

Chapter 2

Three Concepts of Memory

In traditional South Asia, it was completely unremarkable for a boy to memorize the equivalent of hundreds of pages of texts in Sanskrit, down to the most minute phonetic detail.¹ In fact it was expected, indeed required, of all boys of certain castes to do so. The more ambitious and gifted students would memorize the equivalent of hundreds of pages more from texts of grammar, philosophy, and belles lettres. In South Asian literature we encounter a number of tropes associated with memory, for example the student who memorizes everything he has heard but once. We might be skeptical of such spectacular feats of memory, but still today it is common for traditional scholars to be able to recite passages on call from the vast quantities of texts they have memorized, and some scholars display their powers of memory in public performances called *avadhānas*.

Alongside these traditions of cultivating memory in South Asia there were, unsurprisingly, learned traditions wherein memory and a range of related concepts were discussed. These discussions are by no means obscure. But they did remain quite small, for one important reason. The major debates in South Asian philosophy usually involved disagreements between Buddhists, who often took idealist stands, and non-Buddhists, who often took realist stands. On the topic of memory, however, there were no substantial disagreements between the Buddhists and their non-Buddhist opponents. In fact, in the

1. By “traditional” I refer to the traditions that existed in India prior to colonialism. Obviously many of these traditions persisted well into, and after, the colonial period.

debate over the sources of knowledge (*pramāṇam*) — certainly the most contested question in all of South Asian philosophy — nearly all of the interlocutors agreed that, however many “sources of knowledge” there might be and however one might wish to define or characterize them, memory was not one of them. Memory therefore plays a negative role in a great deal of South Asian philosophy, since it was in contrast to memory that authors of very different philosophical and religious backgrounds defined sources of knowledge. Accordingly there is surprisingly little discussion of memory as such in South Asian philosophy, and very little scholarly work that attempts to synthesize or even summarize such discussions.

This paper outlines the concepts associated with memory as they are developed in a number of South Asian traditions, especially Nyāya (formal reasoning), Vaiśeṣika (speculative ontology), Yōga (soteriological practice), and Buddhist and Jain scholasticism. It is organized according to three key terms: retention (*dhāraṇā-*), potentiation (*saṁskāra-*, and deprivation (*saṁpramōṣa-*). The texts I will discuss all date from around the middle of the first millennium of the common era. These sources certainly do not represent the full range of the discussion of memory in traditional South Asia, but in my view they present the concepts in a particularly clear and insightful way, which can provide the basis for a discussion of similar concepts in other traditions. Recent scholarship, in fact, has stumbled over terms associated with memory, reading ambiguity and equivocation into terms that I believe are quite clearly delineated in the sources.

Another motivation for this paper is that we now have several excellent books and articles about the conceptualization and cultivation of memory throughout history — but by “history” they mean, implicitly or explicitly, “Western history.” South Asian discussions of memory are invariably absent, even though English translations of some of the relevant texts have been available for more than a century. If South Asia figures at all, it is only in terms of the trope with which I began this paper, that of an exotic land where the art of memory is cultivated to a high degree. I hope to show that there were, in fact, precise and sophisticated discourses about memory in traditional South Asia, and that these discourses can and should be integrated into the global history of memory. Memory may be a universal human capacity, but it is implicated in practices that differ enormously from place to place and from time to time.

2.1 Retention (*dhāraṇā*-)

Scholars of Buddhism have debated the significance of the verb $\sqrt{dhṛ}$ when used in reference to texts. The basic meaning of the verb is “to hold,” but in any given context, it may not be clear whether it refers to holding a physical object or holding the text in the mind. The ambiguity was signalled first in an article by Lalou (1957), who put the Tibetan and Chinese translators of Mahāyāna texts on either side of the question, with *’dsin* allegedly referring to “carrying” a physical object, and the Chinese word (which she does not quote, but is probably *chí* 持) allegedly referring to bearing a text in the mind. Lalou noted passages in a Mahāyāna text, the *Karaṇḍavyūha*, that seem to refer to the first interpretation, since they describe a “great knowledge” (*mahāvidyā*) that is “located on the body” (*kāyagatā*).

Contrary to what Lalou thought, however, “located on the body” does not so clearly refer to a physical object. The same term is used in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* to refer to a text that has been memorized, and therefore carried “within the body,” as opposed to a text that is located “within a book” (*pustakagatā*; Drewes 2011: 339). The alternatives are given in the context of the sources of the speech of the *dharmabhāṇakas*, the monks whose job it was to preach the *dharma*.

More recently, a debate between Gregory Schopen and David Drewes has once again raised the question of whether the significance of $\sqrt{dhṛ}$ in Buddhist texts is primarily physical or mental.² Drewes had translated the verb as “retain in memory,” in response to which Schopen insisted that “the verbs used for these other activities [directed toward a text] are almost willy-nilly directed to both written and oral texts and their meaning fluid” (2010: 52). He further stated (Schopen 2010: 59 n. 67):

Sanskrit *dhārayati*, for example, means first of all ‘to hold, carry, keep, preserve’ a material object, and only by extension — and perhaps abuse — ‘to bear or keep in memory.’ The latter would seem to require, strictly speaking, the additional presence of *manasā*, ‘with the mind.’

2. Drewes (2007); Schopen (2010); Drewes (2015). In fact Schopen had advocated for “preserve” as the translation of $\sqrt{dhṛ}$ for a long time previously; see Drewes (2015: 120).

