufferings and which, according to the Ancients, still remains the torment of the souls of the dead in the Elysian Fields [*Champs Élysées*]. But it is because they have not yet finished becoming souls. These [images] are only feeble shades of the bodies to which they were formerly united, whose desires they still [retain but lack] the force to realise. They have not become spiritual because they are used to retaining only the perishable, instead of wishing it to perish precisely so as to permit us to release from within it the imperishable which alone deserves to live in our memory.

Such is doubtless the significance of that theory of remembrance²⁶ in which Plato glimpsed an affinity between memory and idea which singularly goes beyond the nature of a simple myth. It is true that the sensible is referred to an eternal idea which gives it its meaning; but since this idea is eternal it is impossible to consider it as in some way pre-existent to the sensible; it is contemporaneous with it. Moreover if we consider it in relation to our life's history we can say that it only ever appears in us posteriorly to the sensible, which is so to speak the occasion for it and from which it emerges through a kind of stripping-back: we see the object's presence

²⁶ Plato's doctrine of essential remembrance (*anamnesis*) according to which it is possible to recall the eternal foundations of things residing in the ideal realm.

replaced then by an imperfect evocation of the perception which has fled us (what we call "the image") which is subsequently transformed into idea, i.e. into that same act through which we constantly create an inner meaning susceptible of being regained in the most diverse representations. We understand therefore that one can have the impression that one has known the idea in the past since it is the fundament of the representation, which would be unintelligible without it. But perhaps it would be necessary, in order to understand the true capacity of reminiscence, to reverse its direction so to speak: for it is not rightly the idea that the sensible makes us recall, it is rather the recollection of the transitory object that, as soon as it is nullified, reveals to us its eternal essence in time. There is therefore no reminiscence of the idea: the idea is reminiscence [itself]. Doubtless we would thereby find a positive way of resolving the classic problem of *innate ideas* as well as of explaining this impression consciousness always [has], that *the formation of self is indistinguishable from the revelation of self, which is so to speak the [ratification] of self*. But we cannot quit [our] examination of the mnemonic power without looking into two more problems, between which there is a certain connection: firstly, the rapport between memory, properly so-called, and imagination; secondly, the rapport between the spiritual essence of the I, such as memory reveals to us in helping shape it, and the totality of the spiritual universe.

7. THE RAPPORT BETWEEN MEMORY AND IMAGINATION.

Memory is generally set in opposition to imagination, as the representative power of the past to the representative power of the future. These two powers agree with one another because they both seek to supply an absent perception through the formation of an image. Moreover the distinction between past and future to which one wants to refer them remains to a certain degree arbitrary: for both are non-temporal if it is true that time [arises] only in the two-fold reciprocal transformation of perception into image and image into perception, i.e. from presence into absence and vice versa. And if we can rightly say that one of them is oriented toward what is no longer but has been, and the other toward what is not yet but perhaps will be, the profound difference separating them [cannot be found]: for the past image is also for me in the future, i.e. I try to bring it forth and do not always succeed; and the image of the future is nothing if it does not borrow from the past the materials it elaborates. Which explains why one almost always assigns rather strict limits to imagination: yet it is now time to define these limits by showing how, thanks to them, the mnemonic power closes us in the experience of the I and at the same time allows us to pass beyond it.

It seems there is indeed between memory and imagination—though they depend on a common power—an opposition, or rather an oscillation, which shows how each of them in some way makes up for the insufficiencies of the other. For memory has more reality: it is a knowledge but a knowledge that subjects us to that very life from which we always seek to liberate

