

Remembering Matilal on Remembering

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Abstract Although memory is pivotal to consciousness and without it no perceptual judgment or thinking is possible, Nyāya epistemology does not accept memory as a knowledge source (pramāṇa). Prof Matilal elucidates and defends Udayana’s justification for calling into question the knowledgehood or even truth of any recollection. Deepening Matilal’s argument, this paper first shows why, if a remembering reproduces exactly the original experience from which it borrows its truth-claim, then there is a mismatch between the time of experience and the time of recall and the remembering ends up being false. To correct that error, if we change the tense in the content of recollection, the added past-ness goes beyond the original experience and violates the purely reproductive nature of memory. The paper ends by responding to this Nyāya position using arguments from Dvaita Vedānta and Jaina epistemology where remembering can be veridical and memory is accepted as an important knowledge source. The additional element of past-ness (a sense of “back-then”) cannot be derived from sense perception. It has to be a spontaneous contribution of the inner sense.

Keywords smṛti (memory) · Pramā (knowledge) · Pramāṇa (knowledge source) · Anubhava · yāthānubhava (just-as-the-experience) · Hippocampus · Amygdala · Synaptic activities · Mental perception

‘Furthermore, on what ground can remembering even claim truth (or veridicality)?’

–Udayana (Thakur 1967)¹

¹*kim ca, smṛter yāthārthyam api kutaḥ. See: Nyāyadarśana of Gautama with the Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana, the Vārttika of Uddyotakara, the Tātparyāṭikā of Vācaspati & the Parīśuddhi of Udayana. Mithila Institute Series, Ancient Text No. 20. Edited by Anantalal Thakur (Muzaffarpur, Prakrit Jain Institute, 1967), 110.*

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‘Memory, inseparable in practice from perception, imports the past into the present, contracts into a single intuition many moments of duration, and thus ... compels us, de facto, to perceive matter in ourselves... it follows that memory must be, in principle, a power absolutely independent of matter.’

–Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (Bergson 1913)²

‘It all began in another city and another life. That’s why I can’t write this story the way I would like to—as if I were still there, still just only that other person. ... *I cannot find the correct tenses*. I was young, had strong slim legs.’

–Valeria Luiselli (Luiselli 2012)

Faces in the Crowd (my italics)³

Is Memory a Form of Non-Knowledge?

In *Logic, Language and Reality*, Matilal wrote this pellucid, provocative, and penetrating sentence:

If, however, it is argued that a memory, in exactly copying a past true experience, can also copy its truth, then we have to say that it is only a copy of the property truth or *pramāṭva* and not the property truth itself (Matilal 1985).⁴

When I clearly—either episodically or dispositionally—remember my numerous intense philosophical discussions with Matilal, do I only manage to have beliefs or awareness episodes with a simulacrum of truth? When I accurately remember my once-experienced events about Matilal, can I not claim to have justified true beliefs about *him*? Is memory not a *pramāṇa*? Setting aside false and doubtful memories, are accurate and sanguine recalls such as remembering that Bimal Krishna had a lot of black curly hair instances of knowledge properly so called? Early, medieval, and new Nyāya epistemologists would unanimously say ‘No.’ Remembering is not a form of *pramā* or ‘truth-hitting’ awareness according to them.

No real and direct cognitive contact is possible with the non-existent. Since the past event which memory apparently puts us in touch with is non-existent (no longer existent) at the time of recalling it—for example, Matilal’s hair is not actually there in the world now—memory, like imagination, can at best be a cognitive connection with a present image or representation of the past event/object masquerading as a direct awareness of the now-non-existent past event/

² Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. Translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. (New York: Dover Publications, 2004), pp. 80–81.

³ Valeria Luiselli, *Faces in the Crowd*. Translated by Christina MacSweeney. (Great Britain: Granta Books, 2012), 1.

⁴ Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Logic, Language and Reality: Introduction to Indian Philosophical Studies* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 268.

object. It is this element of passing off a copy of an experience or experience of a copy to be a direct presentation of the original event or experience that disqualifies memory from the status of genuine knowledge. Even Matilal's repeated use of the word 'copy' (in the sentence quoted above) points in this direction. Still, the phrase 'copy of the property truth' sounds, to put it mildly, obscure.

In this memorial essay, somewhat self-referringly, I shall try to take Matilal's own incisive discussion of the epistemic status of memory a little further by staging a debate between Nyāya's dismissal of memory and Dvaita Vedānta's affirmation of the truth and knowledgehood of our correct remembering, sprinkling some Jaina and Kashmir Śaiva dialectics about the epistemic status of memorial cognition in between.

To See or Feel Is to Remember

At first, it seems obvious that memory is not a form of sense perception. No one, except alleged time-travelers or Yogic clairvoyants, can *perceive* past events. It would be weird to claim that today one is seeing or hearing sights or sounds of yesterday (unless one takes perception of video reproductions to be direct perceptions). On the face of it, perception or direct experience seems to be one thing and remembering quite something else. Perception of a currently available external object or even an introspective enjoyment of a current reflexive cognitive or hedonic state seems to be quite easily separable from memory which is supposed to be concerned with the past and the absent.