The truth, as Drewes (2015) demonstrated at length, is precisely the opposite of what Schopen says here. Drewes reminds us of the fact that the historically prior sense of \sqrt{dhr} in reference to texts is always the “retention” of the text in the mind; in fact this word is the preferred way to express this act in Pali and Sanskrit texts. Drewes cites a number of cases from early Pali texts, but we can think of the phrases *vinayadhara-*, *suttadhara-*, *tipiṭakadhara-* and so on to refer to monks who have memorized the Vinaya, Suttas, or Tipiṭaka (Gombrich 1988: 35; Norman 1997: 116). Drewes convincingly shows that \sqrt{dhr} is used in reference to a physical object in only one very specific context in Mahāyāna Sūtras, where it follows upon (and indeed may be considered a reinterpretation of or, in Schopen’s word, an “abuse” of) the earlier and semantically primary meaning of the word in reference to memorized texts. Finally, Braarvig (1985) had already shown that the word *dhāraṇī*, which does not occur in Pali and is most often associated with magical formulas that were written down and worn as amulets in later Buddhist traditions, similarly referred at first to a Bodhisattva’s access, via the mind, to an object of memory (whether a text, its meanings, or *mantras*).

After this ground-clearing, we can say that the verb \sqrt{dhr} , in reference to texts, refers primarily to their “retention” in the mind of a person. In Buddhist texts, this is one of a number of verbs that are used together in reference to texts. They usually occur in a specific order: *ud√grah* first, then usually followed by *pari(+ava+)√āp*, and then \sqrt{dhr} ; \sqrt{vac} in the causative is sometimes found among them, after the third element. The order of these verbs suggests an order of actions that culminate in the “retention” of a text in the memory. The last element, \sqrt{dhr} , is understood by later authors (such as Haribhadra in his *Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) to mean “not forgetting,” *mi brjed pa ≈ asampramōṣatā* (Drewes 2015: 128). This last phrase suggest an influence of a different way of thinking about memory as “absence of loss,” formalized in the *Abhidharma* tradition and discussed below.

The first word, *ud√grah*, refers to “receiving” a text, and has to be understood in most of its occurrences as referring to the initial stages of “learning” it (in fact most translators use “learn” or a synonym for this word). I would suggest “getting up” the text, in the sense of learning it from a teacher’s oral instruction or possibly from a manuscript in such a way that one can later “master” it (*pari√āp*). Drewes translates this term as

“memorize,” which seems insufficiently specific to me, given that the entire process — from *udgrahaṇa* to *paryāpti* to *dhāraṇā* — culminates in the memorization of the text. I wonder whether there may be an incipient distinction between short-term and long-term memory reflected in these two practices, with *ud√grah* referring to the registration of a text in short-term memory, and *√dhṛ* referring to its registration in long-term memory.

These two words, incidentally, are used very often in Jain texts as well. In the preface to the *Dhavalā*, Vīrasēna tells the story of the monk Dharasēna, who understands that he is about to die, and therefore requests two students to whom he can teach the texts that he alone retains in his memory. The students need to be “capable of learning and retaining” (*gahaṇa-dhāraṇa-samattha-*). It would seem that (*ud*)*√grah* and *√dhṛ* were used across a range of traditions in a quasi-technical sense to mean the beginning and end of process of memorizing texts. And similarly to the use of *dhara-* to refer to a monk who “retains in memory” a particular text or set of texts in Buddhist literature, we encounter expressions such as *pūrvadhara-*, *aṅgadhara-*, and so on very frequently in Jain literature, which refer to individuals who retain in their memory (a certain number of) *pūrvas*, *aṅgas*, and so on.

In my admittedly limited experience, Jain texts do not use the third term, *pari(ava)√āp*, which in Buddhist texts is often found alongside the other two, or rather in between them. The word has a range of meanings in Pali and Sanskrit, but its basic meaning is “attaining” or “reaching” something. We can therefore understand it as the process whereby a text that has been “received” or “gotten up” is converted into a text that is “retained,” or in other words, as the link between *ud√grah* and *√dhṛ*. It can therefore refer to the practices of studying a text. In the *niryuktis* of the Śvētāmbara Jain tradition and their commentaries, we sometimes encounter *anupraīkṣ* (*aṇuvekkhā*, etc.) playing a similar role, namely, silent reflection on the texts that one is learning.

In connection with “retention” or *dhāraṇā*, we have, so far, been talking exclusively about the memorization of texts. It does appear that texts were the primary or privileged object of “retention” and the practices leading up to it, including “receiving” (*ud√grah*) and “mastering” (*pari√āp*) or “reflection” (*anupra√īkṣ*). In other words, it does not appear to me that there was a general model of memory employing these terms that was subsequently adapted to the special case of memorizing texts.

Around the beginning of the common era, however, Jain authors came up with a general model of cognition that culminated in *dhāraṇā*. Elements of it are found in early Śvētāmbara commentaries (the *niryuktis* and *bhāṣyas*), but the clearest and most influential statement of the model is found in the *Tattvārthasūtra* of Umāsvāti.³ Jain authors recognize five different types of knowledge, three of which (clairvoyance [*avadhi*-], telepathy [*manaḥparyaya*-], and omniscience [*kēvala*-]) only apply to enlightened beings. All other knowledge is subsumed under the categories of “cognition” (*mati*-, also called “awareness” [*abhinibōdha*-]) and “testimony” (*śruta*-).

Umāsvāti understands cognition in general to have four stages (*sūtra* 1.15; Balcerowicz 2020: 840). The first is *avagraha*- or “reception,” which can be more specifically understood as “sensation,” since what is “received” is data from the sense faculties upon their contact with an object. In fact this stage is further divided into the reception of sense data in their unprocessed and unconceptualized form (*vyañjanāvagraha*-) and the reception of sense data as conceptually determined. Mental cognitions (such as internal reflection, or indeed recollection) do not begin from unprocessed sense data and therefore do not have the first of these sub-stages. (For technical reasons, visual cognitions do not have it, either.) The second stage is *īhā*-, translated by Balcerowicz as “cogitation,” and defined as “speculation with regard to the character of the sensory data that enters the sensory apparatus and an internal process of its analysis” (2020: 840). This stage leads up to the third, which is called *avāya*- or *apāya*-, translated by Balcerowicz as “judgment,” namely a judgment (or thought) that has the input as its content (*ākāra*-). Finally we have *dhāraṇā*, “retention,” which refers to the registration of the cognition in memory. The cognition so retained “becomes the source for future memory” (Balcerowicz 2020: 841).

