A Theology of Memory:
The Concept of Memory in the Greek Experience of the Divine

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ABSTRACT

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Waltham, Massachusetts

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To the ancient Greek mind, memory is not just concerned with remembering events in the past, but also concerns knowledge about the present, and even the future. Through a structural analysis of memory in Greek mythology and philosophy, we may come to discern the particular role memory plays as the facilitator of vertical movement, throwing a bridge between the realms of humans and gods. The concept of memory thus plays a significant role in the Greek experience of the divine, as one of the vertical bridges that relates mortality and divinity. In the theology of Mnemosyne, who is Memory herself and mother of the Muses, memory connects not only to the singer-poet’s religiously efficacious speech of prophetic omniscience, but also to the idea of Truth itself. The domain of memory, then, shapes the way in which humans have access to the divine, the vertical dimension of which is explicitely expressed in the descent-ascent of the ritual passage of initiation. The present study thus lays bare the theology of Memory.
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Introduction

Toute la civilisation grecque est une recherche de ponts à lancer entre la misère humaine et la perfection divine. Leur art à quoi rien n’est comparable, leur poésie, leur philosophie, la science dont ils sont les inventeurs (géométrie, astronomie, mécanique, physique, biologie) n’étaient pas autre chose que des ponts. Ils ont inventé (?) l’idée de médiation. Nous avons gardé ces ponts pour les regarder. Croyants comme incroyants.¹

The relationship between human and divine is an all-pervasive theme in Greek literature that is most intricately bound up to the opposition of life and death—humans are mortal, gods are immortal or deathless. The bold but poignant claim by French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil that all Greek civilization is but an attempt to bridge these realms applies particularly well to the Greek concept of memory.

Although the Greek concept of memory finds many various and seemingly unconnected expressions across time and genre, I argue that the function of memory is conceived of as surprisingly uniform, from Hesiod to Aristotle. The faculty of memory enables us to excite the mind in order to access knowledge through recollection, and it is the power of recollection that facilitates a vertical movement upward: from forgetfulness to remembrance, from past to present, from potentiality to actuality, from mortality to immortality. Memory functions as a metaxu, an idea of mediation. I propose that in this way, memory plays a significant role in the Greek experience of the divine, as one of the vertical bridges that relates human mortality and divine perfection. I attempt to show how in the theology of Mnemosyne, who is Memory herself and mother of the Muses,

¹ Weil 1953a, 68.
memory connects not only to the singer-poet’s religiously efficacious speech of prophetic omniscience, but also to the idea of Truth itself; for Plato, recollection is in fact the bridge to the realm of Truth. The domain of memory, then, shapes the way in which humans have access to the divine, the vertical dimension of which is most powerfully expressed in the descent-ascent of the ritual passage of initiation.

My first chapter is concerned with laying the conceptual groundwork of memory, remembering, and recollection, and it lays bare the parameters of verticality, spatiality, and temporality. While the first chapter relies heavily on the metaphors employed by Plato’s philosophical and Aristotle’s physiological conceptualization of memory, the second chapter delves more into the mythological context in which the theology of Mnemosyne emerges, and mostly draws on Archaic poetics. Underlying my transition from the philosophical to the religious configuration of memory is Louis Gernet’s assertion that “mythical concepts, religious practice, and societal forms ... were involved in philosophy’s beginnings.”\(^2\) In my treatment of Mnemosyne as well as in the subsequent discussion of the Muses and the singer-poet, I follow Marcel Detienne’s reliance on “Ernst Cassirer’s and Antoine Meillet’s hypothesis that language guides ideas, vocabulary is more a conceptual system than a lexicon, and linguistic phenomena relate to ... influential schemata present in techniques, social relations, and the contexts of communicative exchange.”\(^3\) It is in this context, too, that the triad Memory-Truth-Forgetfulness becomes significant as the guiding principle of the singer-poet’s power of immortalization—the divine gift of the Muses, daughters of Memory herself.

\(^2\) Gernet 1981, 353.
\(^3\) Detienne 1996, 19.
The final chapter presents an exposé of the actual experience of the divine and the facilitating role of memory. For this vertical experience, which I argue to be predominantly expressed in mystical terms, I draw on Pausanias’ description of Trophonios’ oracle, and several of Plato’s dialogues. The mystery language forms the foundation for the simultaneous exposition of Plato’s philosophy and Pausanias’ description of the Oracle at Lebadeia. The imagery of nudity, purification, *katabasis* and *anabasis* provide the framework against which to gauge the experience of the soul’s descent-ascent to Plato’s realm of Truth as well as of the initiate’s descent-ascent to the god of the oracle. In a way, the final chapter experiments with possible expressions of the role of memory—one made explicit in the soul’s philosophical experience of the divine, the other in the initiate’s experience of the divine in a oracular context. The kernel that joins both these expressions together is the language of mysticism and initiation, the very verticality of which, for both Plato and Pausanias, requires the powers of memory.

The concept of memory distinguishes itself by its complexity, and as such I draw on many sources from Greek antiquity to lay bare its most intricate layers. From a religious Memory in Hesiod’s and Homer’s mythology, to a physiological memory in Aristotle, and a mystical memory in Plato. As I switch gears from a philosophical to an anthropological approach, and from historical to linguistic perspectives, my only attempt to justify such a multifaceted methodology is that the Greek concept of memory is markedly uniform in its power to throw vertical bridges. Ultimately, therefore, and very much with Simone Weil, I am concerned not only with understanding the role of memory in the Greek experience of the divine in its own terms, but also with the truth value of this understanding. Indeed, if the Greeks, as Simone Weil would have it, seek to bridge
human suffering and divine perfection, then rediscovering the bridge of Memory may lead us closer once again to the divine—through a theology of Memory, that is. Now, what better place to start than with an invocation to Memory herself:

ἐπεύχομαι δ’ Οὐρανοῦ τ’ εὐπέπλω θυγατρὶ
Μναμ[ο]συ[ν]α κόραις τ’ εὐ-
μαχανίαν διδόμεν.
τυφλα[ὶ γὰ]ρ ἀνδρῶν φρένες,
ὅστις ἄνευθ’ Ἑλικωνιάδων
βαθεῖαν ἐρευνᾷ σοφίας ὁδόν.
(Pindar Paean 7b15-20)

And I pray to the well-robed daughter of Ouranos, Mnemosyne, and her daughters, to give resourcefulness, for blind are the minds of men, whoever without the Heliconians seeks .... the steep path of wisdom.

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5 All translations from the original Greek and Latin texts are mine, unless mentioned otherwise.
Chapter I
Metaphors of Memory:
Conceptualizing Remembrance and Recollection

The concept of memory is notoriously hard to grasp, yet its importance is hard to overlook. It is connected to our understanding of phenomena like identity, time, knowledge, and history—personal as well as cultural.6 Salvatore Settis has argued that classical antiquity itself has provided us with the ruins that stir up memories of a distant ‘other.’7 Our present concern, however, is mainly with the internal human faculty that facilitates remembering, which is in no way less elusive. After one of Bertrand Russell’s more intricate discussions of memory and remembering, the philosopher famously concluded: “This analysis of memory is probably extremely faulty, but I do not know how to improve it.”8 At first glance, the concept of memory in the Greek experience of the divine rests on one major presupposition, namely that memory has some role to play in Greek religion; it should be borne in mind, however, that in a polytheistic system the religion is inseparable from its practice and its experience. The term the divine, therefore, is intended to encompass all that which makes explicit the divide between the human and the divine, an opposition that evokes mortality and immortality, life and death.9

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6 Finley 1965, 281-302.
7 Settis 2006, esp. 54-90.
8 Russell 1921, 187.
9 Vernant 1991, 27-49
In a religious system of reciprocity, the interaction or passage between the realms of mortality and immortality needs to be cultivated. Without sacred texts and dogmas, the Greek polytheistic system depends on the functional interaction between mortal human beings and the pantheon of immortal gods; and in a system of highly ritualized rules of reciprocity, the proper procedure is of defining importance. Although we may imagine an important role for the practical use of memory in the preservation of proper ritual procedures in an oral traditional culture such as that of the Greeks, it is with the conceptual use of memory within the system of human-divine interaction that we are presently concerned. The first indication that memory plays some significant role in the Greek experience of the divine are the myths surrounding the Titan goddess Mnemosyne, whose name means Memory, and who in most versions bears to Zeus nine children, the Muses. In a way, then, Memory sits right at the heart of the Greek pantheon.

Before we explore the significance of memory as a divinity or its role in the interaction between mortality and immortality, we need to come to terms with the concept of memory as the noetic human faculty that recalls. It is in these terms that Martin Heidegger in his lecture series What is called Thinking? conceptualized memory, as a source that releases its contents as a gift:

Memory, in the sense of human thinking that recalls, dwells where everything that gives food for thought is kept safe. We shall call it the ‘keeping.’ It harbors and conceals what gives us food for thought. ‘Keeping’ alone gives freely what is to-be-thought, what is most thought-provoking, it frees as a gift. ... The keeping itself is the most thought-provoking thing, itself is its mode of giving—giving itself which ever and always is food for thought.\(^{10}\)

The keeping gives thoughts freely and frees itself as a gift: the gift of Mnemosyne is essentially reflexive. Heidegger does not stand alone in his theorizing of memory as a

\(^{10}\) Heidegger 1968, 150.
keeping, a place of storage. A quick glance at intellectual history shows that something as elusive as memory is perhaps best captured through metaphors.\textsuperscript{11}

To memorize something—the process of internalizing knowledge to make it readily available, i.e. to commit information to memory—is expressed in English as learning ‘by heart.’ The Italians learn something ‘in the mind’ (a mente), but when the Dutch memorize they learn something ‘out of the head’ (uit het hoofd). The latter suggests a connection between memorization and external storage, which the Germans in fact express most abstractly: to memorize is to ‘learn externally’ (auswendig lernen). The paradox seems to be that memory is an internal mode of external storage. Our access to this external store is through the process of recalling or recollection, which brings about remembering. This distinction is important, because recollection (ἀνάμνησις) expresses memory’s verticality, while remembering denotes the horizontal actualization thereof. We remember where the car is parked and the day of our anniversary, but to recollect is to bring to light, up from the depths of the mind, information that we actively and consciously seek to recall. The process of recollection, then, is like climbing a ladder, using the set sequence of rungs to gather back up what dwells down below.

Our memory, however, tends to lose information: we forget things.

I sometimes find, and I am sure you know the feeling, that I simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into my mind. ... At these times ... I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one’s leisure.\textsuperscript{12}

The idea that we would be able to peruse our memories at our own leisure seems quite attractive, not too mention convenient for those who, like Professor Dumbledore, simply have too many thoughts and memories crammed into their minds. J.K. Rowling’s literary

\textsuperscript{11} Draaisma 2000, 7-23.
\textsuperscript{12} Rowling 2000, 518.
invention of the Pensieve illustrates the idea of separating the faculty of memory from
our mind, as it would allow us to relive past moments and revisit past events without the
tiresome process of recollection, and with no fear of forgetting or overlooking anything.
At the same time, the appearance of the Pensieve in popular literature hints at the sort of
thing that we imagine our memory to be: a mental faculty through which we can summon
back experiences from the past. But the Pensieve also allows its user to relive the past as
if it were the present, and to walk places one is not currently at—in other words, it
facilitates the transcendence of time and space. This mode of recollection presupposes the
idea that memory can be stored outside of ourselves, much like an external hard-drive or
a memory stick. The Pensieve, then, is an actual external store of memories, literally
disconnected from the mind, which simply re-creates all sense-perceptions of a particular
time and place, as some very sophisticated, indeed magical, copy. As illustrated by the
Pensieve, the idea of an external store is that such an access to information prevents this
information from being lost—forgetfulness is foiled, provided we know how to decode
the information.  

The capacity for decoding is indicative of a strong connection between memory
and language. To a certain extent, animals other than human beings have this capacity
too; Émile Benveniste points at bees in particular:

The bees appear to be capable of giving and receiving real messages which
contain several data. ... They can store these data in some kind of ‘memory.’ They
can, furthermore, communicate them by means of symbols, using different
somatic movements. Indeed, the most remarkable thing is that they show an
aptitude for symbolizing: there is undoubtedly a ‘conventional’ relation between
their behavior and the facts it conveys. ... So far we find among bees the very
conditions without which no language is possible, i.e., the capacity for
formulating and interpreting a ‘sign’ which refers to a certain ‘reality,’ the

13 Small 1997, 8, writes: “An external store requires only that the user should know how to ‘decode’ it, and
significantly the time when the decoding occurs is not important.”
memory of an experience undergone, and the ability to decompose that remembered experience.\textsuperscript{14}

Benveniste proceeds to point out several crucial differences between the communication systems of bees and that of humans, but concludes that although bees may not have a language, they at least have a signal code. The most important thing, however, is that these advanced forms of communication emerge in a society of insects: society is likewise the condition of human language, and memory plays a crucial role as the storage place that contains the data of communication.\textsuperscript{15}

Our most commonly used external storage device, however, is not a Pensieve, but pen and paper. The development of writing has been called the most significant cognitive step in human evolution,\textsuperscript{16} and although the intricacies of the advent of writing are beyond the scope of the present research, writing as such forms one of the most important metaphors to describe the workings of memory, also for human thinking that recalls.\textsuperscript{17}

The implications of an actual external store of memory were of a particular concern to Plato, whose Socrates in a well-known passage from the \textit{Phaedrus} retells the reaction of Thamus to Thoth’s invention of letters and writing:

\begin{quote}
‘τὸῦτο δὲ, ὦ βασιλεῦ, τὸ μάθημα,’ ἔφη ὁ Θεύθ, ‘σοφωτέρους Αἰγυπτίους καὶ μνημονικοτέρους παρέξει: μνήμης τε γὰρ καὶ σοφίας φάρμακον ἴσηθῆ.’ ὁ δὲ εἶπεν: ‘ὡς τεχνικῶτατε Θεύθ, ἄλλος μὲν τεκεῖν δυνατὸς τὰ τέχνης, ἄλλος δὲ κρίναι τίν’ ἔχει μοῖραν βλάβης τε καὶ ὀφελίας τοῖς μέλλουσι χρήσθαι: καὶ νῦν σύ, πατήρ ὁ γραμμάτων, ὃν γραμμάτων ὡς ἐννοοῦσαν τοῦναντιόν εἶπες ἢ δύναται. τοῦτο γὰρ τὸν μαθόντας λήπθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμέλετησία, ἀτε διὰ πίστιν γραφῆς ἐξοθικεῖν ὡς ἀλλοτρίων τύπων, οὐκ ἐνδόθων αὐτοῖς ψυχαῖς μὲν ἀναμμηνησκομένους: οὐκοῦν μνήμης ἀλλά ὑπομνήσεως φάρμακον ἴσηθος. σοφίας δὲ τοῖς μαθηταῖς δόξας, οὐκ ἀλλήλων πορίζεις: πολυήκοοι γάρ σοι γενόμενοι ἀνεύ διδαχῆς
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[14] Benveniste 1971, 52.
\item[16] Small 1997, 8.
\item[17] Draaisma 2000, 24 points out that just as the Latin \textit{memoria} had a double meaning of ‘memory’ and ‘memoir,’ so did the English noun \textit{memorial} once mean both ‘a memory’ and ‘written record.’
\end{footnotes}
'And this invention, o king,' said Theuth, ‘will make the Egyptians wiser and better at remembering. For a drug for memory and wisdom was discovered.’ But he said: ‘O most crafty Teuth, one man has the ability to beget things of art, but another has the ability to judge what share it has in harmfulness and usefulness for those who are going to use it. Now you too, since you are the father of letters, have said because of your affection the opposite of what it really can. For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn it, by neglect of their memory, inasmuch as through their trust in writing, externally because of characters that are not their own, they will not remember internally themselves by their own. You have not discovered a drug for memory but for reminding. You provide those who learn it with the appearance of wisdom, not truth. For they will become much-learned because of you but without instruction they will only seem to be very wise, while being for the most part ignorant, and difficult to be with, since they have become seemingly wise instead of being wise.’

The notion that writing provides an external storage device is made quite explicit, and not deemed to be useful for memory—it is a drug for reminding rather than for remembering. Writing may remind someone of the message externally, but remembering is the active process carried out internally; thus being reminded through the aid of writing undermines one’s memory through “neglect, lack of practice” (ἀμελετησίᾳ) in remembering. Plato also makes a distinction between the mere appearance of wisdom and truth, since for Plato, as we will see, true knowledge comes from the internal dialectic of recollection.

Part of Plato’s problem with written words is that they are mimetic: they are only as good as the knowledge of those who have written them. As with paintings, there is no dialogue possible:

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18 All Greek texts from Plato are from the Oxford Classical Texts, edited by John Burnet (1903), unless mentioned otherwise.
19 Small 1997, 10 suggests that Plato’s often recognized ambivalent attitude towards writing (after all, he himself in fact wrote extensively) rests on the “great transitional and formative stages” of writing at that time.
And [written] words are like that too: you might suppose that they speak as if they themselves in some way think, but if you were to ask them something, wishing to learn from the things they are saying, it still always signifies only one and the same thing. And whenever you write something once and for all, every word rolls along everywhere alike, for those who give ear to it, and so in the same way for those who have nothing to do with it; and it does not know to whom it should speak and to whom it should not.

Plato’s critique centers on the impossibility of reciprocation: the communication concerns only a certain objective fact, and with no dialogue possible the objective fact is merely imitated. The wisdom words convey is only as good as their representation of truth. In the Philebus, Socrates compares the writings in a book to the sense-perceptions in the soul, and he shows himself an epistemological skeptic toward sense-perception in general:

For I think that at that time the soul is like some book. ... For memory falls together with sense-perceptions into itself, and these experiences and the things which are around it, they seem to me almost to write words in our souls at that time; and when the particular experience writes the truth, true opinions and words from it agree with the truth are produced in us; but when such writer within us writes falsehoods, the resulting opinions and statements are the opposite of true.

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20 This critique in fact coincides with one of Benveniste’s criteria of language that is lacking among bees: “Because the bees are incapable of dialogue, the communication concerns only a certain objective fact. No “linguistic” information is involved, there being no reply. For a reply is a linguistic reaction to a linguistic manifestation.” Benveniste 1971, 53.
The sense-perceptions in the soul, like the writings in a book, cannot be a guarantee for the truth. In one of his letters, Seneca the Younger expresses a similar sentiment:

Quid est autem quare existimem non futurum sapientem eum qui litteras nescit, cum sapientia non sit in litteris? Res tradit, non verba, et nescio an certior memoria sit quae nullum extra se subsidium habet. (Seneca Letters 88.32)\(^{21}\)

But why is it that I should suppose that he who does not know letters will never be a wise man, since wisdom is not in letters? It [is wisdom that] communicates the truth, not words, and I do not know whether a memory that has no support beyond itself is more accurate.

Memory may not need any actual external device in order to improve its accessibility—it needs practice, which is precisely Plato’s skepticism toward writing, which will produce “forgetfulness in the souls of those who learn it, by neglect of their memory” (τῶν μαθόντων λήθην μὲν ἐν ψυχαῖς παρέξει μνήμης ἀμελετησίᾳ, Plato Phaedrus 275a).

In another letter, Seneca complains how his memory has become sluggish, and he compares his mind to a “scroll” (liber). To counteract his lack of practice he needs to unroll it more often:

Sed diu non retemptavi memoriam meam, itaque non facile me sequitur. Quod evenit libris situ cohaerentibus, hoc evenisse mihi sentio: explicantus est animus et quaecumque apud illum deposita sunt subinde excuti debent, ut parata sint quotiens usus exegerit. (Seneca Letters 72.1)

But I have not tested my memory for some time, and therefore it does not readily follow me. I feel that I have suffered the fate of a scroll whose rolls have stuck together by disuse; my mind needs to be unrolled, and whatever things have been stored away in there ought to be examined from time to time, so that they may be ready right when need requires.

This passage confirms idea of memory as the place in the mind “where whatever things have been stored away” (quaecumque apud illum deposita sunt), and the workings of memory—here the process of recollection—is described as “following me” (me sequitur). The language suggests that recollection happens through one thing after

\(^{21}\) The Latin texts from Seneca are from the Oxford Classical Texts, edited by L.D. Reynolds (1977).
another, thus following a pattern, a sequence. Although the metaphor of the scroll does involve the principle of writing, it in no way should remind us of our typical container of writing: a scroll is not used the way in which we use a book. A book can be opened at any random place, and can truly be perused at one’s leisure. A scroll, on the other hand, must be unrolled in the order in which it comes: the notion of sequence is thus much more specific than in the case of a bound book. Seneca wishes to train the accessibility of memory. Memory training, known as mnemotechnics or *ars memoriae*, does precisely that: it seeks to improve the accessibility of memory by strengthening the use of sequence when recollecting.  

The use of sequence finds expression in the notion of *places; loci* in Latin, or τόποι (*topoi*) in Greek, which are used by practitioners of mnemotechnics. Although the art and training of memory is a different subject altogether, the concept of memory in this context nonetheless bears witness to a crucial aspect of memory: its sequence and its spatiality. According to the tradition of oratory, the first one to discover this practice was the Greek lyric poet Simonides of Ceos, nicknamed Melicus (‘honeyed one’), who was able to identify the mangled corpses of those who died when the roof of Scopas’ dining room collapsed:

Simonides dicitur ex eo [modo], quod meminisset quo eorum loco quisque cubuisset. ... Hac tum re admonitus invenisset *fertur ordinem esse maxume*, qui memoriae lumen adferret. (Cicero *de Oratore* 2.86.353)

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22 That mnemotechnics actually are effective is convincingly demonstrated by Joshua Foer’s recent best-selling book *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, in which the author applies ancient mnemotechnics to become America’s memory champion; see Foer 2011.

23 Yates 1966, 29 mentions an ancient inscription from Greece dated to around 264 BCE, which actually lists Simonides as the inventor of mnemotechnics, in Loeb’s *Lyra Graeca* II, 249: “From the time when the Ceian Simonides son of Leoprepes the inventor of the system of memory-aids, won the chorus prize at Athens, and the statues were set up to Harmodius and Aristogeiton, 213 years (i.e. 477 BCE).” The fragment known as the *Dialexeis*, dated to around 400 BCE, contains a section on memory and how to practice and strengthen it through the use of attention, repetition, and images; Yates 1966, 29-30.

24 The Latin texts from Cicero are from the Teubner edition by Albert Wesenberg (1885).
It is said that Simonides through this method remembered in which place each of
them had been dining. ... Suggested by this event, then, he is said to have
discovered that the most important thing is **orderly arrangement**, which brings
forth the light of memory.

Those trained and versed in *ars memoriae* have acquired easy access to past facts they
wish to remember through the method of orderly arrangement, in which *places (loci)* and
*orderly arrangement (ordo)* play an important role:

> Itaque iis qui hanc partem ingenii exercerent, *locos* esse capiendos et ea, quae
> memoria tenere vellent, effingenda animo atque in iis locis collocanda; sic fore ut
> *ordinem* rerum locorum ordo conservaret, res autem ipsa rum effigies notaret
> atque ut *locis pro cera simulacris pro litteris* uteremur. (Cicero *de Oratore*
> 2.86.354)

And so, by those who train this part of their intellectual ability, *places* must be
selected, and these things which they wish to retain in their memory, they must be
formed in the mind and arranged in these places; it will be in this way, so that the
*orderly arrangement* of the places preserves the order of the facts, and the image
of the facts, moreover, marks the facts themselves, so that we use the *places as wax*
and the *images as letters*.

The basic idea of mnemotechnics is to assign mental images to mental places, and the
latter must be in orderly arrangement. By ‘walking’ through these places, then, the
images are presented in the same sequence. Cicero explains the spatiality of memory with
the analogy of inscribing a writing tablet: the places are represented by the wax (*cf. locis
pro cera*) and the images are represented by the written letters (*cf. simulacris pro litteris*).
Again, we should be aware that the analogy of a wax tablet differs from a book or a
papyrus roll, both of which despite their above-mentioned differences involve a certain
permanency. The letters on a wax tablet, on the other hand, can be easily erased, back to
a state of *tabula rasa*.

Cicero’s analogy, moreover, does not address the process of recollection or the
training of memory *per se*, but the proper use of places—the analogy is between
designing a so-called memory palace and inscribing a wax tablet. Thus the places are like
the wax, the images like the letters, the arrangement of the images is like the script, and
the ‘walk-through’ is like the reading. This indeed suggests that the places can and should
be used again:

The formation of the loci is of the greatest importance, for the same set of loci can
be used again and again for remembering different material. The images which
we have placed on them for remembering one set of things fade and are effaced
when we make no further use of them. But the loci remain in the memory and can
be used again by placing another set of images for another set of material. The
loci are like the wax tablets which remain when what is written on them has been
effaced and are ready to be written on again.25

The proper arrangement of the images (i.e. which image is assigned to which place)
stresses the importance of spatial sequence. If the letters of a word are in the wrong
order, the message cannot be decoded; so too, if the images are arranged haphazardly, the
information that is to be remembered presents itself in the wrong order, or is lost
altogether. This is why Aristotle in his Topics suggests that if someone wishes to train his
memory, the use of these places should become habitual, so that the mind has ready
access to the classification that the spatial sequence provides.26

Mnemotechnics essentially provides such a system of classification, and
strengthens through skill (ars, τέχνη) the artificial memory; this would be impossible,
however, if we were not already equipped with some innate natural capacity for memory.
Describing the workings of our natural memory in the Theaetetus, Socrates uses the
metaphor of a block of wax:

25 Paraphrase from the section on memory in Ad Herennium, in Yates 1966, 7. The Ad Herennium, long
attributed to Cicero but currently considered to be of unknown authorship, is a standard work on the art of
memory, and the earliest surviving Roman treatment of the subject, written probably around the first
century BCE.
26 Aristotle, Topics, 163b25-30.
Assume, then, for the sake of my argument, that there is a lump of wax within our souls, for some larger, for others smaller, and for some the lump is of purer wax, for others of impurer wax [like dung], and for some it is harder, and within others it is softer, and for some it is within measure. ... Let us say, therefore, that this is the very gift of Mnemosyne, mother of the Muses, and that if we should wish to remember things we have seen or heard or we ourselves have thought, we hold this very wax under the sense-perceptions and thoughts, and imprint them upon it, just as we make impressions from seal rings; and whatever is impressed, we remember and know as long as the image of it is implanted, but whatever is wiped out or cannot be impressed, we forget and do not know.