ourselves in order to transcend it. Now imagination carries us beyond – but into a world we justly call imaginary so as to underline that it is neither part of the perceptible world, which is a world common to all consciousnesses, nor part of the remembered world, which has undergone the test of experience and is henceforth incorporeal to our I. Imagination relates to the future only in that imagination as such cannot suffice itself, in that it precisely calls for that realisation which the will alone can produce and which memory has undergone. [Without this] the imaginary remains a possibility that is not actualised, though one sometimes has the illusion of succeeding by way of the lone resources of consciousness: but that is only in floating images it never manages either to reach or to fix. However here is a lure, as the impatient and repeated attempts of the artist show, so long as he does not succeed in making the imagined object a real object with access to the experienced world, apprehensible by the senses. For it is only in perception that the image is achieved and takes possession of itself. And imagination adds nothing to the world unless it becomes properly creative, i.e. unless it incarnates itself in a perceptible thing. The two movements, that of imagination and that of memory, are therefore the inverse of one another, since we might say that imagination goes from the possible to the real and memory returns from the real to the possible. Nonetheless they agree with one another in a certain disposition of the possible, but of which they do not make the same use: for memory lays bare a spiritual possibility constitutive of the I that I am, which I can indefinitely deepen, while imagination evokes no possibility except as a call towards an experience I have not yet [realised], which [realisation] alone will make mine. Thus memory and imagination express two opposing aspects of possibility. Moreover, strictly speaking, memory brings us the reality for which the vanished object brought us only the possibility, while imagination wants the very reality of this still-to-be-born object, of which [imagination] contains only the possibility. The object's apparent return to the possible, such as effected in memory, is therefore a return towards the true reality for which the object represented nothing more than [a] second possibility. And [here] we recognise that in our temporal life, so long as it is not terminated, there is always an implied connection between these two forms of possibility since every initiative of consciousness internalises and exteriorises us at the same time, i.e. reveals our essence to us by transforming our experience. *Imagination constantly enlarges the [same] I that memory indefinitely deepens.*

Consciousness is therefore a kind of debate between imagination and memory. But imagination is nothing without the will that puts it to work. It is a preliminary trial of will. In a contradictory fashion it looks for a prospective representation of the real whereas there is only retrospective representation. But will is mediator between the two for it changes imagination into memory. It projects the non-temporal dreams of imagination into the future so as to oblige them to take form, i.e. to be incarnated: and memory garners their form, liberated from the matter it took on, and the I now disposes [the form] as [it does] itself. Imagination is therefore always employed conjointly with memory. And the rapport between imagination and memory brings to light

rather well, there in the world of representation, the opposition and connection between a possible and a realised participation. That is why imagination strikes us as all-powerful, capable of going beyond not only memory but the world that is given to us, in order to create an infinite plurality of worlds which expresses the very infinitude of possibility. However that is only an abstract vision. For as soon as we want to actualise a possibility in representation we are bound to borrow all our materials from experience and memory and to dispose them in such a way as to make them the vehicle of all our aspirations, since the nature of participation is to express my limits through the irreducibility of a given to my own act; [the former] must be brought to me from outside, [for] I am never capable of creating it. That is also why imagination always seems sickly compared to experience and memory whose richness, in the measure we [plumb] them, always makes imagination's efforts seem miserable so that the most [vivid of them] is also the most chimerical. The liaison between memory and imagination admirably expresses the supreme law of participation which in principle is adequate to every possibility but in fact can take possession of the possible only by way of a given that answers to it and consequently is subject to being first part of my experience and then entering into my memory.

Imagination is therefore unreal and memory real.²⁷ They have the same relation as anticipated or preliminary possibility and realised possibility. Also it seems that imagination always surpasses the field of memory while nonetheless drawing all its materials from it. In imagination memory reveals to us a power of the I that appears at once to lead [memory] and follow it and that attempts to produce a new representation of the world in which the I thinks to find for itself an expression that better satisfies it. But it would be an error to think that imagination delivers us from this world of phenomena where we are confined by our limits: it moves in this world, it is this world that it tries to transform according to the experience we have had of it, so that all the wishes of our consciousness can find in it a kind of figuration, but this is at once a pacification and a deception.

8. THE SPIRITUAL UNIVERSE, AND MEMORY.

In the order of representation, the rapport between memory and imagination witnesses to the solidarity between a participation that has been lived and a participation that is considered only as susceptible of being. That is why there is only memory of the I and only imagination of the not-I, but of the not-I in so far as the I already claims it. However it is important to go beyond the plane of representation. Then we will say that memory reveals to us the being of the I but that, instead of confining us in a separate solitude, as one believes, it [allows] us to penetrate the totality of the spiritual universe.

²⁷ I feel a younger Lavelle might have regarded the two as equally real (or unreal) manifestations of the present, though with different meanings. In any event his statement here conforms with the usual meanings assigned to imagination and memory.