I should note that all of these terms (*avagraha*-, *īhā*-, and *avāya*- or *apāya*-) are rather peculiar, and clearly they were handed down as a list of terms to be explained orally. (As I noted, these terms first appear in the *niryuktis*, which are versified lists of topics for oral exposition.) We should probably see Umāsvāti, and indeed later authors, not as relating an earlier tradition regarding the four stages of cognition but offering a “rational reconstruction” of their own based on the framework of the inherited vocabulary.

3. Balcerowicz (2020) attributes the *sūtras* to Umāsvāmin and the commentary to a different author, Umāsvāti, although most scholars have taken the two to be identical.

The model sketched by Umāsvāti allows us to speak, albeit in extremely vague terms, of both putting something into one’s memory (let us say “remembering”) and taking something out (let’s say “recalling”). What I remember is the outcome of a cognitive process, although Umāsvāti is no more specific than that; he does not speak of the form or qualities of those things that are remembered. Similarly, what I recall is necessarily something that has previously been retained.

2.2 Potential (*saṃskāra-*)

Saṃskāra- is a term of art in many Indian traditions, and it is applied to a wide range of referents: memories, rituals, dispositions, cognitive construction, the preparation of food, and grammatical forms. The sense of *saṃskāraḥ* underlying these diverse usages is, as its etymology suggests, “making right” (*saṃyak-√kr*). More precisely, we could say that *saṃskāra-* refers to something that invests something else with the potential to do, be, or experience something in the future. I suggest the general translation “potentiation” for this reason, which will be motivated in what follows by a reading of Vaiśeṣika sources. But *saṃskāra-* was adopted as a technical term in several very different domains of discourse in ancient India. I will highlight just a few here.

First, it was widely used for the “traces” of past lives that could be reactivated or recalled in the present life. Second, Buddhists adopted it to refer to “conditioned states” (Edgerton) or “formations” (Bhikkhu Bodhi), in a wide range of technical meanings. One such meaning is as one of the five *skandhas* constitutive of the person, where it refers to cognition or mental activity. *Saṃskāra-* is also the second of the twelve *nidānas* or causes in the chain of dependent origination, between ignorance (*avidyā-*) and consciousness (*viññāna-*). Buddhist authors give a wide range of significations to *saṃskāra-* in this context, which I will not review here.

Outside of Buddhist contexts, *saṃskāra-* was an important term in discussing Vedic ritual. In Mīmāṃsā, the discipline concerned with interpreting the ritual portions of the Veda, *saṃskāra-* refers to the “preparation” of a substance (*dravya-*) that would be used in the ritual. This is an action that allegedly makes the substance fit for its ritual function, such as sprinkling water over grains of rice. This usage is already taken for granted in the

Mīmāṃsā Sūtras of Jaimini, which are very difficult to date but probably not later than the second century CE. The term was also applied to what anthropologists call “life cycle rituals” (conception, birth, naming, initiation, marriage, cremation, and so on) already in the *Gṛhya Sūtras*, which are earlier than the *Mīmāṃsā Sūtras*.

Samśkāra- is the key concept in the understanding of memory and recollection offered by two related philosophical systems, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika. These two systems developed independently of each other, with their authoritative *sūtra* texts composed probably just before the beginning of the common era. The *Nyāya Sūtras* are attributed to Gautama and the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* are attributed to Kaṇāda. Nyāya was first of all concerned with formal debate about philosophical topics, while Vaiśeṣika was a system of speculative ontology. But they came to be thought of as complementary by the end of the first millennium of the common era. Nyāya offered an account of the *means* by which knowledge was acquired (*pramāṇa-*), and Vaiśeṣika offered an account of the *objects* of knowledge (*pramēya-*).

Let’s begin with Nyāya. The *Nyāya Sūtras* discuss memory principally in connection with the arguments for the existence of the soul (*ātman-*). The soul is said to be the subject (literally the cognizer, *jñā-*) of recollection (*smaraṇa-*) in *sūtra* 3.2.40. The following *sūtra* is a long list of the different occasions of recollection. By “occasions” (*nimitta-*) are meant the factors following which an act of recollection takes place. This characterization applies to *nearly* all of the items in the list. Some, however, have been understood by the commentators as the factors following which something is registered into one’s memory. Obviously something has to be remembered in the first place in order for it to be recalled, and in that sense the conditions of remembering are also the conditions of recollection. But I do not think that is what was meant by Gautama, and accordingly we must try to understand each item as a condition of recollection. They are, in order:

- *prañidhāna-* a “resolution” to recall something (not to remember something);
- *nibandhana-* “cause” (though Vācaspati, followed by Mishra 1934: 181, reads *nibandha* “text”), or more broadly (according to G. Jha) “association,” including the association with a recalled object with a particular location on the body (a practice that evokes the Mediterranean practice of *loci memoriae*);
- *abhyāsa-* “repetition,” understood by most authors as an occasion for remembering

rather than recollection;