The metaphor compares memory to a block of wax, because the tertium comparationis is the malleability or impressionability of its surface: impressions can be left behind in the wax, depending on how big, pure, and hard it is. Just as a wax surface may be impressed with the image of a seal ring, so memory may be impressed with sense-perceptions and thoughts. A gift from the goddess Mnemosyne herself, the human faculty of memory is located within the soul, where it retains the impressions of things heard, seen, and thought, as long as the imprints thereof do not fade.

The same metaphor of the seal-ring is used by Aristotle in his work *On Memory and Recollection*, and he too stresses the importance of the quality of the surface:

> ἡ γὰρ γιγνομένη κίνησις ἑνσημαίνεται οἷον τύπον τινά τοῦ αἰσθήματος, καθάπερ οἱ σφραγιζόμενοι τοῖς δακτυλίοις. (Aristotle *De Memoria* 450a31-450b)

For when the movement occurs it imprints as some mould of the sense-perception, precisely as when stamping with seal-rings.

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27 The Greek text is from Aristotle’s *De Sensu and De Memoria*, edited by G.R.T. Ross (1973), from the series *Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*. All other texts from Aristotle are from the Loeb Classical Library.
Memory does not occur when people are in rapid transition, or when they are old or very young—there is either too much fluidity or too much density for the sense-perception to leave a proper imprint (450b). Aristotle’s physiological analysis of memory and recollection is very much dependent on the theory of knowledge which he expounds in his *On the Soul*. It suffices to say that for Aristotle all knowledge ultimately is derived from sense-perception, in which form it enters the soul, although it is treated by or absorbed into the imaginative faculty before it becomes thought: imagination, which produces a mental picture, is the intermediary between sense-perception and thought (*De Anima*, 427b; cf. *De Memoria*, 449b34: καὶ νοεῖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἄνευ φαντάσματος, “there is no thinking without imagery”). Interestingly, the entering of sense-perception into the soul is described as “movement” (κίνησις), a term essential in Aristotle’s signature potentiality-actuality distinction.

Elsewhere, Aristotle defines κίνησις as “the actualization of what potentiality is, as such” (ἡ τοῦ δυνάμει ὄντος ἐντελέχεια, ἣ τοιοῦτον, *Physics* 201a11), though there is much debate on what Aristotle exactly means. We may interpret κίνησις as a translatory motion with intrinsic meaning (e.g. learning how to play the Moonlight Sonata), thus the actuality of potentiality qua potentiality. A piano player who is learning to play the Moonlight Sonata has the potentiality to actually play it; his practicing the piece (κίνησις), then, is the actuality of the potentiality as such, namely the potentiality to actually play it. The potentiality-actuality paradigm becomes especially important when

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28 Yates 1966, 32.
29 Kosman 1969, 40. A common interpretation (e.g. by Ross) is that κίνησις means the passage from potentiality to actuality, but Kosman has a slightly different view, as he distinguishes several types of potentiality.
we consider Aristotle’s distinction between memory (μνήμη) and recollection (ἀνάμνησις). First, Aristotle determines the object of memory:

πρῶτον μὲν οὖν ληπτέον ποία ἐστι τὰ μνημονευτά· πολλάκις γάρ ἐξαπατᾶται τούτο. οὐτε γάρ τὸ μέλλον ἐνδέχεται μνημονεύειν, ἀλλ' ἐστι δοξαστὸν καὶ ἐλπιστόν (εἴη δ’ ἂν καὶ ἐπιστήμη τις ἐλπιστική, καθάπερ τινὲς φασι τὴν μαντικήν), οὔτε τοῦ παρόντος, ἀλλ’ αἴσθησις· (Aristotle de Memoria 449b7-14)

First, then, it must be taken of what kind the objects of memory are; for often this is utterly mistaken. For it is not possible to remember the future, but it is the object of opinion and hope (there might also be some science which deals with hope, just as some say that prophecy is), nor is it possible to remember the present, but that is sense-perception.

For Aristotle, “memory is about the past” (ἡ δὲ μνήμη τοῦ γενομένου, 449b16).

Aristotle’s rationalizing account of memory attempts to demystify what apparently were, to his mind, common misconceptions about the temporality of memory:

ἀλλὰ τοῦ μὲν παρόντος αἴσθησις, τοῦ δὲ μέλλοντος ἐλπὶς, τοῦ δὲ γενομένου μνήμη, διὸ μετὰ χρόνου πᾶσα μνήμη, ὡσθ’ ὅσα χρόνου αἰσθάνεται, ταῦτα μόνα τῶν ζῷων μνημονευεῖ, καὶ τούτῳ ὃ αἰσθάνεται. (Aristotle de Memoria 449b29-33)

But sense-perception is concerned with the present, hope with the future, and memory with the past. Hence all memory is with time. So that as much as those of the animals who remember are the only ones to perceive time, also by this [time] they perceive it [memory].

Aristotle’s strict separation of time into past, present, and future necessitates the positing of different epistemological devices to correspond with each object of time: knowledge about the past is acquired through memory, knowledge about the present through sense-perception, and knowledge about the future is acquired through hope (the science of which is called prophecy).

At the same time, we have seen that Aristotle ultimately derives all knowledge from sense-perception, and that memory consists of sense-perceptions leaving an imprint in the soul. Aristotle’s remark that “all memory implies lapse of time” (μετὰ χρόνου πᾶσα
μνήμη, 449b) goes two ways: those animals that have a sense of time are the only ones that remember, and those who remember can in turn perceive time. Remembering, then, means to perceive a sense-perception or to know a thought without the sense-perception or the thought actually being there:

But whenever one has knowledge and sense-perception without things of actuality, in this way he remembers; in one case that he learned or speculated, in the other that he heard, or saw, or did something like that [i.e. sense-perception]; for it is necessary when one in actuality remembers, in the soul so to speak, that he first heard or perceived or thought of the thing. Memory, then, is neither perception nor conception, but a condition or affect of one of them, whenever time has passed.

For Aristotle, remembering “in actuality” (ἐνεργῇ) requires the recognition that one has thought or perceived the same thing before, which was imprinted in the soul as an act of κίνησις. In the soul, the imprint has become “a condition or affect” (ἔξις ἡ πάθος) of one of these past experiences and can potentially be remembered; this is the type of potentiality of the man who can speak Greek but is currently being silent, as against the potentiality of the infant Greek baby who has not yet developed speech. In the following passage, Aristotle describes the “movement” (κίνησις) of bringing a memory “into actuality” (ἐνεργῇ), the resultant state of which is to remember something (an actual memory, μνημόνευμα):

31 Kosman 1969.
So that when the movement of this [experience] is actualized, if the soul, on the one hand, perceives it the way in which it is according to itself, it appears to arrive as some thought or image: if, on the other hand, the soul perceives it the way in which it is of something else, one regards it just as a representation in a painting, and as [a representation] of Koriskos, even when we have not seen Koriskos; here the experience is different from regarding it in this way, and when one regards the animal as something that has been drawn, it occurs in the soul as a simple thought, and when [the soul regards it as] a representation, [it occurs] as a memory.

Here Aristotle reiterates the point that he who remembers must be aware of the fact that he remembers: if the soul does not recognize the actualization of the movement (i.e. the remembered thought or perception) as an imprint of something else, it will occur in the soul as a “thought” (νόημα) rather than a “memory” (μνημόνευμα). When one sees a painting of Koriskos, viewing Koriskos as Koriskos is a νόημα (“object of thought”); viewing Koriskos as an εἰκών (“representation”) of Koriskos is a μνημόνευμα (“memory”).

Aristotle notes how mix-ups in either direction happen—the ecstatics, for example, made the mistake of thinking that something is an εἰκών when it is in fact not (451a10). The distinction is important for those who wish to train their memory:

αἱ δὲ μελέται τὴν μνήμην σώζουσι τῷ ἐπαναμνήσκειν· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν οὐδὲν ἔτερον ἢ τὸ θεωρεῖν πολλάκις ὡς εἰκόνα καὶ μὴ ὡς καθ’ αὐτό. τί μὲν οὖν ἐστι μνήμη καὶ τὸ μνημονεύειν, ἄριστη, ὅτι φαντάσματος, ὡς εἰκόνος οὐ φάντασμα, ἔξεσθαι καὶ τίνος μορίου τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν, ὅτι τὸν πρώτου αἰσθητικοῦ καὶ ὃ χρόνου αἰσθανόμεθα. (Aristotle de Memoria 451a13-19)

But practice strengthens the memory through recollection; this is nothing other than viewing something frequently as a representation and not as the thing in itself. What, then, is memory and remembering: it is said that it is the condition of a mental image, as a representation of the thing of which it is the image; and of

32 See also 452b30; in Ross’ translation: “When, however, one actually remembers, it is impossible not to know it or to be unaware that that is so, for it is just in being aware of this that memory consists.” Ross 1973, 117.
which portion in us: it is said that it is of the primary seat of sense-perception and the part by which we perceive time.

Now, Aristotle distinguishes recollection from remembering. The memory itself, the imprint, is described as an affect (πάθος) or a condition (ἐξίς) of the soul, and remembering it is described as occurring in a state of actuality (ἐνέργεια); recollection, on the other hand, is a process described as movement from potentiality toward actuality (κίνησις), and thus teleological in nature. Aristotle affirms that “recollection is neither the recovery nor the acquirement of memory” (οὔτε γὰρ μνήμης ἐστὶν ἀνάληψις ἢ ἀνάμνησις οὔτε λήψις, 451a22-3), nor is it learning, because learning requires external aid (from a teacher, or a book!) while recollection is a strictly internal process (452a).

The occurrence of an act of recollection is due to the natural tendency for the one movement (κίνησις) to happen after the other. Recollecting, in a way, is starting up a sequence, which is why numbers for example are easily recalled, since they have an orderly arrangement (τάξις, 452a4; cf. Latin ordo).

καὶ ὅταν τούτων ἀναμμηνήσκεσθαι βούληται, τοῦτο ποιήσεις ζητήσει λαβεῖν ἄρχην κινήσεως, μεθ’ ἣν ἐκείνη ἔσται. (Aristotle de Memoria 451b33-5)
δὲ δὲ λαβέσθαι ἄρχης, διὸ ἀπὸ τόπων δοκοῦσιν ἀναμμήνησκεσθαι ἐνίοτε. (Aristotle de Memoria 452a13-5)

And whenever one wishes to recollect, he shall do this: he shall search to select a starting point of a movement, after which there will be that one [which he is looking for].
A starting point must be selected; which is why people sometimes seem to recollect from places.

The selection of a proper “beginning, starting point” (ἄρχη) is pivotal for the sequence of translatory movement to work, that is: from potentiality to actuality. In the context of recollection, the use of places (τόποι) that we have encountered before in mnemotechnics (which for Aristotle are very much the same: memory training happens through
recollection) now takes on a slightly different meaning: the mental mapping of places does not just suggest a dimension of spatial sequence, but of teleological spatial sequence.33

In this last passage from Aristotle’s On Memory and Recollection, recollection and remembering are once again contrasted; most importantly, Aristotle propounds that the power to recollect is unique to human beings, while other animals may have the capacity to remember, too:

Recollection differs from remembering not only on account of time, but in the fact that while many of the other animals take part in remembering, none of the—as they say—known animals partakes in recollection, except humans. The reason is that recollection is like some syllogism; for one who recollects infers (syllogizes) that he saw or heard or experienced some such thing before, and it is much like some search.

Recollection is described to be some sort of “syllogism” (συλλογισμός), a power of reasoning ascribed to humans only. Recollection, like a syllogism, is an analysis: “beginning with your present thought, as it were with a minor premiss, you develop it further by a series of middle terms which finally lead to the idea you are in search of, just as your middle terms in a deduction finally bring you the ultimate predicate which is to be attached to the subject.”34 Although Aristotle’s concept of memory is not so different from Plato’s—both imagine sense-perceptions and thought to leave imprints on what is conceived of as a malleable surface within the soul—their ideas about recollection vastly

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33 Teleological, though sometimes uncontrollable, see 453a20ff.
34 Ross 1973, 284.
differ. As the famous encounter of Socrates with the slave-boy in the *Meno* so aptly illustrates, Plato thinks the soul recollects theoretical knowledge it has received prior to its bodily existence.\(^{35}\) For Aristotle soul and body are *distinct*, but for Plato soul and body are or can be *separate*. Socrates tells Meno how he learned from priests and priestesses, as well as from Pindar and other divine poets, that the human soul is immortal (81b).

\[άτε οὖν ἡ ψυχὴ ἀθάνατός τε οὖσα καὶ πολλάκις γεγονυῖα, καὶ ἑωρακύια καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε καὶ τὰ ἐν Ἅιδου καὶ πάντα χρήματα, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅτι οὐ μεμάθηκεν: ὅστε οὐδὲν θαυμαστὸν καὶ περὶ ἁρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἷῶν τ’ εἶναι αὐτὴν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἃ γε καὶ πρότερον ἕπιστατο. ... τὸ γὰρ ἄρει ἔαρα καὶ τὸ μανθάνειν ἀνάμνησις ὅλον ἐστίν. (Plato *Meno* 81c-d)

The soul is therefore immortal and has been born often, and has seen all things here and also in Hades; there is not anything it has not learned; so it is not at all surprising that it can recollect about virtue and about other things also, things which it knew before. ... For searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection.

Aristotle’s psychology and epistemology do not allow for knowledge that is not ultimately derived from sense-perception, while Plato’s metempsychosis (cf. “the soul is therefore immortal and has been born often”) allows for a soul that “knew things before” (πρότερον ἕπιστατο).\(^{36}\) For Plato, “searching” (ζητεῖν, cf. Aristotle’s ζήτησις, 453a) and learning are part of recollecting; teaching, like that which Socrates does to the slave-boy, is the facilitation of recollection, indeed very much along the same terms of the syllogistic “search” (ζήτησις) that Aristotle ascribes to recollecting.

To gain access to our memories, so that we can achieve the actuality of remembering, requires the movement of recollection. It is worth noting, furthermore, that while for us the words *re-member* and *re-collect* imply that information is collected or called to mind *again* (as in: it is *back* from having been gone), the Greek word for recollection ἀνά-μνησις expresses the process as going *up* (ἀνά, “up”). The Greek term

\(^{35}\) Grube and Cooper 2002, 59.

\(^{36}\) Cf. *Phaedo* 72d-e and 76e.
for recollection thus implies a vertical movement *par excellence*. This verticality of memory is present both in Plato’s and Aristotle’s understanding of recollection: Aristotle’s concept of recollection bridges potentiality and actuality, as it facilitates the vertical *upward* movement from an imprint of a past experience to a present representation thereof; in Plato’s *Philebus*, too, Socrates expresses the power of recollection as opposed to remembering in explicitly upward terms:

Σωτηρίαν τοίνυν αἰσθήσεως τὴν μνήμην λέγων ὀρθῶς ἂν τις λέγοι κατά γε τὴν ἐμὴν δόξαν. ... Μνήμης δὲ ἀνάμνησιν ἢρ’ οὐ διαφέρομεν λέγομεν; ... Ὄταν ἀνάληπται σώματος ἐπανασκέψῃ ποθ’ ἢ ψυχή, ταῦτ’ ἄνευ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῇ ἐν ἑαυτῇ ὑπεράνει, τότε ἀναμνήσκεσθαι ποιήσει. ... Καὶ μὴν καὶ ὅταν ἀπολέσασα μνήμην εἰτε αἰσθήσεως εἰτ’ αὐτῷ μαθημάτως ἀνακαθάρισθαι πάντα αὐτῇ ἐν ἑαυτῇ, καὶ ταῦτα ἄναμνησθαι ἀναλήψῃ ποιήσει. (Plato *Philebus* 34a-c)

I think, then, that memory may rightly be defined as the preservation of sense-perception. ... But do we not say that memory differs from recollection? ... When the soul alone by itself, without the body, takes up completely the things which it experienced with the body, I suppose we say that it recollects. ... And in fact when the soul has lost again the memory either of a sense-perception or of something it has learned, and then alone by itself turns it up again, I suppose we call everything of that kind *recollected*.

Plato’s definition of memory as the preservation of sense-perception aligns with Aristotle’s view, but for Aristotle recollection is the actualization of the potentiality to remember, not the recovery of memory (cf. οὔτε γὰρ μνήμης ἐστὶν ἀνάληψις ἢ ἀναμνήσις, 451a22-3). The fact that Plato emphasizes that recollection is an activity in the soul “alone by itself, without the body” (ἄνευ τοῦ σώματος αὐτῇ ἐν ἑαυτῇ) suggests—since there is nothing the immortal soul has not learned—that the *recollected* of knowledge is superior to any knowledge that arises from the body.
And while we live, we shall be closest to knowledge, if we, as far as possible, neither associate with the body nor join with it, ... but purify ourselves from it, until the god himself will set us free. And in this way, being pure and being released from the body’s thoughtlessness, so we shall, I think, be with the pure and shall know of ourselves all that is unmixed, and that is, perhaps, the truth: for it would not be rightful that the pure is attained by the impure.

The soul, purified from disassociation with the body, may come closest to knowledge—true knowledge, that is—and the soul’s ascend to knowledge is, as we have seen, through recollection. This purification, then, is to be perfected by the god himself, who sets the soul free, in the soul’s final uplifting toward the divine—a theme we shall revisit in the last chapter. We are thus provided with a first tasting of Plato’s concept of recollection that bridges the soul’s immortality and one’s mortal bodily existence, as it facilitates the vertical upward movement from bodily ignorance to the purified soul’s true knowledge.

Aristotle purports to have a secularized and physiological account of memory, which establishes a paradigm of memory and recollection that is temporal, spatial, sequential, and teleological. For Plato, the human power of recollection provides a direct bridge between the realm of the immortal soul and the realm of the mortal body. We may not be surprised, then, that Atheneaus referred to Plato as a devotee of the goddess of memory herself. And it is with these notions of vertical and spatial access to memory and the bridging capacity of recollection that we shall approach the Greek goddess who herself bestowed upon us that divine, waxen gift of memory.

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37 Athenaeus 5.216b, in Small 1997, 86.
Chapter II
Memory and Forgetfulness:
Toward a Theology of Mnemosyne

The role of memory in the Greek experience of the divine finds its most immediate expression in the theology of Mnemosyne. Despite reluctance surrounding the word theology because of modern-day monotheistic connotations, the word θεολογία, as Albert Henrichs points out, “is in origin a perfectly good pagan word,” the basic meaning of which is ‘talk about the gods.’ Theology thus understood as “verbalized reflections on the ‘nature’ of divinity” is perfectly at home in any discussion of Greek religion. In order to define a specific deity such as Mnemosyne, we may be best served by following the advice of Detienne and Vernant:

We have learnt from the work of Georges Dumézil that the best way to define a deity is to differentiate it from other deities and classify it. When we undertake to define the reciprocal relationships existing between the various gods and to establish the positions they occupy in relation to each other, we must take as our fundamental point of departure the forms of complementarity and opposition which link or separate any two divine powers.

It is along those lines of complementarity and opposition that we shall approach Mnemosyne. In a well-known passage from the Histories, Herodotus ascribes primacy to Hesiod and Homer as instrumental in the formation of the Greek pantheon:

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38 Henrichs 2010, 21.
40 Detienne and Vernant 1978, 187. Emphases are mine.
These are the men who composed a theogony for the Greeks, and who gave the gods their epithets, and who distinguished their honors \([\text{timai} = \text{spheres of influence}]\) and skills \([\text{tekhnai} = \text{spheres of activity}]\), and who indicated their forms.\(^{42}\)

Evoking the distinction between what anthropologists call etic and emic perspectives, Henrichs observes that the viewpoint of “the vast majority of modern students of Greek religion”\(^{43}\) is etic rather than emic. According to the *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, “An emic model is one which explains the ideology or behaviour of members of a culture according to indigenous definitions. An etic model is one which is based on criteria from outside a particular culture.”\(^{44}\) Merely recognizing that “emic and etic methodologies produce vastly different insights into Greek culture and especially Greek religion”\(^{45}\) seems insufficient, for ultimately the Greek *experience* of the divine is, ideally, approached from an understanding of the system from within the system, which perhaps requires more intimate ways of engaging with the experience of the divine than ‘etic’ scholarship would normally prescribe. If we are to understand how the divinity of Memory is experienced, we must look, if at all possible, beyond her epithets, honors, skills, and forms. Herodotus points us in the right direction. Although she makes no appearance—as a distinct deity at least—in the Homeric epics,\(^{46}\) Mnemosyne features

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41 The Greek text from Herodotus is from the Loeb Classical Library, edited by A.D. Godley (1920).
42 For \(\text{τίμαι} \) and \(\text{τέχναι} \) as ‘spheres of influence’ and ‘spheres of activity’ see Nagy 1990a.
43 Henrichs 2010, 28.
45 Henrichs 2010, 28
46 For memory in Homeric epic, see Simondon 1982, esp. 22-97.
quite prominently in Hesiod’s *Theogony*: thus a theology of Memory properly starts with Hesiod.

The *Theogony* is at its very core concerned with the classification of gods and their relationships. Mnemosyne (Μνημοσύνη, “Remembrance, Memory”) appears in meaningful relationships of complementariness and opposition with several other divinities. Regarding her own lineage, first of all, it is noteworthy that Mnemosyne is grouped among the other Titans, as the first-born generation of Gaia (“Earth”) and Ouranos (“Sky”):

\[
\text{Οὐρανῷ εὐνηθεῖσα τέκ' Ἄκεανον βαθυδίνην,}
\text{Κοῖνον τε Κρην θ' Ὕπεριονά τ' Ἰαπετόν τε}
\text{Θείαν τε ὘τεῖαν τε Θέμιν τε Μνημοσύνην τε}
\text{Φοίβην τε χρυσοστέφανον Τηθόν τ' ἐρατεινήν}
\text{τοὺς δὲ μεθ’ ὁπλότατος γένετο Κρόνος ἀγκυλομήτης}
\]

Lying with Ouranos she [Gaia] bore deep-swirling Okeanos, Koios and Krios, Hyperion and Iapetos, Theia and Rheia, Themis and Mnemosyne, gold-crowned Phoebe and lovely Tethys; and after them was born Kronos, the youngest, of crooked cunning.

The categorization of Mnemosyne as one of the Titans has puzzled scholars. Occasionally, Mnemosyne and her Titan siblings are subjected to typically etic approaches of pseudo-historicism, which have yielded very little.\(^\text{48}\) For others, the grouping of Mnemosyne with the other Titans has suggested a vestige of the importance of memory in the oral culture of pre-literate Greeks: “Folk-memory has preserved in this legend the once supreme importance of a divinity who sank into a minor cult with the

\(^{47}\) All Greek texts from Hesiod are from the Teubner edition, edited by A. Rzach (1967).

\(^{48}\) Hard 2004, 34, where the Titans are suggested to be pre-hellenic gods of some older religious system, nature-powers, phallic deities, or imported from Hurro-Hittite mythology. It is even propounded that the Titans cannot at any stage have been a coherent group, see p. 36.
advent of written literature.””\textsuperscript{49} Even as this needlessly historicizing comment touches upon the elusive problem of the transformation from an oral to an oral \textit{and} a literary system, it negates the role of the Titans in the mythological narrative as such, and further suggests that oral culture and thus the function of Mnemosyne would have died out with the advent of written literature—an idea that seems to presuppose the mutual exclusivity of oral and literary systems, which is a fallacy. Nonetheless, “the consecration of [Mnemosyne] indicates the value that is set upon it in a civilization whose traditions were entirely oral.”\textsuperscript{50}

To a certain extent, the Titans may be identified as gods preceding the current order,\textsuperscript{51} so that Zeus’ eventual victory in the Titanomachy is the triumph of Olympianism over the more natural powers embodied by the children of Gaia and Ouranos.\textsuperscript{52} Although the names of the Titans do suggest the embodiment of certain natural powers and can even be grouped as such (Okeanos, Tethys, sea; Hyperion, Phoebe, sun, heaven; Themis, Iapetos, earth),\textsuperscript{53} the juxtaposition Titans vs. Olympians does not simply fall into natural vs. ethical powers, as has been suggested.\textsuperscript{54} The Titans Mnemosyne and Themis\textsuperscript{55} seem to represent psychological and social rather than natural powers, and are future brides of Zeus; after Metis, Themis, Eurynome, and Demeter, and before Leto and Hera, Mnemosyne assumes the role as one of the wives of Zeus:

\textsuperscript{49} Notopoulos 1938, 466.
\textsuperscript{50} Vernant 1983, 76.
\textsuperscript{52} Harrison 1962, 458: “The Titanes are children of Earth and Heaven, with a leaning toward Heaven. ... The Titanomachia stands for the triumph, partly only, of Olympianism over that higher from of Naturism which is Ouranianism.”
\textsuperscript{53} Roscher 1965, s.v. Titanen, 40-50.
\textsuperscript{54} Roscher 1965, s.v. Titanen, 40-50.
\textsuperscript{55} Themis has chthonic connotations, though, too, which is why she can be classified as an ‘earth’ power.
And again, he [Zeus] made love to Mnemosyne with the beautiful hair, from whom the gold-crowned Muses were born nine of them, who delight in festivals and the pleasures of song.