But part of this first impression is deceptive. At least from the content of a perception, such as seeing that this is a mango, memory is not that easy to sift out. If we define memory most generally like Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* does, as non-erasure of contents once experienced, a kind of short-term immediate sensory memory is essential for any perception to happen. For perception, however instantaneous it may appear, it occupies what Bergson suggestively calls 'a depth of duration,' the illusion of simultaneity being created by rapid succession like a needle going through hundred lotus petals as if at the same time. That famous analogy is from Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika texts, but the same idea is expressed strongly by Bergson: 'your perception, however instantaneous, consists then, in incalculable multiplicity of memories.'⁵ Just as a machine which erases the previous letters as it types the next one cannot be a typing device, an organism without even a working memory can hardly be said to have (even perceptual) cognition. The synthetic functions of cognition, isolation, identification, selection, attention, recognition, judgment, and hedonic and evaluative assessment are all dependent upon some form of stringing together of experiences across time and recalling the previous ones. And of course inference, the use of language, deployment of concepts, that is, our recognitional capacities, and other conscious human practices (acts, abilities, and habits) require active use of memory. Even the phenomenal qualia or subjective 'what-it-is-like-to-be' character of a process of

⁵ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 53.

consciousness requires that it feels a certain way *for oneself* to undergo it. And without some narrative implicit episodic memory or at least self-recognitional capacity, one would not even have a sense of being oneself (let alone know who one is, a kind of knowledge rather rich in memory content).

This is perhaps what Bergson meant when he remarked: ‘the subjectivity of our perception consists above all in the share taken by memory.’⁶ Thus, a consciousness without any memory, if it is possible to imagine such a thing, would be entirely outward, interactive with the world, registering the current environment, but lacking in that inscape—that background flavor of reminiscence, recognition, and reidentification that makes it someone’s ‘I’ consciousness.

But amnesia or loss of memory seems to permit a conscious experiential life to go on! That can happen because there are many different capacities which are brought under this vague and generic word: ‘memory’. While long-term memory may be lost, short-term or working memory may still be there. While declarative or information-storing memory may be severely impaired, procedural or habit memory may be intact. While retrieval or conscious recall may not be happening, retention may be manifested through nearly ‘unconscious’ recognition through successful motor navigation in familiar spaces. Recognition itself can be of two broad sorts: token recognition and type recognition. If it is a recognition of the very token item which was perceived in the past, we may manifest it by using the proper name of that item and exclaim ‘Ah! It is that same Mr. N. N as before.’ If it is a recognition of some type or kind of which other samples or instances one has come across in the past, then we express that by using a generic predicate or common noun such as ‘Yes! There is another crow or another oak-tree.’

Mainstream classical Indian philosophies such as Nyāya refuse to bracket memory and recognition together. Since recognition falls under perceptual reidentification of what is currently presented to the senses, it is a fresh *anubhava*, whereas recollection—which is the chief meaning of *smṛti*—is always of what is absent and past.

In sum, the following factors of consciousness intimately involve memory of some form or other:

1. The sense of self and self-continuation (without which even the minimum phenomenal bodily self-awareness is unavailable) and the self-other distinction
2. The sense of a past, and hence the awareness of any duration at all
3. Ability to recognize and re-identify objects and other similar and dissimilar living beings.
4. Ability to form concepts
5. Linguistic capacity and rule-following in general

Not just language, but any rational practice which involves inference or application of general rules, requires that the ability to link back with past experiences, their objects, and most importantly the ability to synthesize a successive series of experiences under a single unified cognizing ‘I’ or subject (This is why Kant held that an ‘I think’—a transcendental unity of

⁶ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 75.

apperception—must be capable of accompanying all our cognitive acts), has to involve memory in some form or other.

Abhinavagupta summarizes this essential role played by this ‘linking back’ or ‘connecting-after’ *anusandhāna* or *samanvaya*, this subjective synthesis done by the power of memory, in a succinct passage in IPV (I, VII, 13):

Not only do such common day-to-day practices such as establishing cause-effect relationships, remembering, and exposure of error in a previous piece of awareness require a single knower as their foundations, even all minor popular impure activities such as buying and selling of goods, and purer activities such as receiving instructions from a teacher by a student, etc. are possible on the basis of unity of a cognizer. Thus all practices simply live on synthesis (*na kevalam ete kārya-kāraṇa-bhāva-smaraṇa-bāvatvyavahārāḥ sakala-lokayātrāsāmanya vyavāharabhūtāekapramāṭr-pratiṣṭhah, yāvat avāntarvyavahārā api yekrayavikrayādaya samalah, upadeśyopadeśabhāvādayaśca nirmalāḥ te’pi ekapramāṭr niṣṭhā eva bhavanti, vyavaharah hi sarve samanvaya-prāñāḥ...*) Abhinavagupta 1985⁷

Does Our Past Live in the Hippocampus or Amygdala or in the Consolidation of Synaptic Activities?

Neuroscience has made great advances in the last 40 years or so in exploring the cellular as well as systemic basis of active working memory, long-term memory formation, explicit and implicit learning, and procedural or habit memory. A major part of this research, as Mishkin and Appenzeller reported, is based on studies of object recognition and learning patterns in monkeys and on studies of different kinds of partial loss of memory due to damaged regions of the human brain (Mishkin and Appenzeller 1987).⁸ The physicalist prejudice of most of these researchers is apparent when you find them defining their agenda as: ‘Let us see how the brain remembers.’ It is because of such a bias that whenever a proposed hypothesis implies that there may be something like a central soul or homunculus to give the initial impetus to retrieve one among several stored traces in the brain, that is immediately treated as a *reductio-ad-absurdum* of that hypothesis.