- *liṅga*- “sign” (smoke reminds me of fire);
- *lakṣaṇa*- “characteristic” (the example given by Vātsyāyana is a group of people who can be recognized by a certain characteristic, e.g. their hairstyle, which reminds one of the group as a whole)
- *sādrśya*- “similarity” (a painted likeness of someone reminds me of him);
- *parigraha*- “ownership” (if I see a particular phone that I know to be owned by *x*, I recall *x*);
- *āśraya*- “support” (we might say: an employer reminds me of her employees)
- *āśrita*- “what is supported” (and *vice versa*);
- *sambandha*- “relationship” (as Jha and Mishra both note, following Vācaspati, this must be a special kind of relationship, since everything in this list names or implies a relationship between the occasion and the content of the recollection that it occasions; the example given by Jha is that of the relationship between a teacher and student, and I think it is likely that such personal relationships are meant here);
- *ānantarya*- “contiguity” (if I see a house on the street, I recall the contiguous house);
- *viyōga*- “separation” (often glossed as the recollection of an absent lover, but in that case it is not clear why *separation* should be the occasion rather than desire or affection, and presumably both of the relata in all of these relationships are separated, since otherwise the cognition of one should guarantee the cognition of the other);
- *ekakārya*- “one who has the same task” (one electrician might remind me of another);
- *virōdha*- “opposition” (if I see a snake, I recall a mongoose);
- *atīśaya*- “excellence”;
- *prāpti*- “acquisition”;
- *vyavadhāna*- “intervention” (i.e., when one thing comes between two others);
- *sukha*- “pleasure”;
- *duḥkha*- “pain”;
- *icchā*- “desire”;

- *dvēṣa*- “aversion”;
- *bhaya*- “fear”;
- *arthitva*- “need”;
- *kriyā*- “action” (according to Vātsyāyana, a chariot might remind one of a chariot-maker, but this is hardly differentiated from “cause,” and is not a natural reading of “action” in this case; see below)
- *rāga*- “affection”;
- *dharma*- “merit”;
- *adharma*- “demerit.”

Mishra (1934) perceptively noted that many of these conditions can be seen as specific versions of a more general “law of association,” according to which the presence of *x* occasions the recollection of *y* if there is any type of preexisting association between *x* and *y*. This appears to be true for the majority of these conditions. But the relationality of the conditions comes apart somewhat toward the end of the list, especially in the section relating to feelings (pleasure, pain, desire, aversion, fear, need, affection). The explanation offered in Jha and Mishra is that the feeling itself reminds one of its object (in the case of desire, aversion, fear, need, or affection) or its cause (in the case of pleasure and pain): if I experience fear, I recall what it is I’m afraid of; if I experience pleasure, I recall what it is that gives me pleasure. I have some doubts about this explanation. In the case of certain feelings, especially fear, one might argue that the object is included, in certain sense, in the feeling itself. I don’t need to be reminded of a wolf if I am presently afraid *of a wolf*. Similarly I wouldn’t need to be reminded of money if I am presently in need *of money*. What could these items mean, then? One possibility is that what is called to mind by such feelings is *previous experiences* of that very same affective state. If I am afraid of a wolf in the present moment, I may well remember a previous experience of being afraid, perhaps of a wolf, or perhaps of something else. A similar account may apply to pleasure and pain. Those may well remind me of their causes, but that relationship is already covered by “cause” (*nibandhana*-, understood as referring in both directions, to the cause and to the effect). But they may remind me of previous episodes of the same feelings as well.

From one perspective, it seems that these affective conditions are relatively unique

within the list insofar as their object is not something external (e.g., when I see an axe, I think of a lumberjack) but something internal (e.g., when I experience fear, I remember a previous experience of fear). Or we can put it in terms of the influential distinction introduced by Endel Tulving between *semantic memory* and *episodic memory*. Many of the relationships in the first part of the list essentially have to do with world knowledge. One can recall smoke, given the presence of fire (or the word “fire,” or some other such cue), without necessarily linking that recollection to a specific episode in one’s lived experience. The distinction can be paraphrased as “I remember when...” for episodic memory and “I remember that...” for semantic memory. This distinction, of course, is not explicitly made either in the *Nyāya Sūtras* or its commentaries, and many of the conditions could admit of a semantic and an episodic interpretation (I might recall a *particular* mongoose when I see a snake, or I might recall *that* snakes are the enemies of mongooses).

The distinction between external and internal objects might break down, however, if we take the position that one never remembers previously-experienced *things* but only *previous experiences*. This is a well-known example (although as far as I know not discussed in the literature on memory as such) of “the notorious -ing/-ed ambiguity of experience” identified by Wilfred Sellars. The *objects* of our previous experiences may, at least on a realist view, be external objects (e.g., things I have seen or heard), although they do not necessarily have to be of course (e.g., introspection, imagination, and so on). But when we recollect, are we recollecting the *experience*, which is an internal mental event, or the *object* of that experience? The *Nyāya Sūtras* do not reflect on this question, but we will see it raised explicitly by Vaiśeṣika authors.

Moreover, a difficult question to answer on any interpretation of the above list is *why* only a few internal, experiential, or affective states are mentioned. The pair of pleasure and pain, within Indian thought, is understood to encompass all positive and negative feelings, and can therefore be taken to be exhaustive. Similarly desire and aversion are understood, as a pair, to encompass feelings that are oriented toward an object, and can be taken to be exhaustive of such object-oriented dispositions. But among specific feelings or affective states, why are fear, need, and affection singled out? Why shouldn’t the list also include, for example, anger? And why is action (*kriyā*-) included between need and

affection? Its position suggests that it refers to some kind of internal occurrence, and we may think of it as a form of mental activity.

I suspect that *dharma*- and *adharma*- are included as “free variables” that will account for the differences between individuals when they are presented with the same occasion for recollection. If two people who have both studied a certain text are asked to recall a part of it, and one of them can while another can’t, the differences can be chalked up to their relative merit and/or demerit. This is one of the options that the commentator Vācaspati gives for understanding this pair.