This seemingly peculiar position of Mnemosyne and Themis has led to the belief that the two goddesses are utterly out of place among the other Titans. If anything, their assimilation into the Olympian system as consorts of Zeus suggests that Mnemosyne and Themis are not to be taken as merely allegorical, nor as just abstract personifications of their respective spheres of influence, but as real goddesses.

But if we are to take the Titans seriously as pre-Olympian gods, we should take seriously, too, the spheres of skills and influence they commanded. Diodorus Siculus’ account, which he attributes to the Cretans, definitely took the eleven (instead of Hesiod’s twelve: Theia is absent) Titans seriously as gods with each their distinct sphere of influence:

Μνημοσύνης δ’ ἐξαὐτὶς ἔράσσατο καλλικόμοι, ἐξ ἧς οἱ Μοῦσαι χρυσάμπυκες ἐξεγένοντο ἑννέα, τῇσ ἅδον θαλίαι καὶ τέρψις ἀοιδῆς.
(Hesiod Theogony 915-7)

If anything, their assimilation into the Olympian system as consorts of Zeus suggests that Mnemosyne and Themis are not to be taken as merely allegorical, nor as just abstract personifications of their respective spheres of influence, but as real goddesses.

56 Fabienne Blaise 1998 points out that this is the only instance in which the verbal form of eros is used to describe a sexual encounter, and not without significance: "L’utilisation du verbe pour cette union doit sans doute être elle-même mise en rapport avec l’identité de ce qu’elle va produire : les Muses, très nettement associées au « désirable », puisque l’une s’appelle Eratô (v. 78).” In effect, this passage contains three more hints at the actual names of the Muses—τέρψις, Euterpe and Terpsychore; θαλίαι, Thaleia.
57 Martin West 1966, 204 comments that “both goddesses are put here merely because of their antiquity.”
58 Hard 2004, 37.
60 The Greek texts from Diodorus Siculus are from the edition by Bekker, Dindorf, and Fischer (1906).
Each of them was the discoverer of things of benefit for humankind, and because of the benefaction to all, they were met with honors [= sphere of influence] and everlasting memory. ... And thus these gods, since they introduced many things for human life, they were not only deemed worthy of honors [= sphere of influence], but they were also said to be the first ones to inhabit Olympus after their departure from humankind.

The last line is particularly revealing: the Titans were gods living among humans, before they withdrew to that archetypical divine dwelling place, Olympus—here not exclusively associated with Zeus’ kingship. The Titans discovered things of benefit for humankind for which they were in turn rewarded with spheres of influence (the very characteristic of a god); Diodorus’ mythology suggests a reciprocal system in which gods merit their divinity in a direct and concrete way. The Titans have been separated from the power over which they preside, and are thus no mere abstractions or personifications—their spheres are defined in terms of their usefulness to human beings, and hence they win “everlasting memory” (μνήμης ἀεινάου). Diodorus relates for example how Kronos brought humans “from a rude way of living to civilized life” (ἐξ ἀγρίου διαίτης εἰς βίον ἡμέρον, Library 5.66.4), and how Hyperion was the first to understand and explain the movements of the heavenly bodies (Library 5.67.1); Themis is credited with being the “first of the gods to have introduced the power of divination, burnt sacrifices, and divine ordinance” (μαντείας καὶ θυσίας καὶ θεσμοὺς ... τῶν θεῶν πρώτην εἰσηγήσασθαι, Library 5.67.4). When Zeus forcefully replaces (or rightfully succeeds) Kronos as the new sovereign, the old generation of gods is still in place in terms of the sphere of influence they preside over; in turn, the new gods do not discover benefits for humankind themselves, they are instructed into a skill and rewarded honors Zeus himself has discovered:

61 Cf. Pindar Olympian 13.17, ἄπαν δ έὑρόντος ἔργον, “all credit belongs to the discoverer.”
62 Cf. Diodorus Library 5.70.1.
The myth relates that Zeus imparted to each of these [his children] the knowledge of the things that were discovered by himself and of works he was finishing up, and also assigned them the honors [= sphere of influence] of his discovery, wishing to procure everlasting memory for them among all humankind.

This differs significantly from the Titans’ system of being awarded everlasting memory;

Mnemosyne, by contrast, procured her own honors because she “discovered powers of reasoning” (Μνημοσύνην λογισμούς εὑρεῖν, 5.67.3):

Of the female Titans they say that Mnemosyne discovered powers of reasoning, and that she arranged the placement of the names to each of the things such as they are, by means of which we also express each thing and converse with one another; things which some say Hermes introduced. But they attribute to this goddess also the power to bring things to renewal, and becomes memory for people, from which indeed she received her common name.

The power of name-giving is appropriate in the context of oral traditional poetry in general, and to creation myths (cf. Genesis 2:19-20) and catalogue poetry in particular, which are very much concerned with proper categorization and classification. Diodorus further points at an overlap in spheres with Hermes, who is also concerned with speech and who “has perfected the skill of complete and clear reporting more prodigiously than all others” (τὸ τῆς ἀπαγγελίας ἀρτιον καὶ σαφὲς ἐκπεπονηκότα περιττότερον τῶν ἄλλων, Library 5.74.2). Mnemosyne can bring things “to renewal” (πρὸς ἀνανέωσιν), which expresses the same vertical movement as in recollection (cf. ἀνα-νέωσιν and ἀνά-μνησις).

The reasoning power (λογισμός) Mnemosyne presides over is a calculative faculty very
much akin to Aristotle’s *syllogism* (συλλογισμός), which also plays a key role in Aristotle’s subject-matter of the *Metaphysics*, which so famously opens with “all men by nature desire to know” (πάντες ἄνθρωποι τοῦ εἰδέναι ὀρέγονται φόσει, 980a21). Aristotle is quick to bring up *reasoning power* (λογισμός) as a distinctly human faculty; its importance consists in the human capacity to connect memories into a single experience:

τὰ μὲν οὖν ἄλλα ταῖς φαντασίαις ζῇ καὶ ταῖς μνήμαις, ἐμπειρίας δὲ μετέχει μικρὸν: τὸ δὲ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος καὶ τέχνη καὶ λογισμοῖς. γίγνεται δ’ ἐκ τῆς μνήμης ἐμπειρία τοῖς ἀνθρώποις: αἱ γὰρ πολλαὶ μνήμαι τοῦ αὐτοῦ πράγματος μιᾶς ἐμπειρίας δύναμιν ἀποτελοῦσιν. (Aristotle *Metaphysics* 980b25)

The other animals live by appearances and memories, and partake but a little in experience; but the human race lives both by skill and powers of reasoning. Experience comes to humans from memory, for many memories of the same event produce the potentiality of a single experience.

The sphere Mnemosyne presides over, then, is the very mental faculty that for Aristotle distinguishes humans from other animals, which is the power to *connect memories* into one full, complete, and unified experience. To describe this process, Aristotle uses his trademark concept of “potentiality” (δύναμις) which is connected to the “movement” (κίνησις) towards “actuality” (ἐνέργεια); the role of memory is to provide the basic resources for the experience, but it is through “skill and powers of reasoning” (τέχνη καὶ λογισμοῖς; also Mnemosyne’s sphere) that humans may *actualize* their potential of having a meaningful experience. This notion is practically similar to Aristotle’s concept of recollection, which is a form of κίνησις and even expressed in terms of (συλ)λογισμός.

We can infer, therefore, that Mnemosyne embodies both the actuality (remembering) and the potentiality (recollection) of the sphere of memory.

Although Aristotle’s treatment of the concept of memory is, as we have seen before, physiological and secularizing, it has nonetheless retained the importance of
sequence: Diodorus’ verb that expresses Mnemosyne’s discovery of *drawing up in a certain order* (τάξαι, from τάσσω; cf. Aristotle’s own use of the τάξις [452a4] of mathematical arrangement) revisits the connection between memory, place, and sequence, as recognized by the *places* (loci, τόποι) used in Greek and Roman mnemotechnics. If we can infer from this that the placement of things is essential to Mnemosyne’s sphere, we may venture an even closer connection between Hesiod’s *Theogony* and the importance of place. In the *Physics*, Aristotle concludes that place does have an actual existence, but the mode of its existence is unclear (*Physics* 210a); he suggests that the positing of the existence of “void, empty space” (τὸ κένον) simultaneously recognizes the reality of “place” (τόπος), for the “void” is supposed to be a place without anything in it (*Physics* 208b). Then some sort of space would exist independent of the objects it is filled with:

δόξειε δ’ ἂν καὶ Ἡσίοδος ὀρθῶς λέγειν ποιήσας πρῶτον τὸ χάος. λέγει γοῦν ἑαυτὸν μὲν πρώτιστα χάος γένετ’, αὐτὰρ ἐπειτα γαί’ εὐρύστερνος, ὡς δέ τὸ κένον πρῶτον υπάρξαι χώραν τοῖς οὖσι, διὰ τὸ νομίζειν, ὡσπερ οἱ πολλοὶ, πάντα εἶναι ποι καὶ ἐν τόπῳ (Aristotle *Physics* 208b30).

And this would also suggest that Hesiod said it correctly when he made Chaos the first; he says at least: ‘First of all things Chaos came into being, but then broad-bosomed Earth,’ since first there must already exist room for things to be there; because he thought, just like the majority, that everything must be somewhere and must be in a place.

If Chaos (“Gape”) is a sort of place, or rather a “room” (χώραν) comparable to “empty space” (κένον), then we may conjecture a closer connection between the prime role of the Muses, daughters of Memory, in the lengthy proem of the *Theogony*, and the Hesiodic idea of starting a theogony with Chaos—*empty space*. Indeed, the Art of Memory and power of Mnemosyne consists of the proper sequential arrangement of *places* in our

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63 *Theogony* 116-7, with a slight variation.
mind, and hence the filling of empty space. Thus the role of memory in, quite literally, filling the gap(e), takes on a new meaning when put in the context of Hesiod’s *starting point* (ἀρχή): through the mnemonic power of the Muses and their mother, who initiate the sequence, the empty space becomes a filled space. To go even further: the temporality and the spatiality of the *Theogony* are dependent on the proper sequence to bring its subject-matter to actuality.

The role of giving names, putting things in order, and filling space that Mnemosyne fulfills is further evidenced in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, in which the newborn god needs to secure his own place among the immortals—Hermes himself sings a theogony:

\[
\textit{κραίνων ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς καὶ γαῖαν ἐρεμνήν, ώς τὰ πρῶτα γένοντο και ὡς λάχε μοίραν ἐκαστος. Μνημοσύνην μὲν πρῶτα θεῶν ἐγέραιρεν ἄκουσθαι, μητέρα Μουσάων ἣ γὰρ λάχε Μαιάδος υἱόν· ἀθανάτους ἐγέραιρε θεοὺς Διός ἀγλαὸς υἱὸς, πάντ’ ἐνέπων κατὰ κόσμον, ἐπολέμιον κιθαρίζων. (Homeric Hymn to Hermes 427-32)\]

[He sang,] authorizing the immortal gods and the dark earth, how at first they came into being, and how each obtained their portion. First of the gods he honored Mnemosyne in song, mother of the Muses; for she gave the son of Maia his share. Then the splendid son of Zeus honored the immortal gods, relating all of them in proper order, playing the lyre upon his arm.

Clearly, Hermes and Mnemosyne are structurally related; Hermes’ own sphere of influence is dependent on Mnemosyne: “for she gave the son of Maia his share” (ἡ γὰρ λάχε Μαιάδος υἱόν). It is not just that both divinities preside over the power of speech and communication, but Hermes also honors Mnemosyne first because he is performing a

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64 All Greek texts from the *Homeric Hymns* are from the Loeb Classical Library, edited by H.G. Evelyn-White (1977).
65 In *Orphic Hymn* 28, to Hermes, the prayer calls upon Hermes to bestow, among other things, ‘remembrance, mindfulness’ (μνημοσύνησιν, l. 12).
theogony: the ritual act itself requires the memory, the name-giving, and the proper sequential arrangement that is necessary for his song to be efficacious. The ritual aspect of such a performance is underscored by the fact that the poem tells us how Hermes “authorizes” (κραίνον) the gods and their spheres of influence. Therefore his theogony has to be sung “in proper order” (κατὰ κόσμον—the word κόσμος also has the connotation of something orderly and beautiful, something aesthetically pleasing, cf. Homeric Hymn to Hermes 420-1). The ritual performance that praises past events sung in accordance with order provides an aesthetic delight that is inherent in the correctness and appropriateness of both form and content, sequence and detail. Just as Hermes authorizes the status quo of the Olympian gods (and ultimately himself) through his song, so too does Zeus’ marriage to Mnemosyne, who presides over the proper order of things, authorize his sovereignty.

It is in this context that we may fully come to appreciate Zeus’ marriage to the Titan Mnemosyne. Regarding Zeus’ union with Metis and Themis, Detienne and Vernant have shown how “the combination of these two marriages ensures the supremacy of the new king of the gods, for the two goddesses [form] a pair of powers that are both complementary and opposed ... whose knowledge encompasses the entire cycle of time.” Through marrying them, Zeus consummates their complementary omniscience: while Metis represents cunning-intelligence and tells of the future as holding possible good or evil fortunes, Themis “represents the aspects of stability, continuity and

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66 For a discussion of kata kosmon, see Ford 1992, 122-3: the key seems to be that something kata kosmon is appropriate in temporal sequence and detail as well as in social propriety; thus the order may have an aesthetic aspect, too. For Murray 1981, 94, kata kosmon, indicates therefore ‘both form and content,’ well-structured and true; she refers to the ‘excellent exegesis’ on this passage by Lanata 1963, 12-3.

regularity, the cyclical return of the seasons ... the fixity of destiny.” Perhaps the stability of Zeus’ sovereignty depends in part on his assimilation with the more ancient (mythologically, that is, not historically) powers of his divine brides. Mnemosyne’s being a Titan, then, is less related to her historical antiquity than to her sphere of influence, which authorizes the sovereignty of Zeus through commemorating and perpetuating the proper order of things. Their daughters, in turn, embody the efficaciousness of their mother’s sphere, and in this way delight their father:

\begin{verbatim}
αὖτις δ’ ἀνθρώπων τε γένος κρατερῶν τε Γιγάντων ὑμενεύσαι τέρπουσι Διὸς νόον ἐντὸς Ὀλύμπου
Μοῦσαι Ολυμπιάδες, κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι.
\end{verbatim}

(Hesiod *Theogony* 50-3)

Again, singing of the race of men and of that of the strong Gigantes, they delight the mind of Zeus inside Olympos, Olympian Muses, daughters of aegis-holding Zeus.

As much as Zeus’ assimilation to Metis and Themis provides the newly established sovereign with access to and the inauguration of certain types of knowledge, so too does his union with Mnemosyne represent the incorporation of a kind of knowledge:

\begin{verbatim}
ἀλλὰ παρθένοι γάρ, ἵσατει, Μο[ί]σαι,
πάντα, κε[λα]νφεί σὺν
πατρὶ Μναμοσ[ύ]νῃ τοῦτον ἔσχετε
(Pindar *Paean* 6.54-7)
\end{verbatim}

Come maiden Muses, for you know all things, along with your dark-clouded father and Mnemosyne you have that privilege

The knowledge to which the Muses and Zeus have access, through their structural proximity to Mnemosyne, is *the knowledge of the past*, which is to be ritually commemorated through the performative powers of the Muses. Memory is a crucial

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68 Detienne and Vernant 1978, 108.
component, as Aristotle also realized (it requires time lapsed), to a conceptualization of the past—that is, the past as a reality that is grounded in a type of spatiality and sequence.

The ‘past’ is an integral part of the cosmos. To explore it is to discover what is hidden in the depths of being. History as celebrated by Mnemosoune is a deciphering of the invisible, a geography of what is supernatural. What then is the function of memory? It does not reconstruct time, nor does it abolish it. By eliminating the barrier that separates the present from the past it throws a bridge between the world of the living and that beyond to which everything that leaves the light of day must return.  

Vernant here suggests that Mnemosyne eliminates the divide between present and past, and in that way she bridges the here and the beyond. In relation to Greek cosmogony and her union with Zeus, Mnemosyne embodies the access to the past—in a way, by being eternally present Memory. With the presence of the past sitting right beside him, Zeus has added yet another component of omniscience to his arsenal that allows him to authorize and perpetuate his sovereignty. The knowledge of the past, however, is not simply knowledge of an historical past—exploring the depths of being, the truth that Mnemosyne’s bridge discloses, the geography she maps out, leads to an omniscience that is open to any lapse in time, so long as the path is laid out in recollective sequence, in accordance with order. In this way, then, the theology of Mnemosyne is revealed to authorize Zeus’ supremacy and delight his mind inside Olympus.

There is a double register, however, in the context of the delight Mnemosyne and her daughters provide. The element of delighting does not only arise from singing in proper order and the authorization of the status quo through songs of praise, but also from the idea that Memory has a meaningful complementary relationship with Forgetfulness.

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69 Vernant 1983, 80.
Mnemosyne, in a way, functions as an antidote to misery and sorrow—she provides temporary consolation:

τὰς ἐν Πιερίῃ Κρονίδη τέκε πατρὶ μιγείσα  
Μνημοσύνη, γουνοῖσιν Ἑλευθήρος μεδέουσα,  
λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἀμπαυμᾶ τε μερμηράων.  
ἐννέα γάρ οἱ νύκτας ἐμίσγετο μητίετα Ζεὺς  
νόσφιν ἀπ' ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν λέχος εἰσαναβαίνων.  
(Hesiod Theogony 53-7)

Them [the Muses] she bore in Pieria, mingling with the father, son of Kronos, Mnemosyne, ruling over the ridges of Eleuther, forgetfulness of evils and ceasing of troubles. For wise Zeus was mingling with her for nine nights climbing into her holy bed far from immortals.

Mnemosyne is a “forgetfulness of evils and ceasing of troubles” (λησμοσύνην τε κακῶν ἀμπαυμᾶ τε μερμηράων). The emphatic position of λησμοσύνην (“Forgetfulness”) at the beginning of the line forms a meaningful paradox with the position of Mnemosyne (“Remembrance”) at the beginning of the previous line. In terms of her spheres of activity and influence, then, she has the capacity to make others forget their suffering: “The necessary counterpart to recollection of the past is the ‘forgetting’ of present time.”

70 Neue Pauly, s.v. Mnemosyne: “Sie ist von Zeus, dem sie neun Nächte beiwohnt, Mutter der neun Musen, die den Menschen Freude und temporäre Unbeschwertheit bringen.”
71 Pieria is the region immediately to the north of Olympus, and perhaps more importantly, “it is the first place at which gods alight when going down from Olympus” in Homer, see West 1966, 174, where he also cites examples of gods descending from Olympos via Pieria, e.g. Hera when she goes to Lemnos (Iliad 14.226) and Hermes when he goes to the Ogygian Isle (Odyssey 5.50). West thinks the Olympus-Pieria district must have been at one time the principal center of a cult to the Muses, West goes even further: “As [Mnemosyne] was primarily a goddess of singers, it is not unlikely that a ‘school’ of poets existed there in Hesiod’s time,” 174-5. Pausanias confirms the existence of at least two places of worship, in addition to the elaborate shrines at Mt. Helicon, see Pausanias Description 1.2.5 (images of Athena Paionia, Zeus, Mnemosyne, the Muses, and Apollo at the shrine of Dionysos at Athens) and 8.46.3 (images of the Muses and Mnemosyne represented on the altar of Athena at Tegea, Arkadia). If anything, the existence of a cult of Mnemosyne suggest that indeed she was an object of worship and thus no mere allegory.
72 Mnemosyne herself rules (μεδέουσα, cf. the Homeric formula Ζεῦ πάτερ ἑδήν μεδέον) over the hills of Eleuther; West also assigns a place of cult to Eleutherae on Cithaeron, see West 1966, 175.
73 Vernant 1983, 81.
idea of memory and remembering only underscores the dialectic reciprocity of, for that matter, any Greek divinity.

Remembering and forgetting, Memory and Forgetfulness, Mnemosyne and Lethe; those are structurally very much related by their necessary opposition. In Plato’s discussion on memory in the *Philebus*, Socrates defines forgetfulness as “the departure of memory” (ἐστὶ γὰρ λῆθη μνήμης ἠξοδος, *Philebus* 33e). “The root for ‘forget’ ... is lēth-,” Nagy explains, “[which is] the functional opposite of mnē- ‘remember, have in mind’, a root that can also mean ‘have the mnemonic powers of a poet’ in the diction of Archaic poetry.”\(^{74}\) Mnemosyne is the very embodiment of such powers, and as such much more than just good memory; similarly, Lethe is far from being simply a kind of unawareness.\(^{75}\) The *Theogony* speaks of Lethe, a child of Strife, among the lugubrious offspring of Night:

tékte δὲ καὶ Νέμεσιν, πῆμα θνητοίς βρωτοίς,  
Νῦς ὀλοή· μετὰ τὴν δ’ Ἀπάτην τέκε καὶ Φυλότητα  
Γῆρας τ’ οὐλόμενον, καὶ Ἡριν τέκε καρτερόθυμον.  
αὐτὰρ Ἔρις στυγερή τέκε μὲν Πόνον ἐλγνόεντα  
Δήθην τε Λιμόν τε καὶ Ἀλγεα δακρυοέντα  
Ὑσίμνας τε Μάχας τε Φόνους τ’ Ἀνδροκτασίας τε  
Νείκεα τε Ψευδέας τε Λόγους Ἀμφιλλογιάς τε  
Δυσνομίην τ’ Ἀάτην τε ...  
(Hesiod *Theogony* 223-30)

And she also bore Nemesis, misery for mortal men,  
deadly Night did; and after her she bore Deceit and Friendship,  
and destructive Old Age, and she bore strong-hearted Strife.  
But hateful Strife bore painful Toil,  
and Forgetfulness, Famine, and tearful Pains,  
Fights, Battles, Murders and Manslaughters,  
Quarrels, Lying Words, and Disputations,  
Lawlessness and Delusion ...

\(^{74}\) Nagy 1990b, 44.  
\(^{75}\) Detienne 1996, 24-2.
It is in the antithetical relation to Lethe, the evil sister of such siblings as “painful Toil” and “tearful Pain,” that Mnemosyne’s sphere is to be determined, as well as by her own intricate relation with her daughters, the Muses:

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\text{ἣ δ’ ἔτεκ’ ἐννέα κούρας ὁμόφρονας, ἦσιν ἀοιδή} \quad \text{60}
\mbox{μέμβλεται ἐν στήθεσσιν, ἀκηδέα θυμὸν ἐχούσας}
\]

(Hesiod *Theogony* 60-1)

And she bore nine daughters, all of the same mind, for whom song is an object of care in their breast, having a heart free of sorrow.

The Muses, similar to other female divinity groups such as the Fates or the Graces, function as one coherent whole. The poem describes them as “all of the same mind, agreeing, united” (ὁμόφρονος). The Muses are further described as being “free of sorrow” (ἀκηδέα), perhaps as a result of their main interest, “song” (ἀοιδή). The word ἀκηδής is not without significance; it occurs once more in the *Theogony*, when Zeus himself is said to be “unconquered and free of sorrow” (ἀνίκητος καὶ ἀκηδής, *Theogony* 489) as his father Kronos swallows a rock instead of him. In the *Iliad*, the word is used by Achilles to characterize the state of the gods, who “are free of sorrow themselves” (αὐτοὶ δὲ τ’ ἀκηδέες εἰσι, *Iliad* 24.525), as opposed to “grieving mortals” (βροτοῖσι ἀχνυμένοις, *Il.* 24.525-6). Thus ἀκηδής seems to denote more than the simple absence of pain or grief; rather, it implies a state of being that belongs to the realm of divine perfection, while κῆδος (“sorrow”) belongs to the realm of human misery, suffering, and mortality. This interpretation finds further support in a passage from Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, where the primeval Golden Race living under the reign of Kronos is described in the following way:

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\text{ός τε θεοὶ δ’ ἐξων ἀκηδέα θυμὸν έχοντες}
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76 In the *Iliad*, for example, wolves and lambs are described as not having an “agreeing heart” (ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν, *Iliad* 22.263).
They were living like gods, having a heart free of sorrow, far removed and free from toils and woe; and not even terrible old age was upon them ...

Only when humans lived like gods, they were free of sorrow; in this god-like state they were also “free from toils” (ἀτερ τε πόνων) and unaffected by “terrible old age” (δειλὸν γῆρας), whose personifications are, respectively, the brother (Πόνος) and the uncle (Γῆρας) of Mnemosyne’s antithesis: Forgetfulness (Λήθη).

77 Philostratus reports how Apollonius in very old age used to chant a hymn to Mnemosyne:

τὸ τοι μνημοσύνην ἑκατοπτήν γενόμενον καὶ ὑπὲρ τὸν Σιμωνίδην ἔρρωτο, καὶ ὤμος αὐτῶ τις ἐς τὴν μνημοσύνην ἣδετο, ἐν ὃ πάντα μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ χρόνου μαραίνεθαί φησιν, αὐτὸν γε μὴν τὸν χρόνον ἄγηρῳ τε καὶ ὀθάνατον παρὰ τὴν μνημοσύνην εἶναι. (Philostratus Life of Apollonius 1.14)

In fact, even when he [Apollonius of Tyana] was a hundred, he still surpassed Simonides in power of memory, and some hymn to Mnemosyne was sung by him, in which he says that all things are withered away by time, but time itself is ageless and immortal because of memory.