With what is called rehearsal and consolidation, it now appears that memory formation happens at the cellular level by altering electrochemical strength of connections at the synapses between neurons. The more often a certain sequence of stimuli travel through the same pathways in the network of neurons, the conductances of the ion channels on the cell membranes seem to change and become more facilitated. Since most membrane molecules are constantly getting replaced, such consolidation has to be recorded in a more tangible molecular level in the form of new protein syntheses for a more (beyond a few hours) long-term

⁷ K.A. Subramania Iyer, K.C. Pandey, R.C. Dwivedi (trans), *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī, Doctrine of Divine Recognition*, Vol. I (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1985), 389.

⁸ Mortimer Mishkin and Tim Appenzeller, “The Anatomy of Memory,” *Scientific American* (June 1987), pp. 80–89.

storage. There is no fixed area of the brain where this more permanent archiving activity goes on. For different sorts of information, skill, association, and recognition, different areas seem to be important. But on the whole, the hippocampus, a pair of sea horse-shaped structures on the inner surface of the temporal lobe, and the amygdala, an almond-shaped smaller structure beneath the basal forebrain, seem to be the most important areas since lesions in them cause severe loss of long-term memories.

One main problem of interpretation of the human data in this area is that, when, suppose, after inhibiting protein synthesis at the level of reinforcing synaptic activities, we observe lack of recall, there is no sure way of telling whether it is a structural erasure of the memory or only an operational failure to retrieve a 'trace' or capacity which is still there somewhere in the cells. Effortful retrieval seems to be largely controlled by the pre-frontal cortex which almost 'tells' the hippocampus or other areas of the neo-cortex to reactivate the relevant synapses. So, when retrieval does not happen, whether it is because there is lapsed connectivity at the synapses or lack of proper commands from the prefrontal cortex remains often undecidable.

Are all displayed memories explicable by the person's former exposure to a learning process? Some of the most baffling evidences from newborn humans suggest that even the very first exposure to a headless human body or to snakes evokes as if it were a 'remembered' fear response, and of course the mother's nipple is avidly recognized as desirable without any learning at all. The clean-slate theory of the newborn mind is threatened by such data. The role of negative and positive emotions in failure or success of acquisition, retention, and retrieval of memory has always been well-known. The lesson you love is learnt faster. What new research on the amygdala—the currently recognized brain area responsible for emotional reactions—has shown is that monkeys without an amygdala are slow in learning by positive reinforcement since they fail to recognize a reward as a reward! Mishkin and Appenzeller are worth quoting on this point:

It is possible that the amygdala not only enables sensory events to develop emotional associations but also enables emotions to shape perception and the storage of memories. How does the brain single out significant stimuli from the welter of sensory impressions[...]? The amygdala in its capacity as intermediary between the senses and the emotions, is one structure that could underlie such selective attention (hence learning).⁹

But can we take all this evidence as adequate support for the eliminativist or reductionist thesis that it is the brain that remembers, that we do not need any self other than the complex and constantly changing system of neural network in the CNS in general to explain how the past is preserved within our subjective 'experience' without losing its indexical character of being no longer there now? After all, 'the past' being learned as 'time elapses before now' and now being an ego-centric token-reflexive remembering would lose its 'back-then'-directionality minus an ego or self.

⁹ Appenzeller and Mishkin, "The Anatomy of Memory," 10.

Where Is the Past That Remembering Puts Us in Touch With?

It is in the context of demarcating perception from memory that Bhāsarvajña—the Kashmiri Naiyāyika, a robust realist with a present-centric view of existence ('to be is to exist now')—discusses the status of ceased past items. One defining feature of perception is supposed to be *being generated by its object* (*artha-jatva*). Since the past object does not exist at the time of the cognition (with respect to which it is past), it cannot cause our awareness of it, and the definition of perception must include the property of being 'object-generated' (hence, by definition, perception is only of the present, but for the nagging puzzle about the fact that as a cause, the object has to be 'antecedent' to the perception it causes!), hence memory—our cognition of the past—is never perceptual. But then, even as an object of recall, what sort of an entity is this no-longer existent past particular?

It should not be confused with its own post-cessation absence. This is for two clear reasons: the past event or item has ceased to be, but its cessation or posterior absence is precisely what prevails now. When I remember Bimal Krishna Matilal discussing New Nyāya subtleties in his All Souls College room, I am not remembering the negative fact that that discussion is not happening now. That negative fact I can painfully perceive now. The post-cessation absence is currently real, one can experience it, and therefore cannot experience it. Secondly, the absentee cannot be equated with the absence. Hence, the past object or event is not a kind of not-being or absence—it is what is absent. Nor is it a presence or a being. Therefore, some suggest that a past entity (along with future entities) belongs to a third or middle category: neither being nor not-being, just as certain actions, such as blinking, are neither virtuous nor unvirtuous in the sense of being vicious—they are neutral. But Bhāsarvajña rejects this suggestion. Since there is no other appropriate use of words outside of the positive and the negative, and double negation brings us back to the positive, if the perished past is not a being now, it must be a not-being. If it cannot be a non-being, it must be a kind of positive entity, a kind of reality. What if someone complains that since the entirely past entity has no existence (=presence), it cannot be a real being? Well, that would be a fallacious argument since it is such real things as a pot which are said to be past, present, and future, so how could it be devoid of existence? But then, if the pot has existence in all three times, then would it not become eternal?