Finally, regarding the third item, *abhyāsa*- or “repetition,” the commentator Vātsyāyana first understands it as an occasion for remembering rather than recollection, but then attempts to explain how it can possibly be seen as the latter:

abhyāsas tu samānē viṣayē jñānānām abhyāvṛttiḥ. abhyāsajanitaḥ saṁskāra ātmaguṇō ’bhyāsaśabdēnocyatē. sa ca smṛtiḥētuḥ samāna iti.

Repetition is the recurrence of cognitions regarding a similar object. The “potential” (*saṁskāra*-) produced by repetition, which is a quality of the soul, is expressed by the word “repetition.” And that is a cause of recollection regarding something similar.

The idea is that a capacity to recollect something that is produced by repetition can itself be called “repetition.” I am not sure this is true. I am also not sure whether, even with this extended sense of the word, we can consider it “a cause of recollection” in the same sense that the others are. The *capacity* to recall something must surely be present in all of the other examples as well. But what *triggers* the recollection in this case? I think that the idea is that repetition allows any two elements to be associated, such that the presence of one will trigger the recollection of the other. Two things that have been practiced together are linked in the memory. I note that this interpretation could potentially refer to semantic memory (for example, the image of a certain sign or character will remind me of its pronunciation or meaning) or to procedural memory (for example, doing the first movement of a sequence of movements will allow me to recall the next, and so on).

But what are these “potentials” to which Vātsyāyana appeals in his commentary? This idea is developed in much greater length in Vaiśeṣika texts, to which we will now turn. The *sūtra* that defines *smṛti*- in the *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* (9.22) reads as follows:

ātmamanasōḥ saṃyōgaviśeṣāt saṃskārāc ca smṛtiḥ.

Recollection, from a specific contact between the self and the mind, as well as from a potential (*saṃskāra*-).

In Vaiśeṣika, everything that we would term an inner event—sensations, thoughts, feelings, dreams—are considered to be affectations of the soul (*ātman*-) that involve the soul’s contact with the mind (*manas*-), also sometimes called the inner organ (*antaḥkaraṇa*-). In the case of sensations, contact with the sense faculties and the objects of sensation are also involved. To say that recollection comes from a “specific” contact between the soul and the mind is just to say that qualitatively different types of contact result in different types of inner events.

What is notable about the definition attributed to Kaṇāda is that it only mentions the *causes* of recollection, and not its objects. It is difficult to say precisely what kind of phenomena are meant to be included in (or excluded by) the definition. The ninth-century commentator Candrānanda explains this *sūtra* very briefly, relating it to the standard example of inference, wherein one infers the presence of fire on the mountain, given (a) knowledge of the presence of smoke on the mountain (delivered, for example, by direct perception) and (b) knowledge of an invariable concomitance between smoke and fire.⁴

agnyarthinō dhūmadarśanaṃ yad utpannaṃ tadapēkṣād ātmāntaḥkaraṇasaṃyōgād viśiṣṭāc ca bhāvanākhyasaṃskārād ‘yatra dhūmas tatrāgniḥ’ iti smṛtir utpadyatē.

For someone who is seeking fire, the recollection (*smṛti*-) ‘where there is smoke there is fire’ arises from a connection between the soul and the inner organ which depends on the observation of smoke that had previously arisen, as well as from a particular potential (*saṃskāra*-) called infusion (*bhāvanā*-).

4. Jambūvijaya (1961: 70).

It is (b), the invariable concomitance, that is the content of the recollection in Candrānanda's account. Either the "specific contact" on its own, or this and the potential, are said to depend upon a prior observation of smoke. (In Sanskrit the phrase "which depends..." could go with either the first noun or both.) He does not elaborate on what it would mean for either the contact between the soul and the mind, or the potential that he calls infusion, to be dependent on a prior observation. (We will see that his reference to "a particular potential called infusion" reveals that he is indebted to the discussion of potentials in Praśastapāda's *Commentary*.) Nor does he explain what the nature of this observation is. I suspect that he means an observation of smoke that would lead to or corroborate (b), the invariable concomitance: namely, an observation of fire where smoke is observed, and/or an observation of fire's absence where smoke is observed to be absent.

What is *smṛti*- on Candrānanda's account? It is, first of all, an awareness, an internal event. Its content is a sentence, fact, or proposition — in any case, it is not a sensation or an experience. To return to Endel Tulving's distinctions, we can call it a semantic memory rather than an episodic memory. But is it memory at all? We tend to think of memory as the re-presentation of something previously experienced. But does Candrānanda intend that the person who reflects that "where there is smoke there is fire" is *rehearsing* something that he or she already knows, or rather that the invariable concomitance occurs to such a person *for the first time*? It seems like the latter to me. In that case, *smṛti*- is not simply a re-presentation of some previously acquired knowledge (such that it could be translated straightforwardly as "recollection," as I do above, and equated with semantic memory). Rather, it would be a *generalization* over previously acquired knowledge. Of course Candrānanda's remarks are brief and vague, but this synthetic or generalizing function of *smṛti*- appears to be quite unique, and very different from the merely representational faculty with which memory is often identified, by Indian and non-Indian authors alike.

For the most explicit and influential discussion of the concept of "potential" (*saṃskāra*-) that has appeared in these characterizations of memory, we must turn to another Vaiśeṣika author: Praśastapāda. He wrote a text called the *Collection of Elements and Properties* (*Padārthadharmasaṅgraha*), which is usually just called *Praśastapāda's Commentary*

(*Praśastapādabhāṣya*), probably in the fifth century CE.⁵ Despite the second title, it does not explain Kaṇāda's *Sūtras* in order (as Candrānanda would later do), but rather rewrites and expands upon them. His *Commentary* would essentially usurp Kaṇāda's *Sūtras* as the foundational text of the Vaiśeṣika system. Praśastapāda defines *smṛti*- as follows:⁶

liṅgadarśanēcchāṇusmaraṇādyapēkṣād ātmamānasōḥ saṁyōgaviśēṣāt paṭv-abhyāsādarapratyayaajanitāc ca saṁskārād dṛṣṭaśrutānubhūteṣv arthēṣu śēṣānu-vyavasyēcchāṇusmaraṇadvēṣahētur atītaviṣayā smṛtir iti.