In Apollonius’ song, it is “memory” (μνημοσύνην) itself who preserves time by rendering it “ageless” (ἄγηρῳ, cf. once again the contrast with Γῆρας) and “immortal” (ἄθανατον), the two defining qualities of a Greek god. Thus the opposition Lethe-Mnemosyne intimates the opposition between old age and ageless, human misery and divine perfection—it is Memory herself who bridges the vertical divide between the realms of mortal men and immortal gods.

77 Connecting ‘grief’ with ‘not to be forgotten,’ Menelaus notes that the sufferings of Odysseus are “a grief for me never to be forgotten,” ἐμοὶ δ᾽ ἄχος αἰὲν ἄλαστον (Odyssey 4.108). So, too, upon Kronos’ swallowing of his children does “a grief not to be forgotten seized Rhea,” Ῥέην δ᾽ ἔχε πένθος ἄλαστον (Theogony 467).

78 The Greek text from Philostratus is from the Loeb Classical Library, edited by Christopher P. Jones (2005).
The evils of Lethe and the blessings of Mnemosyne are explicitly addressed in the

*Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne*, a hymn which puts a particular emphasis on the presence of

Mnemosyne in the minds of mortals:

Μνημοσύνην καλέω, Ζηνὸς σύλλεκτρον, ἄνασσαν,

ἡ Μούσας τέκνωσ’ ἱεράς, ὑσίας, λιγυφώνους,

ἐκτὸς ἐόους κακῆς λήθης βλαψίφρονος αἰεί,

πάντα νόον συνέχουσα βροτῶν ψυχαίσι σύνοικον,

εὐδύνατον κρατερὸν θυητῶν αὐξουσα λογισμόν,

ηδυτάτη, φιλάγρυπνος ὑπομνήσκουσά τε πάντα,

ὁν ἃν ἐκαστός ἀεὶ στέρνοις γνώμην κατάθηται,

οὔτι παρεκβαίνουσ’, ἐπεγείρουσα φρένα πᾶσιν.

ἀλλὰ, μάκαιρα θεά,

μύσταις μνήμην ἐπέγειρε εὐιέρου τελετῆς,

λήθην δ’ ἀπὸ τῶν δ’ ἀπόδειμε. 79

(Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne) 80

I call upon queen Mnemosyne, consort of Zeus,

who bore the holy Muses, sacred, clear-voiced,

she is far from evil forgetfulness—always harmful to the mind,

and she keeps together the entire mind, dwells with the souls of mortals;

she makes stronger and increases the reasoning power of mortals,

most sweet, wakeful, she reminds us of all things,

each of which always stores a thought in our breast,

never straying, arousing the mind to all things.

Come, blessed goddess, arouse for the initiates the memory

of the sacred rite, and dispel forgetfulness from them.

The reference to “initiates” (μύσταις) and a “sacred rite” (εὐιέρου τελετῆς) is

commonplace in almost all the poems that form the collection of Orphic Hymns, and this

suggests the hymns were used in a cult-society that practiced mysteries, using the name

of the mythic singer Orpheus as its patron. 81

Most hymns contain exhortations asking the god to do something, 82 but most of these are very general in nature, 82 or do not address

79 All Greek texts from the *Orphic Hymns* are from the edition by Apostolos N. Athanassakis (1977).
81 e.g. ἔλθε, *O.H. 14.12; κλῦθι, *O.H. 15.10; ἀλλὰ, *O.H. 6.10; βαῖν*, *O.H. 53.9*
82 e.g. to Apollo, *O.H. 34.27; κλῦθι, μάκαρ, σώζων μύσταις ἱκετηρίδι φωνῆι, ‘hear, blessed one, the suppliant voice of the initiates and save them’
the initiates at all in the hymn. The call upon Mnemosyne to awaken memory for the initiates and to ward off forgetfulness is, by comparison, remarkably specific—this may indicate a particular aptitude: perhaps the vertical powers of Mnemosyne, namely those of recollection, lend themselves for a quite specific applicability to the initiate and the sacred rites of the mysteries. Indeed, the theology of Mnemosyne embodies the sort of *accessibility* to the divine realm away from sorrow that the initiates seek to embark on, whether in life or in death.

The Hymn’s invocation of the goddess Mnemosyne is not just an indiscriminate appeal to some mental faculty, but an invocation of the position she occupies similar in importance to Aristotle’s secular account of memory. Mnemosyne, who is called “wakeful” (φιλάγρυπνος, l. 6), assumes a presence that keeps the entire mind together: she “dwells with the souls of mortals” (βροτῶν ψυχαῖσι σύνοικον, l. 4), which suggests a proximity that recognizes an intimate reciprocal relationship with a divinity as well as an acute awareness of the sort of mental faculty that memory constitutes. After all, Mnemosyne increases the “power of reasoning” (λογισμόν, l. 5)—the same word Aristotle used to describe that distinctly human faculty that connects memories, and the same word Diodorus used to define Mnemosyne’s very sphere of influence. Her action is to “arouse” or “awaken memory” (ἐπέγειρε μνήμην, l. 9; or “arouse the mind,” ἐπεγείρουσα φρένα, cf. Pindar, *Olympian* 8.74, μναμοσύναν ἀνεγείροντα) and to “dispel forgetfulness” (λήθην ἀπόπεμπε, l. 10) of the “sacred rite” (εὐιέρου τελετῆς, l. 10)—it is safe to assume, therefore, a double register of the workings of Mnemosyne in this hymn: she needs to be invoked as a mnemonic power to secure the remembering of the sacred

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83 e.g. to Earth, *O.H.* 26.10: ἄλλα, μάκαιρα θεά, καρποὺς αὔξοις πολυγηθεῖς, ‘come, blessed goddess, may you multiply the gladsome fruits’
rite, and she serves as the bridge between the world of the living and the beyond to which everything that leaves the light of day must return. We may be inclined to consider the function of Mnemosyne here twofold, one secular and profane (memory as a mnemonic device), and one religious and sacred (Memory as a divinity who throws a bridge). From an emic perspective, however, these functions are, albeit perhaps distinct, then at least not separate. Mnemosyne provides access to a kind of knowledge that in itself resembles a religious initiation.

In its structural complementarity with Lethe, the theology of Mnemosyne as thus far proposed finds some of its validation in the ritual texts for the afterlife known as the Orphic gold tablets. These gold leaves, which have been found mostly in grave-sites across Magna Graecia, mainland Greece, and Crete, are inscribed with instructions for the netherworld that are remarkably uniform, and that are believed to be in tune with Orphic, Bacchic, or Pythagorean eschatology. What concerns us here, however, is the fact that Mnemosyne features prominently as a religious power that plays an important role in these texts, presumably to guarantee the initiate’s soul the remembrance of its original condition. But as in the Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne, the gold tablets suggest a double register for Mnemosyne, as for example in the Hipponion text.

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84 Some variation exists in the naming of the gold tablets. Graf and Johnston 2007 refer to them as Orphic or Bacchic gold tablets; Bernabe and Cristobal 2008 call them Orphic gold tablets; Zuntz 1971 refers to them as ‘Orphic’ gold leaves; Tzifopoulos 2010 talks about ‘Orphic-Bacchic’ gold lamellae; Bowden 2010 simply calls them gold tablets or gold leaves. Needless to say, we are unsure about the meaning of denominations like ‘Bacchic’ and ‘Orphic,’ as in the context of the ‘Orphic’ hymns, too. For our present purposes, however, it suffices to be sure of the fact that the references to bakkhoi and mystai indicate that the texts bear some relationship to mystery cults and initiation, Bowden 2010, 148-55.

85 For a map of Fundorts, see Graf and Johnston 2007, 2.

86 Bernabe and Cristobal 2008, 18.

87 The oldest example so far and one of the clearest and longest texts, this piece of gold foil from the burial of a woman (the gender of αὐδος, however, is masculine) in Hipponion in southern Italy, dated to around 400 BCE, Bowden 2010, 148. Graf and Johnston 2007, 4 note that “the rectangular gold tablet, folded several times, was found lying on the upper chest of the skeleton and was perhaps attached to its neck by a tiny string,” as some sort of amulet.
This is the work of Mnemosyne. When he is on the point of dying toward the well-built abode of Hades, on the right there is a spring and near it, erect, a white cypress tree. There the souls, when they go down, refresh themselves. Don’t come anywhere near this spring! But further on you will find, from the lake of Mnemosyne, water freshly flowing. On its banks there are guardians. They will ask you, with sagacious discernment, why you are investigating the darkness of gloomy Hades. Say: ‘I am a child of Gaia and starry Ouranos; I am dry with thirst and dying. Give me, then, right away, fresh water to drink from the lake of Mnemosyne.’ And to be sure, they will consult with the subterranean queen [Persephone], and they will give you water to drink from the lake of Mnemosyne, so that, once you have drunk, you too will go along the sacred way by which the other initiates and bacchoi advance, glorious.

The two registers are clearly recognizable: one calls the tablet the “work of Mnemosyne” (Μναμοσύνας ἔργον, l. 1), which, hung around the neck of the deceased initiate, should provide him with a mnemonic device in the underworld (which is also why the text is a poem, written in hexameter verse), in order to remember the instructions and to be reminded of the knowledge about the subterranean topography to which Mnemosyne

88 This is the edition of the tablet from Hipponion (L1, Fr. 474 B) as in Bernabe and Cristobal 2008, 245. The translation is theirs, with only slight variations: “spring” instead of “fountain”; “Gaia” and “Ouranos” instead of “Earth” and “Heaven”; and “initiates” instead of “mystai.”
through the spatial sequence of places has access;\textsuperscript{89} the second register takes shape as “the lake of Mnemosyne” (τὰς Μναμοσόνας λίμνας, l. 6 and 14), the water of which is related to the role Memory plays as an instrument of salvation, in the vertical bridging of the world of the living and the beyond. The deceased initiate is supposed to tell the guardians that he is a “child of Gaia and starry Ouranos” (Γῆς παῖς καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος, l. 10), which means, like Mnemosyne herself, the generation of Titans, and could suggest a link to the Hesiodic Golden Race who lived free from sorrow under Kronos. In any case, it signifies a special relationship with the immortal gods.\textsuperscript{90}

The first spring that is to be avoided, though never named, has been commonly identified as a spring of Lethe, Forgetfulness; the oblivion and death of the spring of Lethe stand in opposition to the remembrance and life of the lake of Mnemosyne.\textsuperscript{91} The role of Mnemosyne in the eschatology as presented by the Hipponion tablet suggests that to drink the water of Memory is to be saved: the initiate will advance along the sacred way, glorious. To have drunk from the lake of Mnemosyne is not simply the guarantee that the initiate arrives in paradise with his recollection intact to enjoy the rewards more fully,\textsuperscript{92} but a guaranteed access to recollective powers that lifts the initiate up to the status of blessed immortality itself—the theology of Mnemosyne allows her initiates to be saved by not being forgotten as well as to be saved by not forgetting.

The water of Mnemosyne provides access to the special knowledge that belongs to her divine domain, while the water of Lethe blocks this type of access. The imagery of water is a familiar motif in this context, and Mnemosyne’s daughters, the Muses, are

\textsuperscript{89} Graf and Johnston 2007, 94; Bernabe and Cristobal 2008, 15.
\textsuperscript{90} Graf and Johnston 2007, 116.
\textsuperscript{91} Graf and Johnston 2007, 117; Bernabe and Cristobal 2008, 29-35; Tzifopoulos 2010, 114 n. 54; Bowden 2010, 149.
\textsuperscript{92} This is Johnston’s conclusion, Graf and Johnston 2007, 120.
themselves associated with springs and streams. For Heidegger, recollection and thinking back is connected with poetry through the image of water:

Memory, Mother of the Muses—the thinking back to what is to be thought is the source and ground of poesy. This is why poesy is the water that at times flows backward toward the source, toward thinking as a thinking back, a recollection. ... Poetry wells up only from devoted thought thinking back, recollecting.

In the next chapter, then, we will see how the theology of Mnemosyne spills over into that of her daughters, whose initiate—the poet—also gains access to the very powers of Memory itself.

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93 In Latin, the Muses are called Musae or Camenae, the latter which are specifically well and fountain divinities. The Theogony too, opens with the Heliconian Muses dancing around springs and creeks. In Pindar’s Isthmian Ode 6.74-5, the Muses are water-bearers: “I shall give him to drink the pure water of Dirke, which the deep-bosomed daughters of golden-robed Mnemosyne brought forth from the well-walled gates of Cadmus,” πίσω σφε Δίρκας ἁγνὸν ὕδωρ, τὸ βαθύζωνοι κόραι / χρυσοπέπλου Μναμοσύνας ἀνέτειλαν παρ᾽ εὐτειχέσιν Κάδμου πύλαις.

94 Heidegger 1968, 11.
Chapter III
Memory and Truth:
The Singer-Poet and the Divine Gift of the Muses

The theology of Mnemosyne involves a strong structural connection between the mother and her daughters, the Muses, and their respective powers: memory and poetry-song. With the latter term I mean to emphasize the oral aspect of the poetic tradition, similar to how Nagy in his *Greek Mythology and Poetics*\(^95\) refers to the poet/singer to underscore the findings of the fieldwork of Milman Parry and Albert Lord: “Singer, performer, composer, and poet are one under different aspects *but at the same time,*” says Lord. “Singing, performing, composing are facets of the same act.”\(^96\) The etymology of the word Muse (μοῦσα) and thus a linguistic connection with Mnemosyne is uncertain, but some scholars have derived the word from the root *menth-* (‘mental’).\(^97\) Yet the immediate practical interconnectedness between memory and poetry-song seems straightforward, “not only because poetry preserves the memory of the past but also because the poet himself had to place special reliance on memory before the invention of writing.”\(^98\)

\(^95\) Nagy 1990b, 21.
\(^96\) Lord 1960, 13
\(^97\) Frisk 1970, 261, s.v. μοῦσα: “wir sind für die Etymologie auf bloße Vermutungen angewiesen.”
\(^98\) Hard 2003, 78.
Although the presence of Mnemosyne herself is invoked only occasionally,99 the invocation to the Muses is ubiquitous, and aims at establishing an explicit and direct relation between the goddesses and her initiate, the singer:

εἰ γάρ τις καὶ πένθος ἔχων νεοκηδέι θυμῷ
ἀζηταί κραδίην ἀκαχήμενος, αὐτὰρ ἀοιδός
Μουσάων θεράπων κλέεα προτέρου ἀνθρώπουν
ὑμνήσῃ μάκαρας τε θεούς, οἳ Ὄλυμπον ἔχουσιν,
αὐτὸς δὲ τε παρέτραπε δόρα θεάων.  
(Hesiod Theogony 98-103)

For if someone who also has grief in his fresh-sorrowed spirit, groans since his heart is troubled, yet when a singer, attendant of the Muses, chants the glorious deeds of past men and chants the blessed gods, who inhabit Olympus, at once he at least forgets his anxieties, nor does he in any way remember his sorrows; swiftly the gifts of the goddesses turn him away from these.

The singer’s epithet, “attendant of the Muses” (Μουσάων θεράπων), identifies the poet with the Muses, as the poetic word θεράπων has its origins in the notion of “ritual substitute” (cf. the Iliad refers to the warrior as θεράπων of Ares).100 The singer is identified with the goddesses themselves, which enables him to deliver a religiously efficacious performance act that makes his audience “forget and not remember in any way their sorrows” (ἐπιλήθεται οὐδὲ τι κηδέων μέμνηται)—sorrows that belong to the realm of human misery and mortality. As with Mnemosyne (cf. Theogony 55), the poet’s memory is forgetfulness for others.101 The Muses, in effect, bridge the two realms by their gift of song to the singer, so that he may relieve human “sorrow” (κῆδος); for to be

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99 e.g. Pindar Paean 7, Plato Critias 108d
100 Nagy 1990b, 48.
101 Detienne 1996, 81. In the Odyssey, Helen uses a ‘drug’ (φάρμακον), ‘banishing pain and sorrow, and lacking gall, making them forget all evils,’ νηπενθές τ᾽ ἄχολόν τε, κακῶν ἐπιλήθεται ἀπάντων (Od. 4.221).
‘without sorrow’ (ἀκηδέα) means, as we have seen, to be closer to the divine (cf. the Golden Race).

At the same time that the ‘truth’ of becoming is unveiled before his eyes—that is, the definitive establishment of divine and cosmic order, and the progressive disorder among mortal creatures, the poet’s vision of the ancient times liberates him, to a certain extent, from the evils that beset contemporary humanity, the race of iron. It is as if memory brings him a transmutation of his own temporal experience.102

In this context, then, Zeus’ union with Mnemosyne and the appropriating of her sphere of influence and skill to the Olympian system—a function that is embodied by their uniquely ninefold offspring—is conferred on the human level through the reciprocal interaction between the Muse and the singer.

In fact, an alternate genealogy provides a structural connection between the Muses and the other Titans; according to Alcman as recorded by Diodorus Siculus, the Muses are the daughters of Gaia and Ouranos:103

ταύτας γάρ οἱ πλείστοι τῶν μυθογράφων καὶ μάλιστα δεδοκιμασμένοι φασί θυγατέρας εἶναι Διὸς καὶ Μνημοσύνης: ολίγοι δὲ τῶν ποιητῶν, ἐν οἷς ἐστι καὶ Ἀλκμᾶς, θυγατέρας ἀποφαίνονται Οὐρανοῦ καὶ Γῆς, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὸν ἄριθμον διαφωνοῦσιν: οἱ μὲν γὰρ τρεῖς λέγουσιν, οἱ δὲ ἐννέα, καὶ κεκράτηκεν ὁ τῶν ἐννέα ἀριθμὸς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιφανεστάτων ἀνδρῶν βεβαιούμενος, λέγω δὲ Ὡμήρου τε καὶ Ἡσιόδου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων τῶν τοιούτων.

(Diodorus Library 4.67.1-2)

For the majority of the mythographers and those with most reputation say that they [the Muses] are the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne; but some of the poets, among whom is Alcman, proclaim that they are daughters of Ouranos and Gaia. Similarly they also disagree about their number: for some say there are three, while others say nine; but the number nine has prevailed, since it is confirmed by the most prominent men, I mean by Homer and Hesiod and by all such others.

102 Vernant 1983, 80-1.
103 The connection to Alcman is actually confirmed by a 2nd ce papyrus (Greek Lyric, fragment 5 of the scholia, where it reads that “Alcman made the Muses the daughters of Earth, as Minnemus does,” Loeb Classical Library, edited by Campbell, 391). At the same time, though, in Alcman’s fragment 8 the Muses are children of Mnemosyne and Zeus.
This variant, rather than replacing or skipping Mnemosyne, puts the Muses on the level of the Titans, and Mnemosyne is out of the picture; the Muses (who perform the divinely inspired song themselves as well as give it to humans) and Mnemosyne (who is mnemonic power incarnate) seem so closely interconnected that some scholars have therefore concluded that the Muses are nothing but the personification of memory. In yet another version, retold by Pausanias, the variants of number and parentage are reconciled by positing two generations of Muses:

Μίμνερμος δὲ ...φησίν ἐν τῷ προοιμίῳ θυγατέρας Οὐρανοῦ τὰς ἀρχαϊοτέρας Μούσας, τούτων δὲ ἄλλας νεωτέρας εἶναι Διός παιδας. (Pausanias Description 9.29.4)

But Mimnermos [an epic poet ca. 7th ct. BCE] said in his proem that the oldest Muses are daughters of Ouranos, and the other, younger ones, are children of Zeus.

We need not be confused by these different versions: they are simply part of the mythological system, and only underscore the structural interrelatedness of Mnemosyne and the Muses, of memory and poetry-song. Another alternate version with three Muses instead of nine bears witness to this intimate connection:

οἱ δὲ τοῦ Ἀλωέως παῖδες ἀριθμόν τε Μούσας ἐνόμισαν εἶναι τρεῖς καὶ ὄνομα 
αὐταῖς ἐθεντὸ Μελέτην καὶ Μνήμην καὶ Αοίδην. (Pausanias Description 9.29.2)

The sons of Aloeus held that the Muses were three in number, and they gave them the names Melete (Practice) and Mneme (Memory) and Aoide (Song).

In this version, which according to some is the oldest invocation to the Muses, they encompass the key components of poetry-song, and Memory (here Mneme rather than Mnemosyne) is understood to be part of this coherent triad. To borrow Lord’s terms: practice, memory, and song are facets of the same act that is oral poetry. One of these

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105 Detienne 1996, 41.
facets is indeed practice (μελέτη), the same word that Plato used in the Phaedrus to describe how writing is a lack of practice (ἀ-μελετη-σία) of the memory. For Aristotle, too, practices (μελέται) would lead to a better memory. Melete, then, is practicing one’s memory specifically through the act of recollection, that vertical movement from potentiality to actuality. The triad Melete-Mneme-Aiode expresses precisely that movement of oral poetry: from practicing recollection, one can access the past and potentially remember it, which in turn is actualized through the performance of song.

Cicero reports a slightly different original cohort of four Muses: Thelxinoe (Mind-Bewitching), Aoede (Song), Arche (Beginning), and Melete (Practice).106 The effect of a religiously efficacious performance is captured by Thelxinoe, which means “to bewitch, to spell-bind, to charm the mind” (θέλγω νόος). The instrument Hermes uses to “charm” people to sleep, which Circe uses to “bewitch” Odysseus’ men into pigs, and which Athena wields to “cast a spell over” Odysseus to make him look younger, is a “staff” (ῥάβδος)—the same staff after which rhapsodes are named. The name Thelxinoe, therefore, bears witness to the magicoreligious aspect of an actualized sung performance. The name Arche calls to mind not only how the singer-poet’s speech strives to discover the origins of things,107 but also how the selection of a proper starting-point (ἀρχή, cf. Aristotle De Memoria 451b33-5 and 452a13-5) is essential for the sequence of recollection to be successful. The names of the nine Muses as laid down in the Theogony are equally evocative:

106 Cicero divides the birth of the Muses in three stages: the original four, which are born from the first Jupiter (i.e. Ouranos); then the nine Muses are born from the second Jupiter (i.e. the Olympian) and Mnemosyne, while a third set (the Pierian Muses) is identified with the daughters of Pieros, who have the same names as the nine Olympian Muses (this story also appears in Pausanias). Cicero, De Natura Deorum, 3.54: Iam Musae primae quattuor Iove altero, Thelxinoe, Aoede, Arche, Melete; secundae Iove tertio et Mnemosyne procreatae novem; tertiae Piero natae et Antiopa, quas Pieridas et Pierias solent poetae appellare, isdem nominibus et eodem numero, quo proxumae superiores. See also DND, 3.21.

107 Detienne 1996, 41.
These things, then, the Muses sang, who have their homes on Olympus, nine daughters born of the great Zeus: Kleio (Fame), Euterpe (Well-Delighting), Thaleia (Festivity), and Melpomene (Celebrating with Song and Dance), Terpsychore (Dance-Delighting), Erato (Beloved), Polymnia (Many Songs), and Ourania (Heavenly), and Kalliope (Beautiful Voice), who is the most eminent of them all.

The powers of the Muses is the power of poetry-song, “sung speech” as Detienne calls it, a “link [that] is confirmed even more clearly by the extremely explicit names borne by the daughters of Memory, names that reflect a whole theology of ‘sung speech’. ” In fact, “these things” (ταῦτ’, l. 75 above) the Muses sing about refers to the fair distribution of honors (τίμαι) among the gods after Zeus’ reign has been established. Zeus’ union with Mnemosyne thus produces the very ones who are to celebrate his victory in a performance act, as evidenced by the opening of Hesiod’s Works and Days: “Muses of Pieria, who give fame through their songs / come hither, tell of Zeus, sing of your father” (Μοῦσαι Πιερίηθεν ἀοιδῇσιν κλείουσαι / δεῦτε, Δί’ ἐννέπετε, σφέτερον πατέρ’ ύμνείουσαι, Hesiod Works and Days, 1-2). The Muses “give fame through their songs” (ἀοιδῆσιν κλείουσαι, cf. the poet who sings about the κλέεα of men and gods, l. 100; one of the Muses is named Κλειώ) and in this way the Muses constitute an important vehicle in the continuous praising and commemorating of Zeus’ newly established Olympianism.

The Muses’ performance is a cosmic, magicoreligious re-enactment of the proper allotment of spheres and Zeus’ fair distribution of honors, something which in turn

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perpetuates the divide between the realms of mortals (cf. once again “death” [θανάτοιο] and “old age” [γήραος]) and immortals, as here in the Hymn to Pythian Apollo:

Μοῦσαι μὲν θ’ ἄμα πάσαι ἀµειβόµεναι ὅπι καλῇ ὑµνεύσιν ὡς θεῶν δῷρ’ ἄµβροτα ἤδ’ ἄνθρωπων τληµοσύνας, δός’ ἔχοντες ὑπ’ ἄθανάτοις θεοῖς ζοοσ’ ἀµφραδέες καὶ ἀµήχανοι, οὕτε δύναται εὑρέµεναι θανάτοι τ’ ἄκος καὶ γήραος ἄλκαρ·

(Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo 189-93)

And all the Muses together, answering with beautiful voice [cf. Kalliope] they sing, imagine, about the ambrosial gifts of the gods, and of men their sufferings, all the things they hold under the immortal gods, they live witless and helpless, and they cannot even find a cure for death and a defense against old age.

At the same time, the performance-act of the Muses provides cosmic entertainment, as much as the human singer-poet does on an earthly level. It is often overlooked that the Muses not only bestow the gift of divinely inspired song upon the singer-poet, they also are performers themselves, and as such they give delight (τέρπω, cf. two of the Muses’ names, Euterpe [Εὐτέρπη] and Terpsiychore [Τερψιχόρη]) to their father Zeus and to the other gods. This cosmic entertainment should not be taken as simple amusement or poking fun at the human condition; rather, it is the delight that Mnemosyne provided too: sung in proper order (κατὰ κόσµον), the status quo is authorized through songs of praise, and the performance provides consolation of sorrows in a religious sense.