Bhāsarvajña's answer to this is very peculiar:

Even the pot—the substratum—is not there in all times, so how could it possess the property of existence in all times? Where would the property of existence be without a property-bearer? Does the same pot—like an actor on stage—assume different persona or roles, changing costume as it were, sometimes behaving like a yet-to-be, sometimes as now-happening and sometimes as it's-all-over or bygone? How is this possible. True, it must be so, because that is how the pot is apprehended in ordinary experience (*ghaṭādidharmī eva na sarvadā asti, kutas tasya sattvādi-dharma iti? Na hi vinaṣṭo anuṭpanno ghaṭo asti iti śakyam vaktum. Nanu atītānāgata-rūpeṇa vidyate. Atha kim ayam ghaṭo naṭavat anekarūpatām dhatte? Satyam, kuta etat? Tathā upalambhāt*) (Bhāsarvajña 1968).¹⁰

¹⁰ Nyāyabhūṣaṇa of Bhāsarvajña on Nyāyasāra with pādaṭīppana of editor. Edited by Svāmi Yogīndrānanda, *Saḍdarśanaprakāśanapratīṣṭhānagranthamālā* 1 (Saḍdarśana Prakāśana Pratiṣṭhāna, Vārāṇasī, 1968), 88–91.

But then, there seems to be a regress: the very fleeting roles assumed are themselves sometimes assumed, sometimes not yet assumed, and sometimes given up or relinquished. Is it the same role or character, like the pot, taking up the further role-playing character as to-be-assumed, currently assumed, and already-assumed and dropped? The debate goes on for many more arguments and counter-arguments in *Nyāya-Bhūṣaṇa* suggesting that on this issue even the Naiyāyikas were as sure and clear as we expect them to have been.

Nonetheless, to be past is not to go out of existence. Otherwise, as soon as my mother died I should have started saying 'I do not have any mother.' We can understand this easily with respect to absence of something in a place. If something or someone is removed or gone from a certain place, we do not take that to mean complete annihilation of the object or person. We say that it is not in that place and from the point of view of that place it is said to be absent, though it may be present somewhere else. But with time, it becomes extremely puzzling. Just as there is nothing special about here, the particular place where we are speaking from, intuitively there is nothing special about now, the present time either. Yet, presentism has a natural pull. Things which were very much real at one point in time but are absent now are not only said to be absent but are also said to have ceased to exist. Lack of here-ness could be mere local absence, but lack of now-ness seems to amount to not being there at all. What, then, should be the ontological status of objects which existed in the past but do not exist now? Are they absent or non-existent? Nyāya would call them existent but absent, and therefore their real complaint against remembering cannot be that it is not caused by a real object.

Refutation of the Past-in-the-Brain Theory

Since in a fairly common sense, our memory lies inside our brains, and the perished past particulars live in our memory, would it be plausible to say that the perished past particulars dwell in our brains? In his book *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson has given a powerful argument against any such neuro-physiological explaining away of recollective consciousness. The argument goes somewhat like this:

Pure perception, if there were any such thing, would capture the present. Memory captures the past. The present is lived and acted upon. The past is that which has ceased to act and that on which we cannot act. Since all matter, including cellular or neural-matter has to exist in space, its parts spread out in simultaneity; if remembering the past could literally happen in matter, then it should be possible to spread out the past literally in space, which would make it the present! Therefore, while simultaneous sensations can be localized in the nervous system, to localize memories is to reduce them to sensible present images of past events, a reduction which leaves it totally unexplained how and why the mind (or more absurdly, the brain) should 'go back' to the past to grasp what those are images of! Our sensed present may be a state of our merely physical body and brain, but our pasts (which permeate our presents) cannot be

stored in our brain, for if they were then memories would become another kind of sensations and temporal passage would become a kind of spatial extension.¹¹

Bergson considered in detail all the physiological evidence of his time for accumulation of memories in the cortex. They mostly came, and still come, from cases of memory impairment due to damage or surgical removal of certain parts of the brain. Bergson explains them uniformly as the disabled nervous system's failure to act upon the recollection or to manifest or solve a presented problem, rather than as vanishing of memory. The office of the brain is to translate memory into action rather than to keep the past in its cells! It is a machine which displays or mobilizes memories through performances but could not be an archive for preserving the past.

The above argument can of course be rebutted in many ways. Does it not commit a confusion between memory and its object, the past time? Yes, the past cannot be there in the brain, but why can't 'traces' of the past be there in the present space-occupying brain?

Let me not go into the many contemporary charges against the 'trace' theory of retention and recall Bergson's own answer to the above rebuttal. Nothing that is a physical state can directly take something absent in space like past events as its intentional object because past and ceased events cannot, *ex hypothesi*, cause or act upon brain states. But whatever a brain state can be about must be able to act upon the brain. So a state of the brain or of the synapses cannot be memory. (Of course, one could just eliminate the folk-psychological notion of memory including the phenomenology of the feeling of 'I remember...' which would amount to construing all our knowledge claims based on memory as errors.)