Doubtless memory, in retaining from our past all that pertains to us, can be defined as the individual form our body has given our soul: but in saying that memory is always memory of self, we cannot [forget] that it is at the same time memory of the whole universe, in its connections with self. Now when we no longer deal with representative memory but with memory we can call spiritual, we meet again that correlation of the I and the all that we observe in each of our recollections in that it is inseparable from the recollection of the universe in which it is engaged. Likewise, if memory reveals to us our very being, [though only] in so far as we continue to recreate it though a wholly interior operation that depends on us alone, this operation carries within it [the] condition of possibility which renders it co-present to the entire spiritual universe, on which it has always a limited perspective.

There is more: if all spiritual existence is bound to shed the phenomenal form in which it was incarnated, it succeeds in that only by first becoming memory, [i.e.] indivisibly memory of self and memory of the world. For we can deny neither that we were part of the world nor that world was other than it was, though the least of our actions constantly modifies it and gives it a new aspect. The pure act is consequently offered for participation only by way of a world that is common to all consciousnesses but that must be abolished so that they can succeed in founding their existence, both individually and together. Thus memory of the world is again only a means by which different memories communicate: but, at the moment memory allows us to surpass the universe of representation in order to penetrate the universe of meaning, our existence, instead of closing around self, i.e. around the recollection of events it alone has lived, on the contrary finds access to an inwardness no longer blocked by a corporeal screen, such as would be encountered by those who, confronting their recollections on the eve of their death, and forgetting the events [associated with them, experience a single light emanating from a lone hearth].

Perhaps we should say that recollections become ours only when we can no longer distinguish them from one another: there is a indistinctness that should be overcome and a indistinctness that overcomes distinction itself; then particular recollections become indiscernible from our proper spiritual activity, as the gestures we have learned to make become at a certain point indiscernible from our entire organic spontaneity. Already in dream we see recollections confused with one another and forming monstrous ensembles because consciousness, asleep with the body, no longer [is there] either to separate or to join them. Dream is incapable of distinguishing future from past, and it would not be distinguished from the present if there were not for me a present, different in nature, that others perceive and that I myself perceive when I am not sleeping. But the dream which throws me back on my solitude leads me to the extreme of my passivity with regard to myself by abandoning me to a play of images which never completely succeed in being disincarnated; they interpenetrate but only form incoherent tableaux over which I am not the master. Thus dream can seem an intermediary between an

ordinate or systemised representation and a creative initiative no longer held prisoner by determinate forms.

Knowledge of self, if it is one with self's formation, is therefore achieved by memory; but memory also brings us knowledge of the other, though there is [in this case] no longer that internal conversion of will into recollection which characterises the constitution of the I by way of itself. Memory [here] remains always representational and will is no more than a possibility assumed by another and not by us. Only, we find this possibility again in ourselves, as a possibility we too could actualise, and this representative recollection evokes a spiritual recollection which is an act I always dispose. We find here all the conditions that allow us, thanks to memory, to penetrate a spiritual universe that is not only the same for all consciousnesses but that all consciousnesses help form. Thus is [introduced] the study of communication between consciousnesses which we will [address] in the following section²⁸ and which implies for the soul not only an expressive power—for which the world is the vehicle—that spiritualises all [the world's] manifestations by converting them into recollection, but an affective power, whose rightful character is to create among consciousnesses a mutual reciprocity in acting and participating that obliges them to join with each other through their common dependence on an act void of passivity.

It is necessary to recognise now that memory, which seems to contain all spiritual objects as space contains all material objects, nonetheless contains them—if this metaphysical way of speaking still has any meaning—in a very different manner. For a spiritual universe can only contain self-accomplishing acts, thanks to a stripping-away of every objective appurtenance, which affords an understanding of why there is an identity between *spirit* and *sacrifice*.²⁹ All beings are completed, we might say, in God's memory. Each being discovers itself only from the moment it *no longer recalls what it has but [only] what it is, which is precisely what it has no longer*; for the very secret of the connections between being and having reside precisely in this: that the being we are is shaped from all we have had but have no longer, so that enrichment and [simplification] constitute the very rhythm of our spiritual life. All enrichment is produced in the world of phenomena where we multiply our connections with what surpasses us, all [simplification] is produced in the world of being where *we must no longer have anything that is ours so that we can no longer receive anything but what we are eternally capable of giving ourselves*. At that moment we can say that each being wants for all other beings [the same thing] that he wishes for himself: which means not only that they are joined in the same will but that within each of them self-will is changed into love.