About the form and content of the singer-poet’s performance, Albert Lord writes:

Its symbols, its sounds, its patterns were born for magic productivity, not for aesthetic satisfaction. If later they provided such satisfaction, it was only for generations which had forgotten their real meaning. The poet was sorcerer and seer before he became ‘artist.’ His structures were not abstract art, or art for its own sake. The roots of oral traditional narrative are not artistic but religious in the broadest sense.”

First and foremost, then, the performance of the singer-poet as well as that of the Muses is a religious act. The performance of a singer-poet such as Demodocus in the *Odyssey* is described as indeed very much dependent on his proper relation to the Muses, and thus to Memory. In order for him to sing κατὰ κόσμον, he needs to have gained access to Memory in order to actualize it; the following passages shed light on the special relationship that the poet has with the Muses and hence with the divine.\(^{110}\) In the first passage, Odysseus addresses Demodocus, who is about to perform:

\[
\text{πάσι γὰρ ἀνθρώποισιν ἐπιχειρούσισιν ἀοίδοι}
\]
\[
\text{τιμῆς ἐμμοροὶ εἰς καὶ αἰδοὺς, οὐνεκ’ ἠρα σφέας}
\]
\[
\text{οίμας μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε, φύλησε δὲ φύλον ἀοιδόν.}
\]

(\textit{Homer Odyssey} 479-81)

For among all men upon the earth, singers are endowed with honor and respect, because them the Muse has taught the paths of song, and she loves the tribe of singers.

After the song, Odysseus praises Demodocus:

\[
\text{Δημόδοκ’, ἔξοχα δή σε βροτῶν αἰνίζομ’ ἁπάνων.}
\]
\[
\text{ἡ σὲ γε μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε. Διὸς πάῖς, ἢ σὲ γ’ Ἀπόλλων:}
\]
\[
\text{λίθη γὰρ κατὰ κόσμον Ἀχαιῶν οἶτον ἀείδεις,}
\]
\[
\text{ὅσσ’ ἐρέαν τ’ ἐπιθύνον τε καὶ ὅσσ’ ἐμόγησαν Ἀχαιοὶ,}
\]
\[
\text{ὅς τέ ποι ἢ αὐτὸς παρεών ἢ ἄλλον ἄκούσας.}
\]

(\textit{Homer Odyssey} 487-91)

Demodocus, I praise you truly standing out among all others, either the Muse, the child of Zeus has taught you, or else Apollo; for you sing about the doom of the Achaean very much in accordance with order, how much they did and experienced, and also how much the Achaeans suffered, just as somehow either you yourself were present, or heard it from someone else.

Finally, Odysseus asks Demodocus to sing about the Trojan horse:

\[
\text{αἴ κεν δή μοι ταῦτα κατὰ μοίραν καταλέξῃς}
\]

\(^{110}\) We can infer from another passage from the *Odyssey* that to learn song-poetry from the gods means to learn both content and form (épos): ‘a singer who, having learnt from the gods, sings charming epics to mortals’ (ἀοιδὸν ... δς τε θεόν ἔξ / ἀείδει δεδαώς ἔπε’, ἰμπρόστα τ βροτοῖς, \textit{Od.} 17.518-9).
If indeed you should tell at length and in order these things in due portion, I will at once declare to all men that the god has willingly bestowed upon you a divinely inspired song. Thus he spoke, and being moved, he began from the god, and revealed his song.  

After Odysseus first states that the Muse “loves the tribe of singers” (φίλησε δὲ φῦλον ἀοιδῶν), Demodocus performs his song so well that Odysseus cannot but conclude that the singer indeed must have been taught by the Muses or Apollo (cf. ἦ σὲ γε μοῦσ’ ἐδίδαξε, Διὸς πάϊς, ἢ σὲ γ’ Ἀπόλλων, l. 481). Demodocus is said to perform “in accordance with order” (κατὰ κόσμον), the same construction that was used to describe Hermes’ theogony, and which conveys proper sequence as well as religious appropriateness. In fact, his access to Memory and thus his power of recollection is so developed that it seems as if he himself was somehow present (cf. ὦς τέ που ἢ αὐτὸς παρεὼν, l. 491) or else heard it from someone else who was (ἢ ἄλλου ἀκούσας, l. 491)—the divinely inspired Demodocus truly bridges past and present.

The connection with the divine puts Demodocus in direct contact with both content and form of the original event; if the singer should succeed to “tell at length and in order” (καταλέξῃς) about the next event too, then Odysseus will publicly proclaim how Demodocus’ song is indeed “divinely inspired” (θέσπιν)—something which the poem next suggests is actually the case, as Demodocus, “who is set in motion, begins from the

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111 There is some debate as to whether the genitive θεοῦ is to be taken with ὁρμηθεὶς (‘moved by the god’) or with ἤρχετο (‘he began from the god’); for a discussion and overview of scholarship, see Ford 1992, 27 n. 33.
112 Ford’s note that Apollo, despite the fact that his “association with ‘singers and kitharists’ is archaic” is here named “as patron of poets only” needlessly separates song from poetry, and thus fails to recognize the intimate connection between poetry, performance, and prophecy. Ford 1992, 123 n. 45. Moreover, the Muses typically make up the company of Apollo.
god and discloses his song” (ὁρμηθεὶς θεοῦ ἤρχετο, φαῖνε δ᾽ ἀοιδήν). Demodocus’ song is so good that it seems as if ‘he himself was present’ (αὐτὸς παρεὼν). This feat is a trademark characteristic of recollection: the poet-singer’s mnemonic powers, aided by the Muses, allow him to re-create the time and space around the plain of Ilion, even as he himself has never been there. In other words, the inspired performer has access to an external store of knowledge that seems limitless; indeed, we may recall how Pindar called the Muses and their parents are all-knowing (Paean 6, 54-7).

Although the singer-poet acts as the ritual substitute of the Muses (cf. ἀοιδὸς Μοῦσας θεράπων, Theogony 99-100), this does not mean he commands the same sphere. As their initiate, the singer-poet has access to the all-encompassing knowledge of the Muses and Mnemosyne, which is access to recollection itself. But the singer (ἀοιδὸς) embodies only the third, final aspect of the Muses’ triad: Aoide. The Muses themselves provide the vertical movement of upward recollection, from past to present, from potential remembering to actual remembering. The singer-poet receives, as it were, the ready-made imprints of past experiences and thoughts, and performs the final actualization of them, which is an act of remembering. His invocation to the Muses, therefore, is a call to be reminded (i.e. for him to remember) what the Muses have recollected:

έσπετε νῦν μοι Μοῦσαι Ὁλύμπια δόματ᾽ ἐχουσαι:
ὡς εἰς γὰρ θεαὶ εστε πάρεστε τε ἑστε τε πάντα, 485
ἡμεῖς δὲ κλέος οἷον ἀκούομεν οὔδε τι τίδεμεν:
οἱ τινες ἣγεμόνες Δαναῶν καὶ κοίρανων ἤσαν:
πληθυν δ’ οὐκ ἂν ἐγὼ μοι ὑπήσομαι οὔδ’ ὄνομήνω,
οὕδ’ εἰ μοι δέκα μὲν γλῶσσαι, δέκα δὲ στόματ’ εἶεν,
φονὴ δ’ ἄρρηκτος, χάλκεον δὲ μοι ἢτορ ἐνείη, 490
εἰ μὴ Ὀλυμπιάδες Μοῦσαι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι
θυγατέρες ἰνησαίαδ’ ὅσοι ὑπὸ Ἴλιον ἐλθοῦν:
ἄρχοις οὕ νηῶν ἐρέω νηὰς τε προπάσας.

58
Tell me now Olympian Muses who inhabit Olympus:
for you are goddesses, you are present, and you know all things,\textsuperscript{113} but we only hear the \textit{kleos} and we know nothing;
Who were the leaders of the Danaans and who their lords?
I could not tell over the multitude of them, nor name them,
Not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths,
and had an unbreakable voice and a heart of bronze within me,
unless the Olympic Muses, daughters of aegis-holding Zeus
remind me of all those who came beneath Ilion;
I will tell again of the leaders of the ships and of all the ships together.

The contrast between the divine Muses who “know all things” (ἵστε τε πάντα) and the poets who “know nothing” (οὐδέ τι ἴδμεν) is significant, and this divide can only be bridged by invoking the very goddesses \textit{who are in fact always present} (cf. ἡμεῖς γὰρ θεαί ἐστε πάρεστέ). It is through their act of “reminding” (μνησαίαθ᾽) the poet that he, in turn, has access to the knowledge of the past—then he can “tell again” (αὖ ἐρέω), that is, after the “act of hearing” (kleos) what the Muses have told him. The use of the word \textit{kleos} confirms the notion that the performer presents his composition to the audience “as something that he \textit{hears} from the very custodians of all stages of reality.”\textsuperscript{114} What the inspired poet remembers is the actual sense-experience (the kleos, cf. the Muse named Kleio), facilitated by the recollective powers of the Muses. He demonstrates the ability to \textit{transcend} time and space, conceptualizing temporality and spatiality with a presence and immediacy that allows someone like Demodocus to sing in accordance with order:

The poet has an immediate experience of these bygone days. He knows the past because he has the power to be present in the past. ... Memory carries the poet into the middle of ancient events, back in their own time. The organization of time in

\textsuperscript{113} I take the three connected verbs ἔστε, πάρεστε, ἵστε to be present indicative rather than imperative; ἔσπετε in the previous line is aorist imperative for sure, but I think ἔστε, πάρεστε, ἵστε and the emphatic position of ἡμεῖς indicates a \textit{2nd} person plural indicative rather than imperative; they are all factual in nature, and the construction is, moreover, mirrored by ἡμεῖς, ἀκούομεν, ἱδμεν in the next line.

\textsuperscript{114} Nagy 1990b, 26.
his account simply reproduces the sequence of events at which he is somehow present, in the same order in which they happened, from their beginning.\footnote{Vernant 1983, 77.}

Thus what the poet prays for here at the start of the lengthy Catalogue of Ships “is not just an accurate memory—for this, though highly necessary, would be memory only of an inaccurate kléos—but an actual vision of the past to supplement the kléos.”\footnote{Dodds 1959, 100 n. 116. This ‘actual vision of the past,’ however, falls on the side of content and not of form: “Always [the poet] asks the Muses what he is to say, never how he is to say it.” Dodds 1959, 80. W.W. Minton agrees with him, see Minton 1962, 190. Nagy, on the other hand, has convincingly argued that besides content the singer/poet also uses the same formulaic recordings—the dactylic hexameter, or épos—as the Muses: “The poet’s inherited conceit, then, is that he has access not only to the content but also to the actual form of what his eyewitnesses, the Muses, speak as they describe the realities of remote generations.” Nagy 1990b, 26.}

In a proper relationship, the Muses recollect, so that the singer-poet remembers.

The relationship between the Muses and the singer-poet, as we have seen, depends on reciprocity: the Muse has willingly bestowed upon Demodocus the gift of a divinely inspired song (θέσπιν ἀοιδήν), and she loves him. But this divine inspiration is reciprocal, do ut des. Earlier in Book 8, Demodocus is introduced in the following way:

“the Muse loved him above others, and gave him both good and bad: she deprived him of his eyes, but gave him sweet song” (τὸν πέρι μοῦσ᾽ ἐφίλησε, δίδου δ᾽ ἀγαθόν τε κακόν τε: / ὀφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμερσε, δίδου δ᾽ ἡδείαν ἀοιδήν, Odyssey 8.63-4). Seeing into the past (much like seeing into the future, for the seer) comes with the price of losing one’s faculty of sight in the present. As long as he maintains a proper relationship with the Muses, the poet-singer himself is considered god-like, and truly the ritual substitute for the Muses, performing the same function of giving delight (τέρπω):

\begin{quote}
... καλέσασθε δὲ θεῖον ἀοιδὸν
Δημόδοκον: τῷ γὰρ ἢ ἢ ὦδες πέρι δόκειν ἀοιδήν
tέρπειν, ὅππῃ θυμὸς ἐποτρύνῃσιν ἀείδειν.
\end{quote}

\[45\]

‘... and summon the god-like singer
Demodocus: for the god has given him above others the power of song.'
to give delight, in whatever way his heart urges him on to sing.’

The consequences, however, of not maintaining the proper reciprocal relationship with a divinity are evidenced by the incident that happened to Thamyris, whose story is told in Book 2 of the *Iliad*:

... ἔνθα τε Μοῦσαι ἁντόμεναι Ἄντωμοιν τὸν Ὥρηκα παύσαν ἀοιδής,
Οἰχαλήθεν ἱόντα παρ’ Ἐὐρύτου Ωἰχαλῆος·
στεῦτο γὰρ εὐχόμενος νικησέμεν, εἰ περ ἂν αὐταὶ Μοῦσαι ἁείδοιεν,
κοῦραι Διὸς αἰγιόχοι·
αἱ δὲ χολωσάμεναι πηρὸν θέσαν, αὐτὰρ ἀοιδὴν θεσπεσίην ἀφέλοντο καὶ ἐκλέλαθον κιθαριστύν·

... there the Muses encountering Thamyris the Thracian, they stopped his song as he was going from Oichalia to the side of Ochalian Eurytus; for he made a boastful vow that he would win, even if the Muses themselves were to sing, daughters of aegis-holding Zeus; and they, having become angry, maimed him, but his song, divinely sounding, they took away, and they made him utterly forget lyre-playing.

This encounter between the Muse and the mythical bard Thamyris—who, like Orpheus, is Thracian—is a typical expression of what Nietzsche has called *der agonale Geist*. The “bad” (κακόν) act of mutilation (cf. the blinding of Demodocus, ὀφθαλμῶν μὲν ἄμερσε) is here complemented not by a good gift of song, but by the additional punishment of taking away his “divinely sounding song” (ἀοιδήν θεσπεσίην) and “making him utterly forget” (ἐκλέλαθον) how to play the lyre. The information is not gone, but the Muses have blocked his access to it. With no more Melete (practice, i.e. recollection), there is no more Mneme, and in effect no more Aoide—the triad of ‘Musedom’ has fallen apart for Thamyris. Thus the Muses’ punishment consists of denying the singer further access to their supreme power of recollection; they suspend his divine gift and their mnemonic interaction with the singer is reversed: they make him forget rather than remember. The
singer’s relation with the divine realm of ἀκήδεα, facilitated by the Muses, has broken, and he has returned to the human condition of sorrow and forgetfulness.

There has been much debate as to what exactly this divine gift of the Muses consists of. In an attempt to answer the question of what the gift of poetry entails and why it is bestowed, the incident of the agon between the Muses and Thamyris seems quite revealing: the gift of poetry-song entails actually remembering through the mnemonic access provided by the Muses’ supreme recollection, and is bestowed as an expression of a successful reciprocal relationship between god and human. If so, then the Muses love the singer-poet and give him the power of divinely inspired song; if the reciprocal relation is disturbed, they will block his access to divine memory and make him forget.

Sappho, whom Plato refers to as the tenth Muse, proves that a successful relationship with the Muses has the effect of immortalization—an immortality, that consists of not-being-forgotten:

Αἰολικὸν παρὰ τύμβον ἱών, ξένε, μὴ με θανοῦσαν τὰν Μιτυληναίαν ἔννεπ’ ἀοιδοπόλον·
tόνδε γὰρ ἀνθρώπων ἐκαμον χέρες, ἔργα δὲ φωτὸν ἐς ταχνὴν ἔρρει τοιάδε ληθεδόνα·

ἳν δὲ με Μουσάων ἑτάς τῆς χάριν, ὄν ἄφρ’ ἐκάστης
dαιμόνος ἄνθος ἐμῇ θῆκα παρ’ ἑκάστη δαίμονα,

ὃς Αἴδεω σκότον ἐκφυγὼν, σὺν τις ξένος
tῆς λυρικῆς Σαπφοῦς νόμιμος ἠέλιος.
(Sappho, Epitaph 28)

117 Cf. Murray 1981, 89: “Homer does not tell us precisely what the gift of poetry entails, nor does he speculate as to the reasons for its bestowal. But evidently it is a permanent gift of poetic ability, rather than a temporary inspiration. Failure to recognise this can be exemplified by Harriott’s discussion of the gift idiom: ‘the Greeks expressed the belief that poetry is in some mysterious way ‘given’, and that it comes from a source external to the poet and is other than he is.’ ... There is a difference between lines of poetry being ‘given’ to a poet and the ‘gift’ of poetic ability, which are here confused.” Murray quotes from Harriott 1969, 50-1.

118 Sappho Epitaphs 60, from the Palatine Anthology: Plato, ‘On the Muses:’ ἔννεα τὰς Μούσας φασίν τινες, ὡς ἀληθώς ἕνακτης Σαπφοῦς Λεσβοῦ, ή δεκαίη ὀλιγώρως. Ὅνιδε καί Σαπφός Λεσβοῦ, ἢ δεκάτη, ‘Some say there are nine Muses: how careless! Look—Sappho of Lesbos is the tenth!’ All texts from or about Sappho are from the Loeb Classical Library, Greek Lyric I, edited by David Campbell (1990).
Passing by the Aeolian tomb, stranger, do not say that I, the Mytilenaean poetess, am dead; for human hands built this, and works of men such works disappear into swift forgetfulness; but if you judge me by the grace of the Muses, from each of which divinity I set a flower beside my nine, you will know that I escaped the gloom of Hades, and there will be no sun that does not speak the name of the lyric poetess Sappho.

The gifts of the Muses confer immortality onto Sappho, as several of her epitaphs, among which the one above, testify. Although her tomb is man-maid and will hence wither away into “forgetfulness” (ληθεδόνα), Sappho herself, when judged by the grace of the Muses, has achieved the opposite: Mnemosyne, “Remembrance.” There will be no dawn that does not speak of Sappho, and she proclaims to have “escaped the gloom of Hades” (Ἀίδεω σκότον ἔκφυγον). Her state of not-being-forgotten has lifted the poetess up from death to immortality. Elsewhere Sappho, whose breath is equal to that of the Muses (cf. Sappho Epitaphs 58), is called the singer who “devised deathless gifts of the Heliconian Muses” (ἀφθιτα μησαμένα δόρ’ Ἐλικωνιάδων, Sappho Epitaphs 27), and she is greeted in the following manner:

πάντη, πότνια, χαίρε θεοῖς ἱσα, σὺς γὰρ ἀοιδάς ἄθανάτας ἐχομεν νῦν ἐτι θυγατέρας.

Wherever [you are], greetings lady, equal to the gods, for your songs we still have now, your immortal daughters. (Sappho Epitaphs 58)

The relationship with the Muses reveals itself to be an intricate interplay with Memory and Forgetfulness: the Muses may provide recollective access to Memory and lift the poet’s songs to immortality by-being-remembered which in turn lifts the poet up from lethal forgetfulness; or the Muses cause the poet to forget how to even play the lyre, so that the poet sinks back into the dark oblivion of being-forgotten. If the Muses withhold
their divine breath, the poet’s work is simply human and thus bound to disappear into swift forgetfulness.

One of the most famous bestowals of the Muses’ divine breath takes place right at the start of the *Theogony*:

ποιμένες ἄγραυλοι, κάκ’ ἐλέγχεα, γαστέρες οἶον,
ιδμὲν γεώδεα πολλὰ λέγεαν ἐτύμωσιν ὀμοία,
ιδμὲν δ’, εὐτ’ ἐθέλωμεν, ἀληθέα γηρύσασθαι.
ὁς ἐφασαν κοὐραὶ μεγάλοι Δίας ἀρτιέπεια,
καὶ μοι σκῆπτρον ἔδον δάφνης ἐριθηλέος ὄζον
δρέψασαι θηητὸν· ἐνέπνευσαν δὲ μ’ ἀοιδὴν
θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείοιμι τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρό τ’ ἐόντα.
καὶ μ’ ἐκέλονθ’ ὑμνεῖν μάκαρων γένος αἰὲν ἐόντων,
σφᾶς δ’ αὐτὰς πρῶτόν τε καὶ ὕστατον αἰὲν ἀείδειν.
(Hesiod *Theogony* 26-34)

Shepherds dwelling in the field, bad reproaches, only bellies, we know how to speak many false things resembling true things, but we know, whenever we want to, how to utter true things.

So the daughters of great Zeus spoke, ready of speech, and as a scepter they gave me a branch of very flourishing laurel which they plucked, a wonderful thing; and they breathed into me a song divinely inspired, so that I may sing the fame of things that will be and things that were before.’

And they ordered me to sing of the race of the blessed ones who always are, but always to sing of themselves first and last.

The shepherd119 Hesiod is himself ritually initiated into the sphere of memory and poetry-song presided over by all-knowing Mnemosyne and the all-knowing Muses, and he receives the gift of “divinely inspired song” (ἀοιδὴν θέσπιν) which the Muses “breath into” (ἐνέπνευσαν) him. The gift provides Hesiod with the power to gain access, through recollection, to special knowledge, not simply to Aristotle’s past experiences and thoughts, but presumably to “things that will be” (τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα), too. In addition, the

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119 In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid says how Zeus took the form of a shepherd (*pastor*, Ov. *Met.* 6.114; cf. ποιμένες) to snare Mnemosyne.
Muses are presented as Masters of Truth,\(^\text{120}\) who know how to “speak many false things resembling true things” (ψεύδεα πολλὰ λέγειν ἐτύμοισιν ὁμοὶα) and also how to speak “true things” (ἀληθέα) when they are willing.\(^\text{121}\)

Hesiod has to reciprocate their gift by always singing of the Muses first and last—after all, to recollect means to find the proper starting-point (ἀρχή, cf. Aristotle De Memoria 451b33-5 and 452a13-5) in order to initiate the proper sequence. And indeed, Hesiod reciprocates by starting from the Muses:

> Τύνη, Μουσάων ἁρχώμεθα, ταῖ Δίῃ πατρί
> ύμνευσαί τέρπουσι μέγαν νόον ἐντὸς Ὀλύμπου,
> εἰρεῦσαι τὰ τ’ ἐόντα τὰ τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα
> φωνῇ ὑμηρεύσαι· τὸν δ’ ἀκάματος ρέει αὐθῇ
> ἐκ στομάτων ἡδεία· γελᾷ δὲ τε δόματα πατρός
> Ζηνὸς ἐριγδούποιο θεόν ὁπὶ λειριοέση
> σκυδναμένη... (cf. line 51)

You, let us begin from the Muses, who, when they sing for father Zeus, delight his great mind inside Olympos, telling of things that are, things that will be, and things that were before, according in voice; and from their mouths flows unwearyingly a sweet sound; and with laughter are the halls of father Zeus, the loud-thundering, the voice of the goddesses just like lilies dispersing. ...

The Muses, too, display in their song the access to the same special knowledge that they breathed into Hesiod. “Telling of things that are, things that will be, and things that were before” (εἰρεῦσαι τά τ’ ἐόντα τά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα), the Muses articulate a mode of performance that connects to temporality in a way that is not restricted to past and present, but extends into the future.\(^\text{122}\) The Muses’ power of recollection does not merely

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\(^\text{120}\) Detienne 1996.

\(^\text{121}\) Nagy interprets this encounter as a pan-Hellenizing influence, which transforms “[Hesiod’s] repertoire from localized ‘falsehoods’ into the ‘truth’ that all Hellenes can accept.” Nagy 1990b, 49.

\(^\text{122}\) The same formula appears in the Certamen, 98-9: Μοῦσά γέ μοι τά τ’ ἐόντα τά τ’ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ’ ἐόντα / τῶν μὲν μηδὲν ἑκάτε, σὺ δ’ ἄλλης μνῆσαι ἄονδῆς.
recreate the past like the Pensieve does, but has access to the future too; access that is also granted to those who maintain proper reciprocal relations with them.

Our singer-poet is thus also a prophet-poet: the Muses’ gift to Hesiod to sing what will be and what was (Theogony 32) and the Muses’ own power to tell of things that are, things that will be, and things that were before (Theogony 38) are both very close to Homer’s description of the seer Calchas, who has the god-given power to “know the things that are, things that will be, and things that were before” (Iliad 1.70, ἶδῃ τὰ τ᾽ ἐόντα τὰ τ᾽ ἐσσόμενα πρὸ τ᾽ ἐόντα). The singer-poet and his patron, the Muses, have special access to knowledge similar to that of a seer like Calchas and his patron Apollo, a connection which, in fact, has Indo-European roots. In the context of the interrelatedness of poetry and prophecy, Dodds points out that in an age of oral transmission knowledge about the past is as mysterious as knowledge about the future:

Just as the truth about the future would be attained only if man were in touch with a knowledge wider than his own, so the truth about the past could be preserved only on a like condition. Its human repositories, the poets, had (like the seers) their technical resources, their professional training; but vision of the past, like insight into the future, remained a mysterious faculty, only partially under its

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123 Ford 1992, 48. Ford further points out that the seer Calchas is also a path-finder, whose gift of prophecy not only enables him “to see deeply into the present and future but also to lead the Achaeans ships to Troy (Iliad 1.71-2).” He concludes: “Prophet and poet are seers of what is not apparent, and both know paths we do not.” He cites other examples of prophecy and path-finding.

124 In Aeschylus Agamemnon 1154, the divinatory skills of Cassandra, another seer, are called θέσπις ‘divinely inspired,’ just like Hesiod’s and Demodocus’ song.