What I learn from Bergson's subtle view—all of which I am not in a position to accept or even understand—is a rejection of physicalist reduction of memory without any leaning toward a mind-body dualism. Bergson's position is perfectly consistent with a certain nuanced version of vitalistic neutral monism, which, in its turn, is perfectly consistent with the Upanishadic picture of an omnipresent living force expressing itself through an endless variety of grasping and grasped forms, posing, as it were, to be inert here and alive there, observer here and observed there, a sensation here and a recollection there, as felt phenomenal consciousness here and as causally active molecular structure there.

The major point that I want to make in this section is that all this show of diversity will be unintelligible even as 'diverse' and 'changing' without a single viewer (who perhaps is also the creator and projector of the show!) whose self-replicating power is manifested as memory. The depth of duration enjoyed by any simple experience or thinking act points at such a single knower. Take the fine analysis of the subjective 'experience' (*anubhava*) of sentence interpretation offered by Jayanta Bhaṭṭa in this context:

The phonemes are heard in a sequence. When the traces left behind by the earlier auditory perceptions are all re-awakened at the time of hearing the last phoneme, the partitioning of the total sound-series into words is done along with the activated memory of the learnt conventional meaning of each word.

¹¹ See: Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, pp. 8–46.

Spontaneously examining the syntactic dove-tailing of the words and the semantic congruence of their meanings, the total sentence meaning is glued together. All of this would be exceedingly hard to explain without postulating a single knower... (Bhaṭṭa 1983)¹²

But Is Recalling Knowing Memory and Truth

But what if the self that we seem to remember ourselves to have been 2 min or 2 years ago is an illusory construct because memory never gives us true knowledge? Buddhist philosophers from Dharmakīrti to Śāntarākṣita seem to be saying so.

Memory is regarded as a form of knowledge—an essential way of knowing the past—in most (non-skeptical) Western epistemologies. If anything counts as knowing, remembering correctly surely does. Plato had even suggested that all mathematical knowledge is some form of recollection! Yet, the standard Nyāya view is that remembering does not constitute knowing, that *smṛti* is not a case of *pramā*. Of course, Jaina and Mādhva oppose this and maintain that remembering when veridical are as much knowings (have *prāmāṇya*) as perceiving and inferring. Why then do Naiyāyikas—who, unlike the Mīmāṃsakas, do not even require freshness as a precondition of knowledge—reject the knowledge claim even of veridical memory? A superficial answer to this natural query would be this: *Pramā* is defined as true presentative apprehension (*yathārtha anubhava*). A remembering is solely caused by mnemonic traces (*saṃskāra*) and is not therefore a case of presentative awareness. Thus, failing to fall under the appropriate genus *anubhava*, a remembering is not knowing. But the Nyāya rejection of the *pramā*-hood of memory is deeper than a mere terminological or taxonomic decision. Though some late Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika texts clearly distinguish between veridical memory and non-veridical memory, even veridical memory does not count as *pramā* because then *saṃskāra*, its *karana*, would be a fifth *pramāṇa*. A sophisticated response is made by Udayana to the imagined opponent who points out that the refusal of the status of knowledge to a veridical memory would be merely a terminological decision. ‘On what grounds,’ asks Udayana, ‘can memory be regarded even as veridical?’¹³

First, the past entity or event which was the object of the original true awareness has ceased to be. It is an absentee to a present posterior absence (*atīta* in Sanskrit means ‘gone’). Since the best that memory can do is to make us again aware of that very bygone state of affairs, it can never be depended upon as knowledge of an object as it is (to take the present tense seriously). The defender of the veracity of memory could reply that recalling the black clay pot in its past unbaked state need not be the error of claiming the now-red terracotta

¹² Jayanta Bhaṭṭa, *Nyāyamañjarī*. (1) Ed. Vidvan K.S. Varadhacharya (Mysore: Oriental Research Institute, University of Mysore, 1983), Vol. II, 295.

¹³ Thakur, *Nyāyadarśana of Gautama*, 110.

pot to be black! The response to this, from Udayana, is interesting but odd: How can you remember the pot as black-in-the-past when you have never experienced the pot as black-in-the-past, since you have at best experienced the pot as black-in-the-present? If the recollection has to be faithful to its original presentation (*yāthānubhava*), then it cannot be faithful to the thing (*yathārtha*) at the time of recall; whereas if it has to be true to the object as it is at the time of recall, then it has to put a stamp of pastness on its own object which was not there in the original experience from which alone it derives all its content! It is not only because the veracity of the reproduction has to be a ‘borrowed ornament’ parasitic on the truth of the original awareness that the recall does not merit the title of knowledge (this was Matilal’s diagnosis: that remembering has at best a copy or imitation of truth!), but because the recall is also strictly committed to adding not a jot of new content to the original apprehension, that the recall cannot claim correspondence with current reality. These two constraints, having a truth claim totally dependent upon the truth claim of the past knowledge and having exactly the same object as that piece of knowledge (*kāraṇa-anubhāvānirikta-viśayatve sati tadyāthārthyapāratantryam*, Sadhukhan 2009),¹⁴ work against each other making the veracity of memory philosophically suspect. Even inferences are dependent on the correctness of the grounding subsumptive awareness (*parāmarśa*), but the content of the final inferential awareness is different from that of the subsumptive awareness upon which it is evidentially grounded. There is admittedly an advance in knowledge. But memory cannot add anything to its only source of veracity, the past experience, and yet without adding the qualifier ‘That was then,’ it cannot hope to have current accordance with facts, except accidentally.