Smṛti-, from a specific contact between the soul and the mind that depends on (a) the observation of a sign, (b) desire, (c) remembrance (*anusmaraṇa*-), and so on, as well as from a potential (*saṁskāra*-) produced by an awareness characterized by (a) intensity, (b) repetition, or (c) care; its content is past; it is the cause of (a) the post-determination of (or that is) a remainder [see below], (b) desire, (c) remembrance, or (d) aversion regarding things that one has seen, heard, or experienced.

This is a relatively complex discussion, and I will explain it by reference to the two oldest commentaries on Praśastapāda's *Commentary*, those of Vyōmaśiva and Śrīdhara (both tenth century CE).⁷

First, the two causes of *smṛti*-, as in Kaṇāda, are “specific contact between the soul and the mind” and a potential (*saṁskāra*-). These are, however, further qualified. At least the “specific contact between the soul and the mind” is qualified as “depending on the observation of a sign, desire, remembrance, and so on.” I say “at least” because Vyōmaśiva says that this phrase also qualifies the potential (*saṁskāra*-). Both Vyōmaśiva and Śrīdhara understand “and so on” to refer to the specific set of conditions listed in the *Nyāya Sūtras* and discussed above. Whether Praśastapāda himself intended the list of causes to include *everything* that the *Nyāya Sūtras* identified as condition of recollection seems doubtful to me, because he does not mention the first element of Gautama's list, which is “resolution” (*praṇidhāna*-). Nevertheless it is clear from his use of “and so on”

5. For the other names by which Praśastapāda was known see Chemparathy (1970).

6. Dvivedi ed. p. 249. Words repeated from the *sūtra* of Kaṇāda are in bold.

7. See also Bhattacharya (1945) and Varadachari (1961) on Vyōmaśiva.

(*ādi-*) that he did not mean this list of causes to be exhaustive, but rather invites readers to expand upon the list with the addition of other possible causes.

Among the two causes of *smṛti-*, then, the “contact between the soul and the mind” provides the “trigger.” These are, once again, internal events, but they may be *purely* internal (such as the act of recollection) or they might also involve some *external* stimulus (such as the observation of a sign). Note that remembrance (*anusmaraṇa-*) is here listed as one of the causes of *smṛti-*. We must understand the former as a deliberate mental effort to recall something, which results, if successful, in the latter, namely the recollection of the object.

Regarding the other cause, the potential, Praśastapāda explains what can produce it, but does not need to define it here because he does so elsewhere (see below). I will return to the three causes of a potential when discussing that other passage.

The *effects* of *smṛti-* appear to be listed in two parts: first, a domain of possible objects (“things one has seen, heard, or experienced”) and second, a short and puzzling list of internal occurrences. The latter list, giving the *effects* of *smṛti-*, shares certain elements with the open-ended list of the *causes* of *smṛti-* with which Praśastapāda begins his discussion. This introduces the possibility that *smṛti-* is implicated in a type of feedback loop: one might have a desire that results in recollection, and then the recollection itself will result in desire. The most interesting type of feedback loop to me is the one in which the cause and effect is remembrance (*anusmaraṇa-*): one makes an effort to recall something, and when successful, the recollection itself results in a subsequent effort to recall. Such a feedback loop is implicated in what psychologists call the ironic process, where the attempt to *not* recall something results in its being recalled more frequently. Unfortunately neither Vyōmaśiva nor Śrīdhara say much about such loops.

For both commentators, recollection can result in a desire or an aversion, depending on whether one recalls that something leads to pain or pleasure. Regarding remembrance (*anusmaraṇa-*), both give an example relating to language: the recollection of one word either gives rise to an attempt to remember the following word in a text (Śrīdhara) or the complete sentence in which it occurs (Vyōmaśiva). Regarding the first element, *śēṣānuvyavasāya-*, they also give similar explanations, although they understand the relationship between the constituents of this compound word slightly differently. For both of them,

the word refers to inferential knowledge, and therefore correlates to the first element in the list of the causes of recollection, namely, the observation of a sign. What is to be known *from* such a sign can be called the “remainder” (*śēṣa-*). Recollection that is triggered by a sign results in a “post-determination” (*anuvyavasāya-*), a word that usually refers to a cognition about a determinative cognition, or in other words a metacognition. Whether this particular mental event is *of* the remainder or *is* the remainder is where Vyōmaśiva and Śrīdhara differ, and that difference can easily be explained by the -ing/-ed ambiguity noted above, according to which the content of a cognition and the cognition itself are systematically conflated. Essentially this first element therefore refers to the reflective awareness that one has upon accessing an element that is linked to another element in one’s memory. If, as suggested above, we think about the access of “world knowledge” as a form of semantic memory, and if we think of the language of inference (observing a sign, concluding something from it, and so on) as the language with which world knowledge is discussed in Sanskrit, then it becomes easy to think about this first element, despite its technical name, as the conscious awareness of accessing semantic memory.