125 A slight variation in language stands out: Calchas knows (ἴδῃ) present, future, and past; for the Muses it is an articulation (ἐιρεύσαται) of that knowledge; but Hesiod sings the fame (κλείοιμ) of past and future. In the context of the human singer/poet, Nagy 1990b, 26 remarks that “the actions of gods and heroes gain fame through the medium of the singer, and the singer calls his medium κλεῖος, from ‘the act of hearing,’” (cf. the Muse named Kleio)

126 According to the Chadwicks, “it is clear that throughout the ancient languages of northern Europe the ideas of poetry, eloquence, information ... and prophecy are intimately connected,” Chadwick and Chadwick, The Growth of Literature, I.637, in Dodds 1959, 100 n. 118. Here Dodds gives examples from several Indo-European languages that have a common word for poet and seer, e.g. Latin (vates), Irish (fili), Icelandic (thulr), and goes on to conclude that “Hesiod seems to preserve a trace of this original unity.” Chadwick 1952, 41 states that “inspiration, in fact, relates to revealed knowledge.”
owner’s control, and dependent in the last resort on divine grace. By that grace poet and seer alike enjoyed a knowledge denied to other men.\textsuperscript{127}

For Plato, this divine grace of inspiration comes in four types of divine madness, among which are prophetic madness (Apollo) and poetic madness (Muses).\textsuperscript{128} Whereas for Plato the Muse is actually \textit{inside} the singer-poet (cf. \textit{Cratylus} 428c), the archaic tradition represented “the poet as deriving supernormal knowledge from the Muses, but not as falling into ecstasy or being possessed by them.”\textsuperscript{129} Some have therefore defined the archaic poet’s relationship with the Muses as intellectual,\textsuperscript{130} or have held that Homer speaks “as if the poet were but a passive instrument,”\textsuperscript{131} while others go so far as to say that the Muses in Homer have nothing to do with inspiration because they “are connected with special feats of memory” only.\textsuperscript{132} To disconnect inspiration from memory is to disconnect the Muses from Mnemosyne, while it is precisely their complementariness that constitutes the domain of the prophet-poet-singer:

\textsuperscript{127} Dodds 1959, 81. Whereas Dodds and Nagy think that at one point the poet and the seer were undistinguished social functions in ancient Greece, Flower 2008, 22, contends: “Despite the fact that both might lay claim to divine inspiration, there was no stage in Greek society in which the poet (\textit{aoidos}) and the seer (\textit{mantis}) were undifferentiated. They always performed different functions and had very different social roles.”

\textsuperscript{128} Burkert 1985, 109-10: Burkert notes that there are many variant expressions to describe this sort of madness (the most common term is \textit{mania}): “They mirror the confusion in the face of the unknown.” One way of describing an abnormal psychic state is \textit{entheos} (‘within is a god’), whereas it is also said that a god holds someone “in his power, \textit{katechei}, which gives in translation the term \textit{possessio}, possession.” Burkert also notes that \textit{mania} is connected to the Indo-European root for mental power, and related to \textit{mantis}, ‘seer, prophet’, 112.

\textsuperscript{129} Dodds 1959, 82, see also 101 n. 122. Vernant 1983, 76 confirms that “poetry represents one of the typical forms of divine possession and madness (\textit{enthousiasmos}),” but then goes on to say that “the poet, being possessed by the Muses, is the interpreter of Mnemosoune just as the prophet, being inspired by Apollo, is the interpreter of this god.” In support, Vernant cites a passage from Pindar: ‘Give me an oracle, Muse, and I will be your prophet’ (\textit{Μαντευέο, Μοῖσα, προφατεύσω δ’ ἔγώ}, fr. 32). The passage enforces the analogy between poetry and prophecy, between the Muses and Apollo, but Dodds rightly observes that “it is the Muse, and not the poet, who plays the part of the Pythia [Apollo’s interpreter at the oracle at Delphi]: the poet does not ask to be himself ‘possessed,’ but only to act as interpreter for the entranced Muse.”

\textsuperscript{130} Murray 1981, 96; Maehler 1963, 19, in Ford 1992, 32 n. 51.

\textsuperscript{131} Grube 1965, 2.

\textsuperscript{132} Havelock 1963, 163-4. Murray 1983, 93. Murray is certainly right to contend that “this dissociation of inspiration and memory is misguided: there is no inherent incompatibility between inspiration and information, ... and the fact that we might identify the source of the poet’s inspiration as an internal one does not mean that the poet or his audience feels it to be so.”
Sung speech, delivered by a poet with the gift of second sight, was efficacious speech [and memory functioned as] a religious power that gave poetic pronouncements their status of magicoreligious speech. ... Like mantic knowledge, the knowledge of these inspired poets was a form of divinatory omniscience.\textsuperscript{133}

We may imagine that this is precisely what Aristotle meant when he said that the objects of memory are often utterly mistaken, and the reason why he proceeded to design a strict epistemic division between past (memory), present (sense-perception), and future (hope, or prophecy; \textit{De Memoria} 449b7-14). For Plato, on the other hand, recollection reaches not so much into a temporal reality, but into \textit{reality itself}: recollection is related to Truth. And as Masters of Truth the Muses definitely have command over that particular register, a register that is connected to prophecy as well. For at the end of the \textit{Homeric Hymn to Hermes}, Apollo presents Hermes with his childhood-teachers of divination, the so-called bee-maidens:

\begin{verbatim}
Ἅλλο δὲ τοι ἔρεω, Μαίης ἐρικυδέος υἱὲ
καὶ Διὸς αἰγιόχου, θεῶν ἔριανε δαίμον.
σεμναί γάρ τινες εἰσί, κασίγνηται γεγαυία,
παρθένοι, ὑκείησιν ἀγαλλόμεναι πτερύγεσσι,
τρεῖς: κατά δὲ κρατός πεπαλαγμέναι ἄδριτα λευκά,
οἰκία ναετάουσιν ὑπὸ πτυχὶ Παρνησίῳ,
μαντείης ἀπάνευθε διδάσκαλοι, ἢν ἐπὶ βουσί
παῖς ἐκ' ἐνοὶ μελέτησα· πατὴρ δὲ ἐμὸς οὐκ ἀλέγιζεν,
ἐντεῦθεν δὲ ἐπειτὰ ποτῶν ἄλλη κηρία βόσκονται
καὶ τε κραίνουσιν ἐκατά
αἱ δὲ ὅτε θυίωσιν ἐδηδυῖαι μέλι χλωρόν,
προφρονέως ἐθέλουσιν ἀγορεύειν·
ἢν δὲ ἀπονοσφισθῶσι θεῶν ἡεδεῖν,
ψεύδοντα δὴ ἐπειτὰ δι' ἀλλήλων δονέουσαι.
τάς τοι ἐπειτὰ δίδωμι· σὺ δὲ τύχῃσι
(\textit{Homeric Hymn to Hermes} 550-66)
\end{verbatim}

But surely I will tell you something else, son of glorious Maia and of aegis-holding Zeus, luck-bringing genius of the gods;

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\textsuperscript{133} Detienne 1996, 42-3.
for there are certain holy ones, sisters born, maidens, with swift wings adorned, three; down from the head sprinkled with white barley, they inhabit houses under a fold of Parnassos, teachers of divination far away from me, which, in charge of cows while still a boy, I practiced; but my father took no heed. From there, then, they fly now here, now there, and they feed on honeycombs and authorize all things. And when they are inspired, having eaten yellow honey, with a forward mind they are willing to proclaim truth; but if they are bereft of the sweet food of the gods, then indeed they lie, driving about among one another. These, then, I give you; you, asking them truly, delight your heart, and if you should teach a mortal man, often he will listen to your voice, if he should obtain it.

Just as the poet-singer and the Muses have the power to delight, so too do the prophetic bee-maidens provide “delight” (τέρπε); similarly, Hermes’ own theogonic performance earlier in the hymn was said to have an “authorizing” (κραίνων, Hymn to Hermes l. 27) effect, just as the bee-maidens ‘authorize all things’ (κραίνουσιν ἔκαστα). Thus both activities are described in the same way, which underscores the connection between prophecy and poetry, between the spheres of Apollo, Hermes, and the Muses.

The bee-maidens’ subject-matter, too, is the same as that of the Muses: they can tell lies (ψεύδονται), or they can speak the truth (ἀληθείην) if they wish. We are led to believe, then, that the inspired poet-singer-prophet does not just have, through the mnemonic power of recollection, access to special knowledge from the past or the future, but to knowledge that is special precisely because it is true—we are duly reminded of

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134 Scheinberg 1978, 10. Scheinberg points out that the verb is also used in Penelope’s description of true dreams (Odyssey 19.567), and in the Hymn to Hermes it occurs again in line 531 where it describes the powers of the magical golden staff. In all instances, Scheinberg says, the verb has retained its basic Homeric meaning, “to give sanction of accomplishment.” “Just as Zeus ‘nods his head’ to the requests of men or other gods, thereby rendering them effective, so too the bee maidens, through their prophecies, enable things to come into being.”

135 The veracity of their pronouncement, however, differs from the Muses’ in that the bee-maidens are willing to tell the truth when they are ‘inspired’ by eating honey; deprived of honey, they will tell lies. According to Scheinberg, this suggests a vestige of what may have been the use of intoxicating beverages that may cause honey-induced soothsaying, 17.
Plato’s insistence that recollection puts us in touch with the Truth. If the power of the Muses is to produce true speech, so too does Hesiod single out Nereus, the Old Man of the Sea, as a Master of Truth. Directly after Hesiod mentions the children of Strife (among whom is Lethe, ‘Forgetfulness’), he continues his genealogy with Nereus, the son of Pontos:

\[
\text{Νηρέα δ’ ἀνευδέα καὶ ἀληθέα γείνατο Πόντος,}
\text{πρεσβύτατον παιδών· αὐτὰρ καλέουσι γέροντα,}
\text{οὖνεκα νημερτής τε καὶ ἤπιος, οὕδε θεμιστέων}
\text{λήθεται, ἀλλὰ δίκαια καὶ ἤπια δήνεα οἶδεν·}
\] (Hesiod Theogony 233-6)

Pontos begot Nereus, who is truthful (unlying) and true (unforgetting), the oldest of his children; but they call him old man, because he is trusty and gentle, and of oracular decrees and judgments he is not forgetful, but he knows just and kind counsel.

The description of Nereus bears evidence to a long-recognized linguistic connection between Truth (Aletheia), Memory (Mnemosyne), and Forgetfulness (Lethe). The privative α- suggests that ἀ-λήθης (‘true’) and ἀ-λήθεια (‘truth’) are the negatives of λήθη (‘forgetfulness’). If we consider that λήθη is related to λανθάνω (‘to go unknown, unseen, unnoticed’), the negation ἀ-λήθεια denotes not-forgotten, or known, seen, noticed and unconcealed. In this way, Aletheia (“not forgotten; truth”) forms a natural pair with Mnemosyne (“memory; remembrance”), both of which stand in an oppositional relationship to Lethe. This register leads to a triad of related ideas—Aletheia, Mnemosyne, Lethe—which plays out in the domains of memory, poetry, prophecy, and truth:

Aletheia is a kind of double to Mnemosyne. The equivalence between the two powers is borne out on three counts: equivalent meanings (Aletheia and Mnemosyne stand for the same thing); equivalent positions (in religious thought Aletheia, like Mnemosyne, is associated with experiences of incubatory prophecy); and equivalent relationships (both are complementary to Lethe).
Nereus, too, is a Master of Truth, endowed with prophetic and judicial powers who enjoys the privilege of memory, but at this register “Aletheia represents not sung speech, pronounced by virtue of a gift of prophecy, but the processes of divination and justice.”\textsuperscript{136}

The complimentarity of prophecy and justice is also evidenced by the goddess Themis (cf. Nereus “does not forget themistes,” οὐδὲ θεμιστέων λήθεται\textsuperscript{137})—thus the three different domains (poetry, prophecy, justice) all function in relation to the triad Aletheia, Mnemosyne, Lethe.

There is an even closer connection, however, between the domain of justice and the Muses: they do not only attend on poet-prophets, but are also patrons of kings, so that they may pronounce judgment with the same divinatory power:

\begin{quote}
\textit{ἡ γὰρ καὶ βασιλεύσιν ἡμ’ αἰδοίοισιν ὑπηδεῖ.}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{136} Detienne 1996, 48.

\textsuperscript{137} Detienne 1996, 61, where he points out that “the king held the scepter, the guarantee and instrument of his authority;” this points at another complementariness between king and poet: Hesiod is awarded a scepter when initiated by the Muses (Theogony 30). According to Vernant, “when the daughters of Mnemosoyne presented him with the rod of wisdom, the skeptron cut from a laurel tree, they taught him ‘the Truth.’” Vernant 1983, 79.

\begin{quote}
For she [Kalliope] also attends on reverent kings. Whomever the daughters of great Zeus honor, they look upon the birth of Zeus-nourished kings, and pour upon his tongue a sweet dew, and then from his mouth sweet speech flows. (Hesiod Theogony 80-4)
\end{quote}

The Muses do not distribute their gift of divinely inspired, sweet (cf. μεϊλίχα; the prophetic bee-maidens rave on “honeycombs,” μέλι χλωρόν) speech to poets only,\textsuperscript{138} but

\begin{quote}
\textit{ὅν τινα τιμήσωσι Διὸς κοῦραι μεγάλοι γεινόμενόν τε ἰδὼσι διοτρεφέων βασιλήων, τῷ μὲν ἐπὶ γλώσσῃ γλυκερὴν χείουσιν ἐέρσην, τοῦ δ’ ἐπε’ ἐκ στόματος μείλιχα.}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{138} For an explicit connection between honey and song, cf. Pindar Isthmian ‘honey-sounding songs’ μελιφθόγγοις ἀουδαίς.
also to kings. Just as the inspired singer-poet Demodocus is called “god-like” (θεῖον, Odyssey 43), so too is the divinely inspired king propitiated as a god:

ἐρχόμενον δ’ ἂν’ ἄγωνα θεόν ὡς ὑλάσκονται
αἰδώς μειλιγή, μετὰ δὲ πρέπει ἄγρομένοισιν:
τοῖς Μουσάων ἱερὴ δόσις ἀνθρώποισιν.
ἐκ γὰρ τοι Μουσῶν καὶ ἐκ βάσιδοιν Ἀπόλλωνος
ἄνδρες ἀοιδοὶ ἔσαιν ἐπὶ χθῶνα καὶ κιθαρίσται,
ἐκ δὲ Διός βασιλῆς· ὃ δ’ ὄλβιος, ὅν τινα Μοῦσαι
φιλονται· ἡ λυκερὴ οἶ ἀπὸ στόματος ρέει αὐδή.
(Hesiod Theogony 91-7)

When he comes to a gathering they propitiate him as a god with gentle respect, and he stands out among those gathered together;
Such is the Muses’ sacred gift to men.
For, truly, it is from the Muses and far-shooting Apollo that there are singers and lyre players upon the earth, and kings are from Zeus; blest is he, whomever the Muses love; a sweet speech flows from his mouth.

The “sacred gift of the Muses to men” (Μουσάων ἱερὴ δόσις ἀνθρώποισιν) means to become god-like, which, as this passage suggests, comes with respect and praise, as it did for Demodocus. Once again, this attests to the vertical movement that is connected to the power of the Muses, lifting their initiates from the realm of mere mortality to a state that is considered god-like. At this register we may best appreciate the song of the inspired poet: if the Muses have truly granted him access to Mnemosyne, the poet’s song discloses performative truth—that is, Aletheia, the opposite of Lethe, an immortalizing song.

139 Recall how Hesiod’s Golden Race is also described as living ‘like gods’ (ὡς τε θεοί, W&D. 112), in the context of which to live like gods means to have a heart ‘free of sorrow’ (ἀκηδέα, W&D. 112). As we have seen, that is a quality of the Muses, too, and the singer-poet can relegate this to his audience: one may have a ‘fresh-sorrowed heart’ (νεοκηδεία θημός, Th. 98), but upon hearing the performance he ‘in no way remember his sorrows’ (οὐδέ τι κηδεὼν μέμνηται, Th. 102-3)
140 For Truth, Memory, and Forgetfulness in the context of the song of praise, which confers immortality onto the warrior, see Detienne 1996, 39-52.
Remembering appears to be in itself a kind of initiation. The access to a type of omniscience that is bestowed upon those who maintain proper reciprocal relations with the Muses is a privilege that allows one to throw a vertical bridge to the beyond, entering and returning from it freely. As we will see in the next chapter, the process of recollection, in a way, is a rite of passage, and Memory is the essential facilitating factor that secures travel to and from the beyond, allowing the experience of the divine to be actually meaningful. At the same time, Plato’s theory of recollection calls on the soul itself to ascend, to a full disclosure of Aletheia—with the ultimate mystical experience of assimilation into the divine as its highpoint.

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141 Vernant 1983, 80.
Chapter IV

Memory and Mysticism:
The Experience of the Divine through Descent and Ascent

As old mythologies relate,
Some draught of Lethe might await
The slipping thro’ from state to state.
...
Much more, if first I floated free,
As naked essence, must I be
Incompetent of memory:

For memory dealing but with time,
And he with matter, could she climb
Beyond her own material prime?

Moreover, something is or seems,
That touches me with mystic gleams,
Like glimpses of forgotten dreams—

Of something felt, like something here;
Of something done, I know not where;
Such as no language may declare.\(^\text{142}\)

The theology of Mnemosyne discloses a wide variety of intimations as to how the ancient Greeks experienced the divine: memory is a power that transforms spatiality and temporality of the human realm, allowing for a reciprocal relationship with the divine that grants mortal human beings access to superior powers of recollection and in turn to immortality by not being forgotten. We may recall from the *Phaedo* that Plato assigns a particular role to *recollection* (ἀνάμνησις), in that the immortal soul has learned everything before, and can in its earthly incarnation “recollect about virtue and other

\(^{142}\) Excerpt from *The Two Voices* by Alfred Lord Tennyson.
things also, things which it knew before” (περὶ ἀρετῆς καὶ περὶ ἄλλων οἶνον τ’ ἐῖναι αὐτήν ἀναμνησθῆναι, ἀ γε καὶ πρότερον ἦπίστατο, *Meno* 81c-d, Chapter I). Although Plato’s theory of transmigration and recollection of the soul relies heavily on memory and the divine, our focus thus far has not been on this sort of theory because it is of a different order than the theology of Memory we set out to pursue:

In essence, such a doctrine is not *theologia* but anthropology, fantastic and yet recalling alleged experiences and predicting future ones; it thus lays claim to truth in the most direct sense, in contrast to the playful experimentation that is always apparent in the interpretation of myth.  

In this final chapter, however, we will move away from the theology of Mnemosyne but toward an anthropology of the soul, of the human being whose descent-ascent to truth is facilitated through recollection—a process that is typically captured by the language and notion of initiation.

This ascent, for Plato, has markedly *mystical* dimensions—upon the soul’s initiatory purification from the body, “the god himself will set us free” (θεὸς αὐτὸς ἄπολύσῃ ἡμᾶς, *Phaedo* 67b), and the escape of the realm of mortality he describes as “assimilation to god” (δὲ ὁμοίωσις θεῷ, *Theaetetus* 176b). Plato’s mysticism throws a bridge between the Greek concept of *mystes* and our modern notion of a *mystic*. For the Greeks, a *mystes* is an initiate into certain religious rites known as mysteries, the key to which is secrecy as well as ineffability.  

In a polytheistic system governed by rules of reciprocity, initiation is but a logical step for a human being to reach a ritually inaugurated agreement to an even more intimate relationship with a specific divinity—mysteries, then, are a form of personal religion, “depending on a private decision and

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143 Burkert 1987, 87
144 The verb *myeo* means ‘to initiate’ and may be related to *muo*, which means ‘to shut one’s ears, eyes.’ Burkert 1987, 9 and 136-7 n. 36.
aiming at some form of salvation through closeness to the divine.”

In the *Orphic Hymn to Mnemosyne* as well as in the Hipponion tablet, we encountered mystery language; *mysteria, teletai, and orgia* are all used to designate “initiation, festival, ritual,” and *mystai* and *bakchoi* mean “initiates.” Although the relation of mysteries to ‘Orphic’ and ‘Bacchic’ cults remains vague, one certain paradigm for such rites is the Eleusinian Mysteries, which are characterized as “ways of expressing the more fundamental truth that anyone who has been in direct contact with the gods is forever transformed by the experience.” The mysteries in general may safely be assumed to function as a bridge to facilitate the experiencing of direct contact between initiates and the divine, thereby calling to mind a disclosure of truth that is meaningful yet ineffable, leading to some form of salvation or blessedness.

Whereas the Greek word *mystes* approaches the human subject as a ritual initiate, our use of the word *mystic* concentrates on the experience itself: a mystic is someone who, sometimes with the death or *forgetfulness* of self, is assimilated to the divine. William James’ interpretation of mysticism gives four marks to qualify a religious experience as mystical: ineffability; noetic quality; transiency; passivity. In many ways, this set of characteristics aligns with the Greek mystical experience; what the *mystes* and the *mystic* have in common, then, is an *experience of closeness to the divine* that, as I will show, requires the involvement of powers of memory and forgetfulness to transform their conception of time and space, so that a typically vertical relationship

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145 Burkert 1987, 12.
146 Burkert 1987, 9.
147 Bowden 2010, 48.
148 Cf. Meister Eckhart’s “recipe for arriving at that state of detachment or ‘death’ in which, alone, one can truly ‘see God’: ‘you are aware of nothing within you ... having escaped earthly species and forgotten your honorable estate and all temporal happenings, you have entered oblivion ... of [everything] save the sheer ascendancy of your soul.” Fleming 1995, 142.
149 James 1963, 420.
(human-divine) may be bridged. The immortality of the soul and its possible ascent is, as a principle, presupposed by both the philosophy of Plato and the practices of the mysteries. “What mystery priests had sought to make credible in ritual,” says Burkert, “thus becomes the certainty of the highest rationality … [the soul] is called on to ascend.” In a sense, then, the ascent of the soul is in itself a quest for immortality, an attempt to bridge human mortality and divine perfection.

Yet we face a substantial lacuna in our knowledge on how exactly the experiencing of the divine is significant to the Greek initiate—what does it mean for initiates to encounter the divine? What is the core of this fundamental truth the Mysteries would lay bare, and in what ways exactly are initiates transformed by these mystic experiences? Even the relatively well-documented Eleusinian Mysteries remain, appropriately, a mystery: “We probably do know more or less what initiates experienced at Eleusis,” Bowden writes, “but the problem that faces us is, of course, that the secrets of the Mysteries were not to be revealed to non-initiates.” The truth remains hidden, despite modern-day attempts to rationalize away the mystic experience by appealing to hallucinogenic mushrooms or what anthropologists have called the imagistic mode of religiosity. These are typical cases of the etic approach: if we are to understand, however, the system from within the system we ought to adopt an emic viewpoint. We should not necessarily foster the illusion of uncovering what ‘truth’ initiates experienced during the mysteries; not only because, as Burkert notes, “secrecy was radical” but also

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150 Burkert 1985, 323. The immortality of the soul is not necessarily followed by the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul, as for Plato, Pythagoras, and others.
151 Bowden 2010, 25 and 38, respectively.
152 Wasson, Hofmann and Ruck 1978 ‘solve’ the Eleusinian Mystery by appealing to hallucinogenics. On hallucinogenic mushrooms and LSD in the Eleusinian Mysteries in general see Bowden 2010, 43. On the anthropological notion of this kind of religiosity see Bowden 2010, 44-6.
because it remains “an open question whether in mysteries the sacred was forbidden (ἀπόρρητος), or unspeakable (ἄρρητος) in an absolute sense.” But, taking into account the possible ineffability of the experience as well as the dearth of (reliable) sources, we may still venture to inquire into the language and imagery that is used to symbolize the initiate’s bridging of realms and the ultimate exposure of ‘truth.’ One of the more revealing episodes is Pausanias’ description of the Oracle of Trophonios, which is a veritable, even physical, rite de passage; some knowledge is conveyed to the initiate who descends into a direct experience of the divine, only to ascend back up to our world—physically and mentally—aided by Memory.