There is, however, a ring of tense confusion about this argument, and it seems to assume almost a Buddhist flux theory of states of objects such that the present recall of some past states of affairs would be necessarily discordant with the present states of affairs! Bimal Matilal who had carefully analyzed Udayana’s arguments against the knowledgehood of memory tried to reinterpret and defend them as follows: With a remembering, instead of only one, there are two veracity checks to be made before it can be judged as true.

The original awareness has to be correct and the recalling has to be an accurate copy. Since inaccurate recall of a correct awareness is possible and since accurate recall of an erroneous experience is possible, the correctness of neither one is a guarantee for that of the other. While the memory judgment phenomenologically claims a truth-value link between itself and its original, there actually exists no such link and that is why remembering—even when it ‘matches’ the past it recalls—cannot be systematically relied upon and memory, therefore, cannot be regarded as a veridical presentative awareness or knowledge produced by a reliable knowledge source. One of the reasons why many modern Western Epistemologists of memory do not face this double-blind problem is that what is known in any presentative or re-presentative judgmental awareness,

¹⁴ See *Nyāyanibandhaprakāśa of Vardhamāna (Trisūtrī Section)*, Volume One. Edited by Sanjit Kumar Sadhukhan (Kolkata: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 2009), 44.

according to them, is a timeless proposition rather than a time-indexed property possession by an object!

Jaina and Mādhva philosophers fail to understand why Nyāya would count a correct perceptual recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) such as realizing: ‘This is that long-lost class-fellow of mine’ as knowledge proper but not the remembering that is nested within that recognition.

A Jaina Defense of the Knowledgehood (*prāmāṇya*) of Rememberings

In his *Syādvādaratnākara*, Vādideva Sūri gives a fair and succinct version of all the possible reasons why memory cognitions may be stripped of the title of knowledge. And then he answers all those charges and vindicates the veridicality of memories (not of inaccurate or hazy ones but of our clear and correct rememberings).

Why would anyone take the trouble of exposing the non-veridicality or epistemic disvalue of memory? (1) Is it because to remember is to re-apprehend what has been already apprehended once (*grhītagrāhitvāt*)? But that is not fair. When after someone has known fire on the hill by inference, they actually go and see the fire, is the perception not veridical, not a case of knowledge, just because they are apprehending the same thing which they had known before? (A Buddhist can say that but a Naiyāyika cannot).

Secondly, inside the content of every inferential knowledge, one could always locate a part which is re-apprehension of once apprehended objects. Inference always depends upon knowledge of invariable concomitance of the prover property and the probandum—the target property. Within this general premise, along with all smokes and all fires, this particular fire is, in a non-specific way, already apprehended at the time of knowing the invariable concomitance. In coming to know the presence of fire on the hill, then, each time one is grasping what was once already grasped. If that does not invalidate inferences as fresh pieces of knowledge, why should a remembering, where the past event which was once apprehended (as present, back then) and then re-collected but with a new aspect (as past), not count as equally fresh knowledge?

The other six objections recounted and replied to by Vādideva Sūri are as follows:

Memory is not *pramā* (2) because it lacks any special demarcating content (*paricchitti-viśeṣābhāvāt*); (3) because it is directed toward a non-existent perished object; (4) because it is not generated by the object that it brings to light; (5) because it fails to match with or be corroborated by its own intentional object; (6) because it fails to distinguish itself from imaginary superimposition or error; and (7) because it serves no purpose (Sūri 1988).¹⁵

¹⁵ See Vādideva Sūri, *Pramāṇanayatatvālokaṅkāraḥ: tadavyākhyā ca Syādvādaratnākaraḥ/Śrīmadvādidevasūriviracitaḥ; Moṭilāla ityetaiḥ ṭippanībhīrupoddhātēna ca pariṣkṛtya saṃśodhitaḥ*, 2 Vols. (Delhi: Bharatiya Book Corporation, 1988), Vol. 1, 486.

Why the Logical Direct Realist Cannot Accept Memory as a Knowledge Source

Of these complaints against memory, the most interesting charge is (6) which is a summary of Udayana's major objection to memory. Let us, even at the risk of repetitiousness, rehearse Udayana's chain of reasoning here:

Furthermore, on what ground can memory even claim truth? It cannot be held that when an object/state-of-affairs is remembered, at that time, the object/state-of-affairs stays as it is remembered to have been. Because the *previous* condition must have ceased at the present time (when that condition is recalled as a past condition), if it has not ceased, it would not count as a 'previous' condition. Here, one could not offer the rejoinder that, after all, memory apprehends the previous condition as having ceased hence there is no error or misrepresentation as long as a no-longer extant content is apprehended as no-longer extant. For, this 'cessation of the earlier condition' has not been experienced (only the condition itself was experienced, not its cessation) and what has not been experienced cannot be remembered (*na ca nivṛtta-pūrvāvasthatayā eva tam artham smṛtir avalambate, pūrvāvasthānivṛtter ananubhūtatvāt.*)¹⁶

If memory apprehends any content which is above and beyond what was once experienced, then it would not deserve to be called 'memory.' Here, Udayana anticipates another supporting argument in favor of the epistemic veridical status of memory (against his own final position). When the present memory and the past experience have exactly the same (qualified) object or state-of-affairs as their content ('Matilal was fluent in Sanskrit,' and 'Matilal is fluent in Sanskrit'), how can the latter be veridical and the former non-veridical? Udayana's reply is straightforward: It is because at the time of the occurrence of the direct experience (*anubhava*), the object was in the condition in which experience found it, but at the time of recall, the object is not in that condition and often in no condition at all because it is no longer there.