²⁸ “The Mediation between the I and [that] Other I”.

²⁹ The ancient Upanishads also insist on this connection.

CONCLUSION: RAPPORT BETWEEN THE COGNITIVE POWER AND THE MNEMONIC POWER.

We now understand the affinity between the mnemonic power and the cognitive power that was described in the first section. Let us recall that the cognitive power allows us to embrace in participation that which goes beyond us, the not-I insofar as it has rapport with the I, both by way of representation, i.e. as a spectacle given to us, and by way of the concept, i.e. as a formal construction that receives its content from elsewhere. However memory in its turn seems a kind of cognizance, namely, that knowledge which bears on the I itself; but it is a cognizance which, though it begins by being representative, i.e. by making the I an object, ends by effacing this object in the I, i.e. by blending it with the I itself.³⁰ That is why, if all cognizance is cognizance of an object, memory implies the suppression of this object, [a] suppression the image struggles vainly to supplant since in spiritual memory, properly so-called, the image disappears. Thus we verify how *the absence of every object is presence to self* and how memory can realise that identity between knowing and the known which is at once the ideal and the limit of all knowledge. — But it testifies to its privilege in relation to cognizance in another way again. For the peculiarity of cognizance is to show us a world, i.e. that which is beyond and to which [cognizance] must submit, [there] in the very activity in which we participate. By contrast memory is the knowledge of the very being we have given ourselves; and that is why what we have willed—or has worldly rapport with what we have willed—is changed into memory. Memory is nothing more than the act of will insofar as it strips away phenomenality, which is merely the obstacle by way of which it realises itself in order to be shown to us in its true purity. Also the paradox of memory is that, on the one hand, if it is true that I am all that I have become, i.e. if I carry nothing more within me than the totality of my past, I do not need to know it since I am it, and on the other hand, I can [have] an existence interior to myself, which is no longer that of a phenomenon, only through the consciousness I have of it, which is never that of an object but of a spiritual operation I can always dispose.

The mnemonic power cannot therefore be separated from the cognitive power: and indeed it seems to nullify it only because it pushes it to the extreme, to the point where being and knowing can no longer be distinguished from one another. When it is a question of me, the identity between the being I am and the being I know is realised in the being I create. Yet in memory being only borrows from itself what it makes it be. *And just as voluntary action was [shown to be] participation in the creative power, memory is, we might say, participation in self.* It is the [kingpin] of all the solutions one can give for problem of knowledge since it re-establishes the identity (which cognizance continually shatters) between knowing and the known. Every act

³⁰ Author's note. "This is not, as one might think, a return to its original unity. For it is only after having been divided [from] itself and having surmounted this division, that the I is capable of winning its spiritual unity."

of cognizance involves the memory through which the I recognises its own identity in the fugitive object of consciousness, which one could just as well demonstrate by studying the privileged role of movement in the make-up of the physical world (since movement is the memory of the successive positions the moving object has occupied one after the other) or of reasoning in all the operations of thought (since reasoning is the memory of an already acquired knowledge to which certain new acquaintances are related). But in a general fashion we will say that to know is to recognise the presence of being, to remain faithful to the act that makes it be. *To know is to preserve*. Yet nowhere are these characteristics better shown than in that recognition of self which is the constitutive nature of memory, which grounds the identity of the I with itself and enables it to discern in the world all that is its own, i.e. all that it has made its own.

Thus, while the will makes us go out of ourselves so as to experience contact with the world, memory makes us come back into ourselves in a kind of *involution* which is the ultimate basis of our evolution and for which the world itself was the perpetually-vanishing instrument. We easily understand that our consciousness can either remain attached to the phenomenal plane, i.e. to the perishable, in order to try retain an image of it by way of representative memory; or convert into its own spiritual substance, i.e. into an internal act whose disposal it [retains] from then on, the event in which its will was at first engaged. And now, having shown how the soul is constituted by means of the world and thanks to [its] effacement, and [how the soul] inscribes its action in it through its will before gathering into memory its purely spiritual fruit, it still remains for us to establish how, throughout this two-fold initiative, communication between the I and another I is effected in a common spiritual world they both penetrate by way of memory, for which the phenomenal world was both the condition and the shape.³¹

³¹ An introduction to the third section of Book Three, titled “The Mediation Between the I and the Other I”.