The mystic descent and ascent that Pausanias describes through ritual, Plato describes through philosophy. Although Plato’s reputation is that of the father of rational philosophy, French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil challenges this view; to her, Plato is “an authentic mystic and even the father of Occidental mysticism.” Weil’s ideas that Greek thought is an intimation of Christianity and her attempts to marry Christianity and Platonism need not makes us comfortable when we use the French mystic’s perspective as, in a way, an emic lens through which to gauge the Greek mystic experience—thus using, rather boldly perhaps, the mystic to understand the mystes’

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153 Burkert 1985, 276.
154 Harrison 1927, 512
155 Harrison 1927, 513, goes so far as to say that “Plato’s whole scheme alike of education and philosophy is but an attempted rationalization of the primitive mysticism of initiation, and most of all that profound and perennial mysticism of the central rite de passage, the death and the new birth, social, moral, intellectual.”
156 Can one be a philosopher and a mystic at the same time? Schopenhauer considered mysticism and philosophy two mutually exclusive paths to knowledge. Cooper includes mystics, because “the claims of mystics to achieve some kind of union with true reality mean that discussion of mysticism is very much in accord with the guiding theme of this book: philosophy as the enterprise of mitigating the sense of alienation that seems to go with the reflective human condition.” Cooper 2003, 191
157 Weil 1958, 77.
158 Yourgrau 2011, 136.
experience of the divine through memory.\textsuperscript{159} Even as we need not follow Weil in her Christianization of Greek thought, we may find with Wittgenstein’s friend Maurice O’Connor Drury, that “now that Simone Weil has taught me how to read Plato, I would bite my tongue out rather than make [my earlier] remark, that … when Plato talks about the gods, it lacks the sense of awe which you feel throughout the Bible.”\textsuperscript{160}

Pausanias’ description of the oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia puts the sphere of Memory in a context that is specifically applicable to the experiencing of the divine. Herodotus mentions the oracle of Trophonios as one of the oracles King Croesus tests for their knowledge of “the truth” (τὴν ἄληθείην, Histories 1.46.3) before launching his expedition against the Persians. Consulting the oracle in Croesus’ case is about finding the “truthful oracular response” (μαντήιον ἀψευδὲς, Histories 1.47.2, cf. Theogony 233), for the art of divination is, much like the knowledge of the Muses and the bee-maidens, subject to the will of the divinity to disclose lies that resemble the truth as opposed to the truth itself. The establishment of the oracle of Trophonios, according to Pausanias’ account, originates in the following way:

tὸ δὲ μαντεῖον οἱ Βοιωτοὶ τοῦτο οὐ πεποιμένοι πρότερον ἐπ’ αἱτίᾳ τοῖδε ἔγνωσαν. θεωροῦσι ἀφ’ ἐκάστης πόλεως ἀνδρὶς ἀποστέλλουσιν ἐς Δελφούς: οὐ γὰρ δὴ σφισιν ἔτος δεύτερον ὑπὸ ὁ θεός. τούτοις αἰτοῦσιν ἐπανόρθωμα τοῦ ἀψευδος προσέταξεν ἢ Πυθία παρὰ Τροφώνιον ἐς Ῥήγην μεδοῦσιν εὐρασθαι παρὰ ἑκείνου τὸ ἱαμα. ὡς δὲ ἐς τὴν Λεβάδειαν ἐλθὼν τὸ ἱαμα οὐκ ἐδύναντο εὑρεῖν τὸ μαντεῖον, ἐνταῦθα τὸν ἡ Πυθία τὸν Παρθένον σύμπαντο δὲ  ἑν καὶ ἡλικία  τὸν θεωροῦν πρεβύτατος—εἰδεν ἐμὸν μελισσῃν, και παρέστη οἱ, ὅποι ποτ’ ἂν ἀποτράπωνται, και αὐτὸς ἐπεσθαί. αὐτίκα δὴ τὰς μελίσσας ἐς τοῦτο ἐσπετομένας ὁρᾶ τῆς γῆς, καὶ συνεσθήλθο τοιοσὶν ἐς τὸ μαντεῖον. τούτον τὸν Σάωνα καὶ τὴν

\textsuperscript{159} Weil herself, for example, recognized that “in practice, mystics belonging to nearly all the religious traditions coincide to the extent that they can hardly be distinguished. They represent the truth of each of these traditions.” She specifically mentions the Orphic and Eleusinian Mysteries, as well as Plato. Weil 1953b, 47.

\textsuperscript{160} Rhees 1984,161, quoted in Yourgrau 2011, 136.
But the Boeotians, not having learnt about this [the oracle] before, came to know about the oracle in the following way. From each city they sent male theoroi [= envoys; pilgrims] to Delphi; for in fact the god had not made it rain for the second year. To those asking for a correction of the drought, the Pythian [Apollo’s seer] prescribed to go to Lebadeia to the side of Trophonios to discover the remedy from him. When they came to Lebadeia, they could not find the oracle, there Saon from the town of Akraiaphnios—he was also in age the oldest of the theoroi—saw a swarm of bees, and it occurred to him, wherever they would turn away from, to follow them himself. Immediately, then, he saw the bees flying there into the ground, and he went with them to the oracle. They say that this Saon has been taught by Trophonios both the established religious service and as many other things as they perform concerning the oracle.

The need to consult a god arises from a practical necessity to gain access to some knowledge: how to correct the drought. We are reminded of the fact that oracles were primarily places consulted for immediate practical purposes in the present. From each city so-called theoroi are dispatched, envoys or pilgrims to consult the oracle of Pythian Apollo in order to discover the truth, which in this case leads the theoroi to Lebadeia to another oracle, yet to be discovered. In addition to the religious connotation of theoros as a visitor of a religious festival or oracle, Hermann Koller has identified the original meaning of theoros as derived from θεο-ορός, or “seeing the god,” which suggests an experience of direct contact with the divine during which knowledge is disclosed. The oldest (and hence the wisest, cf. the epithet πρεσβύτατος and Nereus, a Master of Truth, Theogony 234) of the god-viewers locates the new oracle by following a swarm of bees.

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161 The Greek text from Pausanias is from the Teubner Edition (1903).
162 Theoroi travel ‘abroad’ for religious matters—to visit an oracle, to join a religious festival, or just for the sake of learning. This common practice, known as theoria, happened both on an institutionalized scale as well as on a personal basis. A theoria on the city-state’s behalf combined political, social, and religious aspects; the theoros (pilgrim) would see and hear the sacred spectacle or behold the sacred objects, the resulting benefits of which were to be shared with the community upon return. Nightingale 2004, 40-7. In Plato’s Symposium, Diotima, too, is a theoros, and she is said to have benefited the community of Athens: she managed to postpone the Athenian plague for ten years (201d3-6).
The oracle of Trophonios turns out to be a chthonic site of prophecy: Saon sees the bees flying into the earth; the role of the bees as the disclosers of the site is reminiscent of the bee-maidens as the reveling disclosers of truth, and of the special position of bees as associated with the divine in general.\textsuperscript{164}

When someone wishes to consult the oracle of Trophonios, which is described as a descent, he first has to go through several days of ritual purification:

κατὰ δὲ τὸ μαντεῖον τοιάδε γίνεται. ἐπειδὰν ἄνδρι ἐς τοῦ Τροφωνίου κατιέναι δόξῃ, πρῶτα μὲν τεταγμένων ἡμερῶν δίαταν ἐν οἰκήματι ἐχει, τὸ δὲ οἶκημα Δαίμονος τα ἀγαθὰ προτέρων ἕστιν ἀγαθῆς: διαιτώμενος δὲ ἐνταῦθα τὰ τε ἄλλα καθαρεύει καὶ λουτρόν εἰργεται θερμῶν, τὸ δὲ λουτρὸν ὁ ποταμός ἐστιν ἡ Ἁρκυνα (Pausanias Description 9.39.5)

Down at the oracle these things happen. Whenever a man is determined to go down to the oracle of Trophonios, he first has for a prescribed number of days his dwelling in a house, which is the sacred house of good Daimon and good Tyche; living there, among other things, he is ritually clean, and abstains from hot baths, but his bath is the river Herkyna.

The presence of good divinities like Daimon and Tyche, in whose dwellings the initiate-to-be stays, confirms the idea that we are dealing with rites of initiation here. In the treatise on the \textit{Face in the Orb of the Moon}, Plutarch says the moon is haunted by \textit{daimones}, but some of the better sort come down to preside over oracles:\textsuperscript{165}

οὐκ ἀεὶ δὲ διατρίβουσιν ἐπ’ αὐτῇ οἱ δαίμονες ἄλλα χρηστηρίουν δεύρῳ κατισιν ἐπιμελησόμενοι, καὶ ταῖς ἀνωτάτοις συμπάρεισι καὶ συνοργίαζουσι τῶν τελετῶν ... ἐκ δὲ τῶν βελτίων ἐκείνων οἱ τε περὶ τὸν Ἀρκυνόν ἄντες ἐφασαν αὐτοὺς εἶναι, ... καὶ τοὺς περὶ Βοιωτίαν ἐν Λεβαδείᾳ Τροφωνιάδας.

(Plutarch \textit{de Facie in Orbe Lunae} 30)

The \textit{daimones} do not always stay up there, but come down in order to take charge of oracles, and they take part in the highest of orgiastic initiatory rites ... Of the best of these [\textit{daimones}] are those who said they themselves were around Kronos, ... and the \textit{Trophoniads} in Lebadeia around Boeotia.

\textsuperscript{164} For an extensive overview of the role of the bee in Greek religion and mythology, see Lawler 1954, 103-6.

\textsuperscript{165} Harrison 1927, 511.
Plutarch thus supports not only the notion that the Oracle of Trophonios is linked to initiatory rites, but also helps to understand the role of good Daimon (Δαίμονος τε ἄγαθοù)—he takes charge of the oracle, and acts as an intermediate between two realms. In Plato’s *Symposium*, Eros is also called a *daimon*, “a great *daimon* … he is in between god and mortal” (δαίμων μέγας ... μεταξύ ἐστι θεοù τε καὶ θνητοù, 202d13-e1).¹⁶⁶ Being of an intermediate nature (*μεταξύ, metaxu*, “in between”), Eros interprets and communicates messages to the gods from men and *vice versa* (*Plato Symposium* 202e3ff). He is thus the very embodiment of the bridging of the mortal and divine realms, a role we may also envision for Good Daimon presiding over the Oracle at Lebadeia. The bridging quality of these best of *daïmones* is evidently a blissful thing, as Plutarch’s reference to Kronos invokes once again the Golden Race of men and their state *free from sorrow* (ἀκηδέα).

Good Daimon and Good Tyche also play their part in the ritual cleanliness and purification of the initiand: living with them, the initiand is “ritually clean” (καθαρεύει). According to Clement of Alexandria, purifications are the first stage of the mysteries:

> ἄρα καὶ τῶν μυστηρίων τῶν Ἑλλησιν ἀρχεὶ μὲν τὰ καθάρσια, καθάπερ καὶ τοῖς βαρβάροις τὸ λουτρόν. μετά ταῦτα δὴ ἐστὶ τὰ μικρὰ μυστήρια διδασκαλίας τινὰ ὑπόθεσιν ἐχοντα καὶ προπαρασκευῆς τῶν μελλόντων, τὰ δὲ μεγάλα περὶ τῶν συμπάντων, οὐ μανθάνειν <σώκ> ἐτί υπολείπεται, ἐποπευτεῖν δὲ καὶ περινοεῖν τὴν τε φύσιν καὶ τὰ πράγματα. (Clement *Stromata* 5.70.7–70.1)

And for the Greeks, then, the first part of the mysteries are the *purifications*, just as a *bath* is among the non-Greeks. After that there are the lesser mysteries which have the function of teaching, and preparation for the things that are to come; and then the greater mysteries which concern everything, where there is no longer learning left, but contemplation and considering of nature and of realities.

¹⁶⁶ The Greek text from Plato’s *Symposium* is from Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics, edited by Kenneth Dover (1980).
Purification was certainly part of the Eleusinian Mysteries too, and the ‘Orphic’ gold tablets from Thurii also indicate that the initiates have undergone ritual purification.

Quoting once again the famous passage from the *Phaedo* (cf. Chapter I), we find that for Plato the soul needs to distance itself from the body in order to attain to knowledge, which is expressed in terms of purification:

καὶ ἐν ᾧ ζῶμεν, ... ἐγγυτάτω ἐσόμεθα τοῦ εἰδέναι, ἐὰν ὅτι μάλιστα μηδὲν ὄμιλόμεν τῷ σῶματι, μηδὲ κοινωνόμεν, ... ἀλλὰ καθαρεύομεν ἄπ’ αὐτοῦ, ἐως ὅτι ὁ θεός αὐτὸς ἀπολύῃ ἡμᾶς: καὶ οὔτω μὲν καθαροὶ ἀπαλλαττόμενοι τῆς τοῦ σώματος ἀφροσύνης, ὡς τὸ εἰκός μετὰ τοιούτων τε ἐσόμεθα καὶ γνωσόμεθα δι’ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν πάν τι εὐλικρινές, τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἴσως τὸ ἠληθές: μὴ καθαρός γὰρ καθαροῦ ἐφάπτεσθαι μή ὡς θεμιτὸν ἔρχεται μὴ οὐ θεμιτῶν. (Plato *Phaedo* 67a-b.)

And while we live, we shall be closest to knowledge, if we, as far as possible, neither associate with the body nor join with it, ... but purify ourselves from it, until the god himself will set us free. And in this way, being pure and being released from the body’s thoughtlessness, so we shall, I think, be with the pure and shall know of ourselves all that is unmixed, and that is, perhaps, the truth: for it would not be rightful that the pure is attained by the impure.

Plato here puts a strong emphasis on ritual purity, as the pursuit for knowledge presupposes “the truth” (τὸ ἠληθὲς) of a strict distinction between “pure” (καθαρός) and “impure” (μὴ καθαρός). The process of “purification, ritual cleansing” (καθαρμός) should free the soul of the “body’s thoughtlessness” (σῶματος ἀφροσύνης). The purity of the soul leads to pure knowledge, which is the truth (τὸ ἠληθὲς). For Plato, the quest for the soul’s ascent in philosophical terms necessitates first of all the speaking of the truth and the dispelling of falsehoods. When in the *Symposium* it is Socrates’ turn to make a speech about Eros, he distinguishes himself from the other speakers by claiming to be unable to perform a panegyric in the style of his predecessors:

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167 Parker 2005, 346. *Halade Mystai*, ‘Initiates to the Sea,’ the ritual with the washing and sacrificing of the piglet is such a purification rite in the Eleusinian Mysteries, Bowden 2010, 33-4.

168 Bowden 2010, 150-1.
ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ ὑπ’ ἀβελτερίας ὁμην δεῖν τὰληθῆ λέγειν περὶ ἐκάστου τοῦ ἐγκομιαζομένου, καὶ τούτο μὲν ὑπάρχειν, ἐξ αὐτῶν δὲ τούτον τὰ κάλλιστα ἐκλεγομένους ὡς εὐρεπέστατα τιθέναι. (Plato Symposium 198d3-6)

For in my stupidity I thought it necessary to speak the truth about each thing that is praised, and to make this the beginning, choosing simply out of that [the truth] the best things so as to present them in the most attractive way.

Socrates’ previously stated expertise in τὰ ἐρωτικά (“things concerning Eros,” see 177d7-8) only applies to the truth about Eros. Socrates hereby not only implies the utter falsehood (cf. ψευδῆ, “falsehood, lies,” 198e2) of all the previous speeches, but he also proclaims the truth of his account of Eros (cf. “to listen to the truth being spoken concerning Eros,” 199b3).169 The contrast here between truth and falsehood concerning Eros invokes Plato’s concern for true knowledge, the key to which is recollection. The cross-examination (Ἐλεγχος) that Socrates performs, then, is intricately bound up to the notion of purification and ritual cleansing (καθαρμός), in this case a cleansing of falsehoods (ψευδή). As the passage from the Phaedo testifies, it is the body that needs to be overcome in order to attain the truth.

In the case of the Oracle of Trophonios, the initiand attains purification by abstaining from hot baths but bathing in the river Herkyna instead (cf. τὸ δὲ λουτρὸν ὁ ποταμός ἐστιν ἡ 'Ερκυνα). Elsewhere, Pausanias explains how the river Herkyna was discovered when Kore (Persephone, the daughter of Demeter as the typical child) was playing with Herkyna:

φασὶ δ’ ἑνταῦθα Ἁρκυναν ὁμοὶ Κόρη τῇ Δήμητρος παίζουσαν καὶ ἔχουσαν χήνα ἀφεῖναι τούτον ἄκουσαν: ἐς δὲ ἄντρον κοίλον ἐσπτάντος καὶ ὑπὸ λίθον

169 Socrates then assumes the rule of interlocutor, and exposes the falsehood of Agathon’s argument by showing that one does not desire that which one already possesses. When Agathon is brought to the typical post-Socratic state of ἀπορία, he remarks how there is no speaking against Socrates, who in turn cleverly corrects this remark: “you cannot speak against the truth, my dear Agathon, while there is nothing difficult about speaking against Socrates” (οὐ μὲν οὖν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ... ὁ φιλούμενε Ἀγάθων, δύνασαι ἄντιλέγειν, ἐπεὶ Σωκράτει γε οὐδὲν χαλεπόν, 201c8-9).
They say that there Herkyna, playing together with Kore, the daughter of Demeter, and having a goose, she let go of it involuntarily: and when it had flown into a hollow cave and hidden under a stone, Kore herself, having entered, took the bird laying under the stone: they say that water then flowed from where Kore took up the stone and after that the river was called Herkyna.

We are reminded of the fact that the Oracle was discovered by Saon because of drought; and it is Kore who discovers the water supply, the very girl who in the Hymn to Demeter—the myth that functions to a significant extent as the “sacred tale” (ἱερός λόγος) of the Eleusinian Mysteries—is ensnared by a beautiful flower and then abducted by Hades, the ultimate descent into Death. The flower was “a beautiful toy” (καλὸν ἄθυρμα) for the girl, and when the thing of beauty has guided, she experiences a sudden rapture by the god himself. For Weil, this myth characterizes God’s quest for man, just as ultimately in the Phaedo god himself sets us free: the soul is ensnared by beauty itself, symbolized by the narcissus which Gaia made grow as a trick for the playing girl.170 “By the power of this snare God seizes the soul in spite of itself,” says Weil, “God must allow the soul to return to nature; but before that, by surprise and by strategy, He furtively gives it a pomegranate seed to eat”171—Kore is tricked by Beauty, then the god pulls her in. Kore’s abduction represents the soul’s entrapment by beauty, and its subsequent descent into the underworld as its initiation into some union with the divine.

Pausanias provides another link to the Eleusinian myth when he lists the divinities to whom the initiand must sacrifice, the last sacrifice of which is “to Demeter, whom they

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170 Weil 1958, 3: “The narcissus flower represents Narcissus, a being so beautiful that he could be in love only with himself.”
171 Weil 1958, 3.
say, naming her Europa, was the nurse of Trophonios” (καὶ Δήμητρι ἦν ἐπονομάζοντες Εὐρώπην τοῦ Τροφωνίου φασίν εἶναι τροφόν, 9.39.5). Besides the pun (Τροφωνίου-τροφόν), the reference to Demeter as his “nurse” (τροφόν) is significant because the other famous child she nursed was Demophoon himself, whom she tried to render immortal in the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

Kore’s entrapment by the beautiful flower finds its obvious parallel in Plato’s account of Eros as the metaxu to the Beautiful, which in turn is Plato’s metaxu to the Good. Yet the object of Eros is not beauty, but rather “begetting and bringing forth in beauty” (τῆς γεννήσεως καὶ τοῦ τόκου ἐν τῷ καλῷ, 206e5), because procreation is the only way a mortal human being can approximate perpetuity and immortality. Diotima concludes therefore that “it is indeed necessary from this account that Eros is also the desire for immortality” (ἀναγκαῖον δὴ ἐκ τούτου τοῦ λόγου καὶ τῆς ἁθανασίας τὸν ἔρωτα εἶναι, 207a3-4). This immortality is to be attained through offspring—physical or spiritual in nature—though the immortal name won by poets or lawgivers outdoes the begetting of fine children. The highest human aspiration at this level, therefore, is “love of honor” (φιλοτιμία, cf. 208c3),172 the point of which is basically to be saved by not being forgotten, which requires, as we have already seen in Chapter I, practice (μελέτη):

For that which is called practice, since it is the practice of departing knowledge; forgetting is the departure of knowledge, and practice, newly implanting again the memory in the place of what is lost, preserves the knowledge, so that it seems to

172 Kraut 1992, 257.
be the same. For in this way everything mortal is preserved, not by always being the same exactly throughout, like the divine, but by leaving behind another new thing similar to what it was itself that left and grew old. Through this device, Socrates, [Diotima] said, the mortal partakes in the immortal, both the body and all the other things; this is impossible in any other way.

This passage from the Symposium revisits the Phaedo’s concern with writing, which leads to neglect or lack of practice (ἀμελετησίᾳ) of one’s own recollective powers. The significance of this practice (μελέτη) is here confirmed by Diotima’s instruction to Socrates: the preservation of knowledge through memory is as close to the divine as one can get—“the mortal partakes of the immortal” (θνητὸν ἀθανασίας μετέχει), because of the power of Memory to preserve, perpetuate, immortalize.\footnote{Riedweg 1987, 28 rightly suggests that this ‘Eros for immortality’ is essentially aiming for the epic notion of “undying fame” (κλέος ἄφθιτον, cf. Homer I 413), the immortality of the hero as well as of the epic itself (cf. 208c5-6).}

After the ritual purification, the initiate-to-be at the Oracle of Trophonios is being prepared for his descent, aided by two teenage boys (itself the proper age for a rite de passage) who act as servant boys and who are conspicuously called Hermae, little Hermes:

πρῶτα μὲν τῇ νυκτὶ αὐτὸν ἄγουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ποταμὸν τὴν Ἑρκύναν, ἀγαγόντες δὲ ἐλαίῳ χρίουσι καὶ λούουσι δύο παῖδες τὸν ἄστρων ἑπτὰ που καὶ δέκα γεγονότες, οὔς Ἑρμᾶς ἐπονομάζουσιν: οὗτοι τὸν καταβαίνοντα εἰσιν οἱ λούοντες καὶ ὑπό σα χρῆ διακονοῦντες ἀπὸ παιδός. το ἐντεύθεν υπὸ τῶν ἱερέων οὐκ αὐτίκα ἐπὶ τὸ μαντεῖον, ἑπὶ δὲ ὅσα χρή διακονοῦσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερέων οὐκ αὐτίκα ἐπὶ τὸ μαντεῖον, ἐπὶ δὲ ὅσα χρή διακονοῦσιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἱερέων. (Pausanias Description 9.39.7)

First, in the night they bring him to the river Herkyna, and having brought him they anoint him with olive oil and wash him: two boys from the citizens, being about thirteen years old, whom they call Hermae; and they are the ones who wash the descendant and whatever things necessary, acting as servant boys. From there he is taken by the priests, not immediately to the oracle, but to springs of water; these are very close to each other.

The fact that two Hermes-boys are guiding the initiand reinforces the idea of vertical movement in general (Hermes ascends and descends, himself in some way the typical
metaxu between mortals and immortals), and the idea of descent into the Underworld in particular (Hermes as psychopomp). Here, the descent into Hell is straightforward, but how about the imagery of descent in Plato?

If, as for Plato, death is the separation of body and soul, then the immortal soul continues its journey upon death. Removed from the body, the soul should be purified, and hence closer to truth. That the truth is something inherently unconcealed is a quality it shares with the soul, both of which therefore pertain to the realm of the divine, as opposed to appearance (which conceals the truth) and body (which conceals the soul). In the *Gorgias*, Plato specifically connects the truth and the soul with the state of being stripped of all appearance—nakedness, that is. The issue at hand is the judgment in the afterlife, too many cases of which are currently misjudged as the judges are confounded by appearances. Zeus proposes a solution:

\[ \text{ἔπειτα γυμνὸς κριτέον άπάντων τούτων, τεθνεότας γάρ δεῖ κρίνεσθαι. καὶ τόν κριτήν δεῖ γυμνὸν εἶναι, τεθνεότα, αὕτη τῇ ψυχῇ αὕτην τήν ψυχήν θεωροῦντα ἐξαίφνης ἀποθανόντος ἐκάστου.} \] (Plato *Gorgias* 523e)

Then let he be judged naked of all these things, for having died, they must be judged. It is necessary for the judge to be naked too, which means he should have died. By the soul alone should he behold the very soul immediately upon the death of each.

Weil strongly emphasizes that here the image of nudity is linked to death: one has to be stripped of everything that belongs to this world of appearances—wealth, nobility, physical beauty—but in order to do so one has to be, as it were, dead. It implies, too, that the judgment is “nothing but the expression of what one really is,”\(^\text{174}\) and that ‘real being’ therefore means truth, uncovered by public esteem and possessions so that the judge may “behold” (θεωροῦντα) the naked truth: “The truth is not revealed except in nakedness,”

\(^{174}\) Weil 1958, 81.
says Weil, “and that nakedness is death.”\(^\text{175}\) Death, then, means parting with the cloak of the realm of appearance—the body.

\[ \text{ὁ θάνατος … οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἕν δυοῖν πράγματοι δίαλυσις, τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος, ἀπ᾽ ἀλλήλου. … ἐνδήλα πάντα ἐστίν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ, ἐπειδὴν γυμνωθῆ ἡ τοῦ σώματος, τὰ τῇ φύσεως καὶ τὰ παθήματα, ὁ διὰ τὴν ἐπιτήδευσιν ἐκάστου πράγματος ἔσχεν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος. (Plato Gorgias 524b-d) \]

Death … is nothing else than the dissolution of two things, the soul and the body, from each other. … All that is in the soul becomes manifest, when it is stripped of its body, of the things of nature and the experiences, which a man has in his soul on account of his attention to each pursuit.

When in death the soul “is stripped of its body” (γυμνωθῆ τοῦ σώματος), the naked truth shines forth, as the things of nature and the soul’s experiences are laid bare in a state of real being.

This image is comically exemplified by Aristophanes’ Frogs—named after the chorus of blessed initiates in the underworld.\(^\text{176}\) In the Frogs, Dionysus and his slave Xanthias, upon their descent into the underworld, have switched clothes, and their outer appearance is sufficient to deceive Aeacus—the appointed judge of Europe (cf. Gorgias 524a!). His flogging to no avail, Aeacus at length suggests:

\[ \text{oὐ τοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαι πω μαθεῖν ὀπότερος ὑμῶν ἐστι θεός, ἀλλ᾽ εἰσίτον: ὁ δεσπότης γὰρ αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς γνώσεται χὴ Φερρέφατθ᾽, ἄτ᾽ ὄντε κἀκεῖνῳ θεῷ.}\(^\text{177}\)

Truly, by Demeter, still I cannot discover which one of you is the god. Be come inside; for my lord himself [Hades] will soon know, and Persephone, since they themselves are both gods. (Aristophanes Frogs 668-71)

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\(^{175}\) Weil 1958, 82.

\(^{176}\) For the use of mystery terminology in Plato as in relation to its use in Aristophanes, see De Vries 1973, 1-8.

\(^{177}\) The Greek text from Aristophanes is from the Oxford Classical Texts, edited by F.W. Hall and W.M. Geldart (1939).
Once again, the truth is obscured by appearances. If the path of purification necessitates a naked soul—stripped from the body, that is—and if to be naked means, somehow, to be dead, then the soul’s ascent to the blessedness of the divine realm involves, rather, a “descent into Hell as initiation.”