The point is not that Udayana is blind to what, in twentieth century tense logic, is called 'truth-value link.' Udayana concedes that, in common parlance, one loosely says that the memory is true if the original experience was true. But that is precisely why the truth of a recollection is not 'original' to the recollection: it is as if a borrowed ornament (*yācītaka-māṇḍana-prāyam*). This is what is meant by calling the alleged correctness or knowledgehood of memory 'parasitic.' The word 'knowledge' is used by common people to mean a kind of truth which is only to be found in a fresh original presentation. Knowledge in this sense excludes recollection because it is never a fresh first-time presentation.

Although Udayana says this, the fact that when it comes to knowledge gathered from testimony—knowing by being told by someone else—Nyāya would not require that such second-hand knowledge have the truth claim of a fresh direct perception or inference-for-oneself. Michael Dummett has insightfully compared testimonial knowledge to memory, as if when I know that P because you have seen that P and told me, reliably and intelligibly that P, I am remembering what you have experienced. Dummett

¹⁶ Matilal, *Logic, Language and Reality*, 266.

would call both of them knowledge in the full sense of the term, but Nyāya seems to be okay with testimony but not okay with memory. The reason could be this tense change in the content and the lack of any original experience of the phenomenon of becoming past (Dummett 1994 in Chakrabarti et al. 1994).¹⁷

Dvaita Epistemology Re-Instates Memory as Inner Mental Perception

Perhaps the best defense of the knowledgehood of remembering is to be found in the dualistic school of Mādhva Vedānta. Vyāsātīrtha, of Nyāyāmrta fame (in Mandāra-Mañjarī on Jayatīrtha's Upādhikhaṇḍana Tīkā, Ānandatīrtha 2001),¹⁸ anticipates the following objections against the knowledgehood of memory and offers these powerful replies:

Objection 1 Remembering is not a case of knowing (*pramā*) because it is a claim about a remote absent object, without being supported by inference, etc., which are the only means of knowing past and other remote objects.

Reply But a recognition such as ‘This is that house which I saw last year’ is admitted to be a case of knowing (as long as it is correct) in spite of being unsupported by inference, etc., while it mentions a remote absent object, namely, the house-as-seen-last-year! So the reasoning advanced is inconclusive.

Objection 2 If you wish to put memory in the category of inner mental perception, such as one's inner perception of one's current pleasure and pain, remembering goes beyond its permissible limit as regards its object. This is because inner perception can only be about inner mental states such as pain, pleasure, desire, etc., whereas remembering claims to access external things and events such as a forest fire last year or a man (now dead).

Reply When, through inner perception we come to apperceive ‘The pot is being apprehended by me,’ we clearly make a physical pot the object of introspective mental knowledge. So there is no rule that the inner sense cannot grasp external objects. Inner sense being ‘common sense,’ aided by the memory traces left behind by the original experience, it can access any past object which was experienced once—be it inner or outer.

Objection 3 But the original experience, through the impression or trace it leaves, sets a limit to how much can be included in the content of a remembering. When you see ‘There is a fire,’ that experience leaves a trace of a present

¹⁷ Michael Dummett, “Testimony and Memory”, In Arindam Chakrabarti and Bimal Krishna Matilal (eds), *Knowing from Words: Western and Indian Philosophical Analysis of Understanding and Testimony* (Netherlands: Springer-Science + Business Media B.V., 1994), pp. 251–73.

¹⁸ Ānandatīrtha, *Upādhikhaṇḍanam with the commentaries Śrī Padmanābhatīrtha and Śrī Jayatīrtha and sub-commentaries of Śrī Vyāsārāja Śrīnivāsa tīrtha and Śrī Satyānātha tīrtha*. Edited by Vidwan Satyadhyānachārya (Bangalore: Dvaita Vedānta Studies and Research Foundation, 2001), pp. 131–133.

fire in your mind. But in recalling after some time that ‘There was that fire,’ you add an extra element: that the time of the happening as well as the time of your witnessing the fire is gone. This pastness, this reference to the perishing of a particular period of time, is something that the original experience did not contain. So, in including this element of time lapse, the recall oversteps its limits. This is Udayana’s objection couched in clearer terms.

Reply Let us consider both the time periods as follows:

t1 = the time of the original experience

t2 = the time of the recall Now, it is undeniably established by common experience that the recall of the past fire does not mention t1 as its own present time. Neither does the recall mention t2 as the time of the happening of the fire. If it did either, then the charge of necessary non-veridicality would have been fair against memory. But it is longer there. This cessation of the previous time or relation with t1 is itself a present fact. It is now (t2) the case that t1 is a bygone past. So, if the recall mentions it as part of its content—in an implicitly present-tensed manner—where is it overstepping its limits of legitimacy? Is it not obvious that at t2, t1 is indeed gone and ceased?