The *objects* of these mental events that are listed as the effects of recollection are described using a deceptively simple phrase in Sanskrit: “seen, heard, or experienced.” This is a triad of extremely frequent occurrence in Sanskrit texts (as well as in Prakrit texts), and in most contexts we would be inclined to take it as a merism, referring to anything that the subject of recollection has encountered in the past. But Praśastapāda’s commentators have been troubled by the redundancy of this expression. Something seen or heard is necessarily also “experienced.” Vyōmaśiva and Śrīdhara therefore take these three words as referring to objects of the three main instruments of knowledge (*pramāṇa-*), namely perception (*pratyakṣa-*), testimony (*śabda-*), and inference (*anumāna-*) respectively. Vyōmaśiva relates another interpretation where all three refer to sensory experience, but “seen” refers specifically to visual sensations, and “heard” to auditory sensations, while “experienced” refers to anything not covered under those two major categories (i.e., the sensations of touch, smell, and taste).

Vyōmaśiva and Śrīdhara have the most to say about the one word *atītaviṣayā*, which should mean that the content (*viṣaya-*) of recollection is something that is past (*atīta-*). For Śrīdhara, the primary function of this qualification is to limit the content of *smṛti-* to

past objects or experiences (the latter in Śrīdhara's interpretation), essentially echoing Aristotle's claim that memory is of the past. This qualification has enormous epistemological consequences that Śrīdhara hurries to point out (p. 290):

*ata ēva na pramāṇaṁ, tasyāḥ pūrvānubhavaviśayatvēnōpadarśanēnārthaṁ
niścinvatyā arthaparicchēdē pūrvānubhavapāratantryāt.*

It is for this very reason that it is not a source of knowledge (*pramāṇa-*), because insofar as its content is prior experience, it determines its object through re-presentation (*upadarśana-*), and therefore is dependent upon that prior experience regarding the delimitation of its object.

He then quotes two verses from the great Mīmāṃsā thinker Kumārila Bhaṭṭa in support of the view that recollection necessarily "inherits" its epistemic status (that is to say, veridical or not) from the earlier cognition of which it is a recollection.

Vyōmaśiva, by contrast, anticipates a number of objections to the qualification that memory is "of the past." This qualification might result in overextension of the definition, because the content of inference, too, is something that has previously been experienced: I cannot infer fire from smoke if I have never experienced fire previously. It also might result in underextension, insofar as one maintains that recollection (*smaraṇa-*) can take place with respect to an object that is actually present. Vyōmaśiva appears to be sympathetic to these critiques, because he ends up saying that we must take the phrase *atītaviśaya-* in a "transferred" sense (*upacārēṇa*): "recollection arises regarding that object of which there has been a past experience" (*yatra hi viśayē 'nubhavō 'tītas tatra smṛtir utpadyatē*). This extended or transferred sense allows the object of recollection to be something that is currently present to the subject, so long as the subject has previously experienced it. He provides one more way out of the difficulty by relating a different interpretation, according to which the qualification is elliptical: *atītaviśaya-* does not mean the object of recollection is something in the past, but that the object of recollection is an *experience* of which the object is in the past (in other words, it is *atītaviśayaviśaya-*, "that of which the object is something of which the object is in the past").

So much for Praśastapāda's discussion of *smṛti-*, or recollection *per se*. But we have left out what is probably the most important element of this discussion: the role of a po-

tentiation (*saṁskāra*- in producing a recollection. In fact we can call the Vaiśeṣika theory, which was widely adopted in premodern India, the “potentiation theory” of memory. This theory essentially has two components: the *creation* of a potential at a certain point in time (let’s say t_0) and the *access* of the potential, or to use the more common expression in Sanskrit, the *awakening* (*udbōdhana*-) of the same potential at a later point in time (let’s say t_1). This is the theory that has the most similarity to Western conceptions of memory based on the storage and retrieval of information, whether those conceptions are expressed through metaphors of inscription (e.g., Plato’s wax tablets) or digital memory. In fact the term *saṁskāra*- can be translated as “trace” and the result will be a conception of memory that looks very similar to the prevailing Western conception of memory as the retrieval of a previously-stored trace. The “potentiation theory,” however, was not simply a set of metaphors. It was a theory in the full sense. Vaiśeṣika authors, foremost of them Prāśastapāda, took it upon themselves to explain exactly what potentiation was and how it functioned in the process of recollection.

Let us remind ourselves that potentiation translates *saṁskāra*-. In the Vaiśeṣika ontology a *saṁskāra*- is a property (*guṇa*-), or as Gokul Madhavan (2017) more appropriately translates the word, a “trope.” *Samśkāras* can be compared to “capacities” (*śakti*), which however were not recognized as a separate category in early Vaiśeṣika. Like a capacity, a *saṁskāra*- is defined by the possibility of future effects, from which alone the *saṁskāra*- can be known. Hence the first important characteristic: a *saṁskāra*- is that by virtue of which an object (the *saṁskārya*-) becomes *capable* of producing a certain effect. But a *saṁskāra*- does not belong to an object intrinsically. In this respect it differs from a capacity, which belongs to an object intrinsically. This is the second important characteristic: an object has to be *invested* with a *saṁskāraḥ*-.

Thus a *saṁskāra*- can therefore be thought of as a “preparation,” but in a specific sense. When I make lemon rice, I can use the word “preparation” to refer to the act of preparing it or the finished product. The word *saṁskāra*- can be used metonymically to refer to either one of these things (although Sanskrit provides *saṁskaraṇa*-/*saṁskṛtiḥ*- and *saṁskārya*- for these purposes), but its primary reference is to that property that makes the rice taste like lemon rice, or more precisely, to the investiture of the rice with that property.