In the next episode of Pausanias’ description of the descent to the Oracle of Trophonios, the role of Memory and Forgetfulness in this type of mystic experience of the divine becomes finally clear:

Here he must drink water called the water of Lethe, so that he becomes forgetful of all the things which he up to this time was considering, and after that to drink again another water, that of Mnemosyne; from this he remembers the things he has seen during his descent. After looking at the image which they say Daidalus made—it is not shown by the priests except to those who are about to go to Trophonios—and having seen this image and having attended to it and having prayed, he comes to the oracle, clothed in a linen chiton being girded with bands and dressed in boots from the country.

The descendant must drink from the spring Lethe, so that he forgets all things he hitherto knew. In several eschatological accounts, the same fate awaits those souls who approach the spring of Lethe upon death. The gold tablet from Hipponion, although it does not mention Lethe explicitly, suggests such a spring, too, in the topography of the Underworld. Milton (Paradise Lost II) also mentions the river Lethe in his description of the Underworld:

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178 Weil 1958, 83.
179 Graf and Johnston 2007, 103-5.
180 Milton (Paradise Lost II) also mentions the river Lethe in his description of the Underworld:
make their way through the heat of the Plain of Lethe, and subsequently quench their thirst in the river of Carelessness, forgetting everything, before they are reborn. Here, Lethe truly functions as the opposite of Aletheia, the Truth the soul has once seen is forgotten, concealed again upon rebirth. In Pausanias’ account, however, the descendant drinks from Lethe almost as another form of purification. In order for the initiand’s descent into the Underworld to be successful, he can apparently not retain any of his present memories—the descent requires the cleansing of his memory, the wiping out of his wax tablet. The reason for this is that the soul needs to die (= descend) before it can experience the divine (= ascend). Death, symbolized by Lethe, purifies the soul in preparation for its ascent.

The ascent itself, in turn, requires Mnemosyne: with a memory free from the experiences of his mortal earthly existence, the initiand drinks the water of Memory, “and from this he remembers the things he has seen upon his descent” (ἀπὸ τούτου τε μνημονεύει τὰ ὄφθεντα οἱ καταβάντι). Here, the parallel with the ‘Orphic’ gold tablets is even clearer. The mystai and bacchoi were instructed to drink from the Lake of Memory only, so that they may continue on the blessed road. Although scholars have focused primarily on the differences, the power that is invoked by the theology of Mnemosyne is still quite similar. Both the initiates in the Underworld and the initiands of the Oracle appeal to the special sort of knowledge that Mnemosyne presides over—the knowledge that bridges human mortality and divine perfection, by eliminating the barrier that

Farr off from these a slow and silent stream,  
Lethe the River of Oblivion roule  
Her watrie Labyrinth, whereof who drinks,  
Forthwith his former state and being forgets,  
Forgets both joy and grief, pleasure and pain.

181 According to Edmonds 2004, 106-8, the functions of the Waters of Memory differ significantly in the two contexts. See also Graf and Johnston 2007, 205 n. 33.
separates the present from the past, the here from the there. Thus Mnemosyne, in both cases, facilitates the soteric uplifting of the soul that requires a vertical movement—the descendant into Hell may ascend safely again; the deceased soul may ascend to a state of bliss; and for Plato, the soul of the philosopher, who has a supreme relationship with Memory, may become close to the divine:

δεῖ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον ξυνιέναι κατ’ εἶδος λεγόμενον, ἐκ πολλῶν ἰὸν αἰσθήσεων εἰς ἐν λογισμῷ συναιρούμενον· τοῦτο δ’ ἐστὶν ἀνάμνησις ἑκείνων ἀ ποτ’ εἴδεν ἡμῶν ἢ ὕποκή συμπορευθείσα θεῶ καὶ ὑπεριδούσα ἃ νῦν εἶναι φαμεν, καὶ ἀνακύψασα εἰς τὸ ὅν ὄντως. διὸ δὴ δικαίως μόνη πετεροῦται ἡ τοῦ φιλοσόφου διάνοια: πρὸς γὰρ ἐκείνων ἰοίεν ἡμῖν κατὰ δύναμιν, πρὸς οἴσπερ θεὸς ὃν θείως ἔστιν. τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἁνήρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὑπέρθεκτος ἐκ πολλῶν ἑσθεν, τοῖς δὲ δὴ τοιούτοις ἁνήρ ὑπομνήμασιν ὑπέρθεκτος ἐκ πολλῶν ἑσθεν. (Plato Phaedrus 249c-d)

For it is necessary that a human being understands a general idea formed by collecting into one the many sense-perceptions though reasoning power; and this is recollection of these things which our soul has once seen, journeying with god, and lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. Indeed, that’s why justly only the understanding of the philosopher flies; for he is always, so far as he is able, with these things in memory, the same according to which god is being divine. Indeed, a man who uses such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries, and he alone becomes perfect; but since he separates himself from the human pursuits and becoming toward the divine, he is rebuked by the many for being mad, and the many escape notice that he is inspired.

He who uses his memory rightly (cf. use his λογισμός to recollect the Truth his soul perceived on its journey with the divine), according to Plato, is “always being initiated into perfect mysteries, and he alone becomes perfect” (τελέους ἰντελετᾶς τελούμενος, τέλευς ὅντως μόνος γίγνεται). Memory allows the mortal to partake in the immortal (Symposium 208b), and he whose powers of recollection lift him up to a direct closeness to unconcealed Aletheia thus becomes the most complete and perfect initiate. But what does it mean for the initiate to become god-like? Plato envisions something more than the
sorrow-less state of the Hesiodic Golden Race; in fact, Plato’s view brings out the notion that the divine is characterized by perfection of righteousness, which is significant for Weil too—God’s supreme quality is His Goodness. The idea of the realm of the divine as perfectly good and perfectly just is not only philosophically embodied by Plato’s theory of Forms, but also by Plato’s θεολογία, which poses a perfect divinity. Socrates, in a famous passage from the Theaetetus, explains what the real reason is why people have so much difficulty avoiding vice and pursuing virtue:

τὸ δ’ οὖ, ἵνα μὴ κακὸς καὶ ἵνα ἄγαθος δοκῇ εἶναι … τὸ δὲ ἂληθὲς ὡδε λέγωμεν. θεός οὐδάμην οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ’ ὡς οἶον τε δικαίωτατος καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν αὐτῷ ὁμοίότερον οὐδὲν ἢ ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν αὖ γένηται ὅτι δικαίωτατος.
(Plato Theaetetus 176b-c)

It is not so that someone may seem to be not bad and may seem to be good … but let me thus tell the truth: a god is never in any way unrighteous, but most perfectly righteous, and there is not anything more like him than he among us who in turn becomes most righteous.

Again, the speaking of truth presupposes that Socrates has been cleansed and purified from falsehood, and speaks with authority on the nature of the gods. He reveals that a god is “most perfectly righteous” (ὡς οἶον τε δικαίωτατος), whose example can be imitated and approximated by a perfectly righteous man “among us” (ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν). For Weil, he among us who becomes most righteous is Jesus Christ, or, for that matter, Socrates, or Krishna—those who embody divine righteousness, or in Platonic terms, the Idea of the Good.182

In Plato’s philosophical account of the soul’s ascent, the most righteous is the most god-like, but to what extent can the human condition really be averted or foiled to

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182 Yourgrau 2011, 140, in his recent philosophical biography of Simone Weil, suggests that Plato hereby admits the possibility of an incarnation of the divine. At any rate, these ‘god-like’ paragons of righteousness may function as exemplars through which ‘human misery’ and ‘divine perfection’ can be bridged.
actually attain closeness to the divine? In the *Theaetetus*, the answer lies in fleeing this world and being assimilated to the divine:

> Αλλ’ οὔτ’ ἀπολέσθαι τὰ κακὰ δυνατόν, ὦ Θεόδωρε, ὑπεναντίον γὰρ τι τῷ ἀγαθῷ ἂν εἶναι ἀνάγκη, οὔτ’ ἐν θεοῖς αὐτὰ ἱδρύσθαι, τὴν δὲ θυτὴν φύσιν καὶ τὸνὶ τὸν περιπολεῖ ἐξ ἀνάγκης. διὸ καὶ παράσθαι χρῆ ἐνθένδε ἐκεῖσε φεύγειν ὅτι τάχιστα. φυγὴ δὲ ὑμιόσωσις θεῶ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν, ὑμιόσωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. (Plato *Theaetetus* 176a-b)

But it is not possible that evil should disappear, Theodorus, for there must always be something contrary to the good. And this something cannot have its place among the gods, but out of necessity it floats around in the realm of mortal nature in this world. That is why one should strive to flee this world as quickly as one can. This flight is, as far as possible, an assimilation in god, and this assimilation is to become righteous and holy by means of *thoughtfulness*.

Plato here poses Weil’s two realms, one of human misery (the realm of the body) that is distinguished by the presence of *evil* (τὰ κακὰ), and one of divine perfection (the realm of the soul) characterized by the absence of evil. To assimilate into the divine realm, then, means to assimilate into the perfectly good, or the Good; and indeed, one thus becomes “righteous and holy by means of *thoughtfulness*” (δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως).

This last word stands in stark contrast to the “body’s thoughtlessness” (σώματος ἀφροσύνης) of the *Phaedo*, which had to be overcome to attain true knowledge about the nature of the god. The “escape” (φυγή, cf. how Sappho “escaped the gloom of Hades” and attained immortality, Ἀίδεω σκότον ἐκφυγον) from this world and the “assimilation to god” (ὀμιόσωσις θεῶ) reveal the soteric nature of the experience, the vertical *Aufhebung* that the recollective power of Memory facilitates.

At the Oracle of Trophonios, the descendant is now ready to have his encounter with the divine, and to receive the special knowledge or truth (“things that will happen,” τὰ μέλλοντα) that the oracle may disclose:
Then he who has descended, lying on the ground holding barley-cakes kneaded with honey, thrusts his feet into the hole and he himself follows after, being eager for his knees to be inside the hole; and his remaining body being dragged in immediately runs after his knees, just as the greatest and swiftest of rivers keeps hidden a man being bound together by a whirlpool. After this, to those who are inside the innermost sanctuary ('not-to-be-entered') there is not one and the same way in which they learn things that are about to happen, but sometimes someone has seen them, and someone else has heard them. To return back up for the descendant is through the same mouth also, with the feet running out first.

The experience unmistakably relies on the rapid and intense emotional and physical shock-effect that the initiate undergoes; the body of the descendant is dragged down through a narrow hole, and suddenly the initiate is 'inside the innermost sanctuary' (ἐντὸς τοῦ ἀδύτου). The truth comes in the form of visible or audible knowledge, but Pausanias does not give much detail as to how the disclosing is experienced. Perhaps we may compare Pausanias' scanty account to the self-proclaimed mystic experience of philosopher William James, who describes his mystical vision in terms of memory:

I seemed all at once to be reminded of a past experience; and this reminiscence, ere I could conceive or name it distinctly, developed into something further that belonged with it, this in turn into something further still, and so on, until the process faded out, leaving me amazed at the sudden vision of increasing ranges of distant fact of which I could give no articulate account.

James' experience sounds like a recollective experience in the Aristotelian sense, following a certain sequence, but goes beyond what is to be recollected from usual

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183 Bowden 2010, 45. Cf. Plutarch Fragment 168, in which he describes the bewilderment the soul experiences, the sweat, panic, and shivering, before the revelation of light and purity.

experiences in the past. The sudden disclosure of an ineffable vision comes about through a process with a mode of sequence akin to that of recollection, and suggests a connection between memory and mystic experience; the ineffability of the experience, which is visual rather than conceptual as James says, is intimated by the visual dimension of memory in general and recollection in particular: the experience is an active path resulting in a passive disclosure of some truth.

The emphasis on the sense-experience (hearing, seeing) is significant, though, because sense-experience forms the input for memory. Drinking from the water of Mnemosyne, the initiand “remembers the things he has seen upon his descent” (μνημονεύει τὰ ὄφθεντα οἱ καταβάντι). In the Eleusinian Mysteries, too, the visual is stressed: “We have reference to ta dromena, ta deiknumena and ta legomena, ‘things done, things shown and things said’ as making up the Mysteries,” Bowden says, and “the priest of Demeter is called hierophant, which means ‘he who shows the holy things’.”

Initiates into the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis were called epoptes, “viewers, contemplators.” Clement described this stage as follows: “the greater mysteries concern everything, where there is no longer learning left, but contemplation and considering of nature and of realities” (τὰ δὲ μεγάλα περὶ τῶν συμπάντων, οὗ μανθάνειν <ούκ>έτι ύπολείπεται, ἐποπτεύειν δὲ καὶ περινοεῖν τὴν τε φύσιν καὶ τὰ πράγματα, Stromata 5.70.1). The action that apparently expresses the experiencing of the divine best is seeing, just as the pilgrims are called theoroi, “god-viewers.”

The emphasis on the visible relates directly to its powers of entrapment: the Beautiful is a visible force, the visible image of the Good. In the Symposium, the final stage of initiation (starting at 209e5) mirrors that of the Greater Mysteries (μεγάλα 185 Bowden 2010, 38.
μυστήρια,¹⁸⁶ and involves the gradual ascent from the “beholding, revelation” (ἐποκτικός) of particular beauties, to beholding beauty in general (“...gazing upon [θεωρόν] the vast ocean of beauty...” 210d4), and finally to absolute and eternal “Beauty itself” (αὐτὸ τὸ καλὸν, 211d3). Diotima’s function has shifted from being Socrates’ teacher to a mysteries guide, or mystagogue (μυσταγώγος): she will lead, and Socrates is to follow as best as he can—the leading hand of the mystagogue is indispensable, as the Hermes boys and the priests in the case of the Oracle.¹⁸⁷

The final step of the ascent (known as the ladder of love)¹⁸⁸ is the self-disclosure of the beautiful itself: he who has followed the right path of initiation “as he approaches the end of his initiation will suddenly catch sight of a beauty whose nature is marvelous indeed” (πρὸς τέλος ἢδη ἰὼν τῶν ἐρωτικῶν ἔξαίφνης κατόψει τι θαυμαστὸν τὴν φύσιν καλὸν, 210e3-5).¹⁸⁹ Thus at the hand of the mystagogue but ultimately of his own accord, the initiate has come closest to the divine and beholds its unconcealed, true nature. This notion is reiterated at the end of Diotima’s speech, when she states the benefits of being an initiate into the Greater Mysteries of Eros:

τεκόντι δὲ ἄρετὴν ἄληθὴ καὶ θρεψαμένῳ ὑπάρχει θεωρίει γενέσθαι, καὶ ἐπερ τῷ ἀλλῷ ἀνθρώπῳ ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκείνῳ. (Plato Symposium 212a5-7)

¹⁸⁶ Riedweg 1987, 21. Diotima, Socrates’ mystagogue, uses very specific mystery language: ‘Into these things concerning Eros [i.e. the Lesser Mysteries], Socrates, you too could perhaps be initiated; but whether into the final revelations also, for the sake of which these [i.e. the Lesser Mysteries] exist, if one approaches correctly, I do not know if you would be able to. I will tell you of it, and I will not abandon any of my willingness, so you try to follow if you can’ (ταῦτα μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐρωτικὰ ἴσως, ὦ Σώκρατες, κἂν σὺ μηθεῖς, τὰ δὲ τέλεα καὶ ἐποπτικὰ, ἐν ἑνίκα καὶ ταῦτα ἐστίν, ἐὰν τις ὀρθῶς μετήργησα, οὐκ οἶδ’ εἰ οἷος τ’ ἂν εἴης. ἐρῶ μὲν οὖν ... ἐγὼ καὶ προθυμίας οὐδὲν ἀπολέσθω, παρὼ δὲ ἐπεσοῦμαι, ἐὰν οἷος τ’ ἂς, 209e5-210a4).

¹⁸⁷ Initiation into the mysteries can only be successful ‘if one is properly directed by one’s guide’ (ἐάν ὀρθῶς ηηῆθα τ’ ἡγοῦμένος, 210a6-7). For other references to mystagogic language of ‘leading’ and ‘following,’ Riedweg 1987, 26.

¹⁸⁸ For a succinct discussion of the movement of ascent, see Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 148-151. See also Kraut 1992, 253-262.

¹⁸⁹ The most obvious and omnipresent indication of mystery terminology in this final phase of the Greater Mysteries is the use of words that denote ‘seeing,’ ‘beholding,’ ‘gazing at,’ et cetera, the prime example of which is the verb καθοράω (‘to look down, to look to, to observe,’ cf. 210e4). Riedweg 1987, 22-25 lists a myriad of instances in which a form of καθοράω is used to denote the ‘looking at’ or ‘beholding of’ beauty.
To him who brought forth and nurtured true [i.e. not forgotten, hence everlasting] virtue it is the privilege to become loved by the gods, and to become immortal himself, if ever any man can.

“Godbelovedness” (θεοφιλεῖ) and becoming “immortal” (ἀθανάτω) are the ultimate rewards of the soul’s pilgrimage and god-gazing (theoria). The initiate ultimately experiences the divine through seeing, guided by the mystagogue through the stages of purification and instruction. The god-gazer at the Oracle of Trophonios may not win Plato’s ultimate rewards of immortality, but when he ascends he nonetheless has experienced the divine, and has seen or heard certain knowledge; Mnemosyne has ensured his safe return from Hell, up again to the light of day, where his mystagogues (priests, ἱερεῖς) receive him:

τὸν δὲ ἄναβάντα παρὰ τοῦ Τροφωνίου παραλαβόντες αὐθις οἱ ἱερεῖς καθίζουσιν ἐπὶ θρόνον Μνημοσύνης μὲν καλούμενον, κειται δὲ οὐ πόρρῳ τοῦ ἀδύτου, καθεστθέντα δὲ ἐνταῖθα ἀνερωτῶσιν ὑπόσα εἰδε τε καὶ ἑπύθετο: μαθόντες δὲ ἐπιτρέπουσιν αὐτὸν ἢδη τοῖς προσήκουσιν. οἱ δὲ ἔστω το ὀἴκημα, ἔνθα καὶ πρότερον διητάτο παρά τε Τύχη καὶ Δαίμονι ἀγαθοῖς, ἐς τοῦτο ἀράμενοι κομίζουσι κάτοχον τὸν δὲ ἄλλα οὐδὲν τι φρονήσει μεῖον ἢ πρότερον καὶ γέλως ἑπάνεισιν οἱ.

(Pausanias Description 9.39.13)

The priests, receiving again the one who has ascended from the oracle of Trophonios, set him down on what is called the chair of Mnemosyne, which stands not far from the inner sanctuary, and they question him, who is seated there, about whatever things he has seen or learned; and when they have found out, they turn him over now to those he belongs to. To the house where he was also living before beside good Tyche and good Daimon, to this place they carry him, lifting him up, still possessed with fear and ignorant of himself and of his surroundings alike. Afterwards, however, he will be mindful of the other things nothing less than before and laughter will return to him.

The priests seat the ascended initiate upon a “chair of Mnemosyne” (θρόνον Μνημοσύνης), not only so that the initiate may recollect (or rather: be reminded by Mnemosyne) his experiences down in the cave, but also to complete his journey back up
from the Underworld to the here and now—the throne of Mnemosyne, then, functions both as a mnemonic device and as the crowning of the initiate’s *katabasis*. The initiate returns to the house of Good Daimon and Tyche to recover, while still in shock, but soon “laughter” (γέλως) will return to him. Laughter signals the normalization of the mental state of the initiate, and would indicate that the descent-ascent has indeed been successfully completed—Mnemosyne has restored the descendant back up to life and light.

The triad Mnemosyne-Lethe-Aletheia has already connected Memory to Truth; indeed Detienne distinguishes several Masters of Truth, such as Nereus and the Muses. For Plato, the access to Aletheia is through recollection, the power of memory, which has been described repeatedly as λογισμός and by Aristotle even as συλλογισμός (453a). Plato’s description of the encounter with the Form of the Good in the *Republic* is expressed once again in distinctly visual terms—and through the visible one may *syllogize* that the Good, the highest form of all, is itself the Master of Truth:

> ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα καὶ μόγις ὀράσθαι, ὀφθέασα δὲ συλλογιστέα εἶναι ὡς ἁρὰ πᾶσι πάντων αὐτή ὀρθών τε καὶ καλῶν αἰτία, ἐν τε ὀρατῷ φῶς καὶ τὸν τούτου κύριον τεκοῦσα, ἐν τε νοιητῷ αὐτῇ κυρία ἀλήθειαν καὶ νοῦν παρασκυμενην, καὶ ὅτι δέ ταύτην ἰδεῖν τὸν μέλλοντα ἐμφρόνως πράξειν ἢ ἰδίᾳ ἢ δημοσίᾳ.  
> (Plato *Republic* 7.517c)

The idea of the good is even hardly seen, and when seen it must be concluded that indeed this is for all things the cause of all things right and good; in the visible world *giving birth* to light and its master, in the intelligible world being the very master of truth and reason, and that it is necessary to *behold* this if one wishes to be thoughtful in matters private or public.

Once more, the imagery of birth (cf. τεκοῦσα) and truth is evoked in relation to immortality, and Plato’s notion of the manifestation of the Good on earth as the sun (who sees all, cf. the eye of the sun) giving birth to light underscores the image of the visible.
In the words of Étienne Gilson, just as “the sun is the lord of all that shares in the essence of light, the Idea of Good dominates the intelligible world because all that is, in so far as it is, is good.” Plato’s perfectly righteous god from the *Theaetetus* probably partakes in the Idea of the Good, and so does in turn he who achieves assimilation to god. Gilson explains that for Plato, “Truly to be means to be immaterial, immutable, necessary, and intelligible. ... If that which is the more real is also the more divine, the eternal Ideas should eminently deserve to be called divine.” And yet, to Plato, the Good is not a god, or God—even though Gilson, himself a Thomist, thinks “Plato should have made [that deduction].”

The fact that for Plato the Good itself is the Master of Truth puts Memory on quite the pedestal, as the power of recollection is the soul’s true epistemic device to ascend to the immortal realm. The soul’s mystagogue on its descent-ascent to immortality is, for both Plato and Weil, the Beautiful, that divine object which humans so naturally and passionately desire (ἐρως), as the *Symposium* amply testifies—recall that to attain immortality one needs to give “birth in beauty” (τοῦ τόκου ἐν τῷ καλῷ). “The ascent of the soul to cognition,” Burkert writes, “is not a cool acknowledgment of fact. Plato portrays this path as a passionate undertaking which seizes the whole man, an act of love [eros],” and the key to the path is Beauty: “It is the beautiful which points the way,” since the Beautiful is the image of the Good—analogous to how, for Weil, Jesus is the image of God. But ultimately, it is the god himself who will set us free, just as Kore, tricked by the Beautiful, is seized by the god himself. The descendant into the Oracle of

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190 Gilson 1969, 25
191 Gilson 1969, 24-5.
192 Gilson, 1969, 25.
193 Burkert 1985, 323.
Trophonios secures his safe return through the power of Memory, and it is through the interaction with Lethe and Mnemosyne that he may come—in his own lifetime—in direct contact with the divine, the realm of immortality, facilitated by the vertical movement of descent (dying, Forgetting) and ascent (preserving, Remembering).
Conclusion

If Greek civilization is a search for bridges, then certainly in Memory the Greeks found one. The concept of Memory, captured in metaphors of scrolls and wax tablets, not only discloses a spatiality that relies on places and some paradoxical form of internally external storage, but also proves itself to be conducive to extensive theorizing on the uniquely human capacity to recollect: that is, to pursue a nearly syllogistic sequence, lifting some piece of knowledge up from potentiality to actuality. The capacity to throw vertical bridges allows Memory to function as a metaxu, in between the realms of mortality and divine perfection. The capacity to bridge, through this recollective power, is evidenced by the theology of Mnemosyne, and the relationships of complementarity she forms with Lethe and Aletheia in particular, but also with Apollo, Hermes, and of course the Muses. The Muses themselves are the embodiment of the omniscience that Mnemosyne represents as they have special access to the knowledge of past, present, and future, to which in turn the human singer-poet may appeal.

The performative truth that the Muses proclaim not only authorizes the orderly arrangement of things, but also puts aside the troubles and anxieties of human beings, and offer medicinal delight by transforming time and space. Part of the bliss that the powers of Memory may convey consists in the summoning of a state free from sorrow, reminiscent of the Golden Race, when the realm of human and divine had not yet been separated. The other part consists in Memory’s soteric capacity to facilitate the
movement of initiatory descent into Hell in order to ascend more blessed, more wise, and more true. Plato calls on the soul to ascend, which is only possible through the sphere of Mnemosyne, who makes recollection possible. Purified in nudity, the initiate’s soul may assimilate into the realm of Truth upon the visible disclosure of its master, the Form of the Good.

We only build horizontal bridges. Indeed, we live in non-theological times. Talk about the Gods, Truth, the Good has largely been banished to the margins of philosophical discourse, and the practice of theology proper is mostly confined to the precincts of church and college. The Greek theology of Memory, however, has left its traces. With Simone Weil, we may find that it is through the Greek discovery of vertical bridges that we too may come to appreciate their usage for us today:

Les ponts des Grecs.— Nous en avons hérité. Mais nous n’en connaissons plus l’usage. Nous avons cru que c’était fait pour y bâtir des maisons. Nous y avons élevé des gratte-ciel où sans cesse nous ajoutons des étages. Nous ne savons plus que ce sont des ponts, des choses faites pour qu’on y passe, et que par là on va à Dieu.194

194 Weil 1948, 167.
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