Objection 4 But then, the recall in adding elements (like ‘that time is now gone’) which were not there is the original experience. That goes against its strict and complete derivative character. Memory is supposed to have no source of content other than the impression left behind by the previous experience.

Reply This is an unfair assumption. Remembering is partly caused by the memory traces (*saṃskāra*), but partly it is caused by its own appropriate organ, the inner sense or *manas* (which is the organ of introspective awareness as well). Memory is actually a variety of internal perception. While retrieving the data from the latent traces of the past experience, if the *manas* directly procures also the current pastness or time lapse of that experienced instance, it naturally adds that to the content of the recall. (We must, in this context, give due credit to the British empiricist John Locke who, without having read Vyāsaśīrtha, defined memory, as ‘the power of the mind to revive Perceptions, which it has once had, *with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before*’ (Locke 1975).¹⁹ Indeed, this mental perceptual re-adjustment of the tense is a positive epistemic merit of remembering—rather than a flaw. It shows that the knowledge claim of the remembering is not just that of a derivative ‘facsimile’ or ‘copy’ but that it has its own independent status as knowledge. Hereby, Udayana’s objection—that memory borrows all its alleged epistemic claim from the original experience which it reproduces—is also repudiated.

The reason I mentioned this vigorous defense of memory by a later dualist philosopher is this. Abhinavagupta was writing more than 400 years earlier than Vyāsaśīrtha.

¹⁹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 150.

And his philosophical motivation was diametrically opposed to Vyāsaśīrtha's. But he anticipates these very points:

1. That memories do not mention either their own time of occurrence or the time of the original experience episode—as the present time within memory's own cognition content
2. That as a fresh piece of *ābhāsa* or representation (or appearance) memory actually has its own unique self-aware content and can be, therefore, called a correct *svalakṣaṇa* (not quite in the Buddhist sense) rather than a mere conceptual error of the imagination

To translate this part of his IPV (on IPK, I, IV, 2):

Here in the determinate remembering an object is clearly and definitely presented, otherwise it would be as good as sleeping or losing consciousness [...] this illumination of its own object is not done by memory either by rejecting the time of the original awareness (the source of the memory) or by embracing that past time (Abhinavagupta 1938–1943).²⁰

At the time of our experience of missing a taste or a smell, Abhinavagupta argues that these sensed absences are capable of being registered because we remember and can imaginatively posit the absentees, the past experience of the taste of smell. Besides, the spontaneous subjective contributions by inner sound, inner speech, our own salivation, our inner touch, our imagined awareness of what it would have been to have that feeling which I do not have, etc., offer a rich background awareness in which we can situate the observed absence.²¹

And this is solid evidence, for Abhinavagupta, that our cognitions are never merely passive, that they are always self-creative, active, and spontaneous (in Kant's sense) and that we construct our own world within our consciousness where every absence is noticeable as a lack of a sensation only when referred back to that same omni-sentient self-relishing I who could possibly possess it. The world and the self together create experience, and therefore truth need not come into a cognition exclusively from the world-side. The time lapse in remembering is corrected, and therefore the loss of freshness is compensated for by the self's inner contribution to the total recall. To the extent that we are made aware of this inner fullness of self-consciousness, this relentless creation of mirroring awarenesses in the form of echoes for sounds, inner alternative images for sights, inner touches (hair-raising thrill) for outer contacts, and salivation for gustatory stimulations, even our pains become occasions for self-relishing. And indeed, Abhinavagupta remarks elsewhere that it is natural for human beings to be 'interested' in even suffering in search of a new sensation where he can feel himself alive, rather than become dulled and bored by a pleasure that no longer thrills. ('Our sense organs

²⁰ Abhinavagupta, *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī*, 3 Vols. K.A.S. Iyer and K.C. Pandey (trans). Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies (Bombay: 1938–1943), Vol. I, pp. 156–171.

²¹ For further discussion, see Abhinavagupta, *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvivṛtivismarśinī*, 3 Vols. Edited by Madhusudan Kaul Shastri. Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies No. 62, 63, 65 (Bombay: 1938–1943), pp. 277–283.

tend even to run after painful experiences just to explore what is in it! Whereas often they have apathy towards pleasures feeling that there is only this much and nothing more in them!’ Abhinavagupta 1921)²²

Let me close with an invocation verse from the aesthete-philosopher Abhinavagupta:

We sing the praise of that Śiva, who takes out the numerous gems of objects gathered in the treasury of His own heart and strings them together in well-arranged rows inside Himself on the thread of memory.²³

May the thread of our memory of Bimal Krishna Matilal never snap!

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²² Abhinavagupta, *Mālinī-vijaya Vārttika*. Edited by Pandit Madhusudan Kaul Shastri. Kashmir Series of Texts and Studies No. 31 (Srinagar: Research Department, J & K State, 1921), § 235, p. 15.

²³ *padārtha ratna-nikaram nija-hṛdganjapūñjitam grathnantam smṛti-sūtrāntah samtatyaiva stumah śivam*. Abhinavagupta, *Īśvarapratyabhijñāvimarśinī*, 146.

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