Samskāra- is used frequently in Kaṇāda's *Sūtras*, but it is not defined there. Nor is it defined, *per se*, in Praśastapāda's *Commentary*. Praśastapāda does, however, provide a general discussion of *samskāra-* by recognizing three types, and then discussing each of those three types in turn. The types are (a) momentum (*vēga-*), (b) infusion (*bhāvanā-*) and (c) elasticity (*sthitisthāpaka-*). The first and the third types are “motional tropes” (so Madhavan 2017: 244, from whom I take the translation of these terms).⁸ The first refers to the cause of a material object moving in a specified direction, and the third refers to the cause of a material object returning to its original form after deformation. The second is, by contrast, a “trope of the soul” (*ātmaguṇa-*) according to Praśastapāda. It is not the cause of a movement but rather of a cognition, and more specifically, of two mental events: recollection (*smṛti-*) and recognition (*pratyabhijñāna-*).

Here is what Praśastapāda says about “infusion” (p. 633/260):

bhāvanāsañjñakas tv ātmaguṇō dṛṣṭaśrutānubhūteṣv arthēṣu smṛtipratyabhijñānahetur bhavati jñānamadaduḥkhādivirōdhī paṭyabhyāsādarapratyaya-jah.

[The potential] called “infusion,” by contrast, is a trope of the soul; it is the cause of recollection and recognition regarding objects that are seen, heard, or experienced; it is countered by a cognition, intoxication, pain, and so on; it is produced by an awareness characterised by intensity, repetition, or care.

paṭupratyayāpēkṣād ātmamanasōḥ saṁyōgād āścaryē 'rthē paṭuḥ samskāratīśayō jāyatē, yathā dākṣiṇyātyasyōṣṭradarśanād iti.

An intense, i.e., extraordinary potentiation arises regarding something astonishing, as a result of the contact between the soul and the mind that depends on an intense awareness. For example, such a potentiation arises for a South Indian upon seeing a camel.

vidyāśilpavyāyāmādiṣv abhyasyamānēṣu tasminn ēvārthē pūrvapūrvasamskāram apēkṣamāṇād uttarōttarasmāt pratyayād ātmamanasōḥ saṁyōgāt samskāratīśayō

8. Madhavan suggests “residue” for *samskāra-* in general.

jāyatē.

When knowledge, skill, exercise and so on are repeated, an extraordinary potentiation arises regarding that very object, as a result of the contact between the soul and the mind resulting from an awareness in which every later one in the series depends on the potentiation of the earlier one.

prayatnēna manaścakṣuṣi sthāpayitvāpūrvam arthaṁ didṛkṣamāṇasya vidyut-sampātadarśanavad ādarapratyayaḥ. tam apēkṣamāṇād ātmamanasōḥ saṁyōgāt saṁskārātiśayō jāyatē, yathā dēvahradē rājatasauvarṇapadmadarśanād iti.

An awareness characterized by care is when one deliberately prepares the mind and faculty of sight in the hope of seeing some unprecedented object, like observing a flash of lightning. An extraordinary potentiation arises as a result of the contact between the soul and the mind that depends on that. For example, such a potentiation arises from observing gold and silver lotuses in the Dēvahrada.

The final example refers to a folk belief that, at a certain time of night, on a certain day of the year, golden and silver lotuses would appear on the surface of the water in a particular tank. People would go to that spot in the hope of seeing this miraculous sight, and fix their attention on the surface of the water. The resulting awareness would therefore be registered in memory as a “potential.”

In fact all three sources of potentiation are described by Praśastapāda as extraordinary (*atiśaya-*). The vast majority of our present awareness is completely evanescent. An awareness event is impressed upon our memory only in certain extraordinary circumstances, related to the quality of the awareness event and the circumstances in which it arose. Now Praśastapāda does not delineate clear criteria for the degree of intensity, practice, or care that would produce a potential, or at any rate a potential that can be activated at a subsequent moment. Certainly he, like Plato and Aristotle, had a sense that awareness events were “imprinted” very differently in different individuals. But an even larger question is why Praśastapāda chose these three types of awareness events as the source of potentiation, and whether they are meant to be exclusive. Certainly one can think of awareness events that could be characterized by both intensity and care. And certainly

intensity is correlated not just with the experience of astonishing objects, but also with particularly painful or traumatic experiences, or indeed happy and rewarding experiences.

We might ask whether the types of potentiation that result from these three types of awareness events are themselves qualitatively different. It seems as if intensity and care pertain largely to episodic memory, while repetition pertains to procedural memory. What appears to be missing is a way for content to enter into semantic memory. I can recall, for example, that Kevin McCarthy was removed from his position in the House of Representatives, although I definitely did not intend to register this in my memory; the awareness that it had happened was neither deliberately produced nor, from my perspective at least, particularly intense. The awareness might have been repeated once or twice, in conversation or when casually checking the news, but it certainly was not repeated in the way that learning an instrument or a language is. So how do we account for the “world knowledge” that we acquire in the course of everyday life?

I do not think the Vaiśeṣika theory is defective in account of not having a clear answer to this question, which is of course formulated using categories that would not have been available to Praśastapāda. On the contrary, I think that there are aspects of this theory which have very interesting points of contact with modern psychological research on memory. One of the key aspects of this theory is the role that it assigns to repetition. I have chosen to translate *abhyāsa-* as “repetition” rather than “practice” (which it can mean in many contexts) precisely because of the “feedback loops” noted in the discussion of Praśastapāda’s definition of *smṛti-*. The act of remembrance (*anusmaraṇa-*) is named as one of the causes and effects of recollection. We can imagine a situation where an awareness event that is moderately intense or deliberate leaves, at time t_0 , a potential for accessing its object in the future. Now let us say that one is in that future moment, time t_1 . One remembers the object stored at time t_0 , thanks to the potential that was created at that time. But this act of remembering is itself a recurrence of the original awareness, or at least it “goes back” to the original awareness in some sense. This means that, at time t_1 , the act of remembering does not just produce a recollection event; it also produces another potentiation, or alternatively, it strengthens or reinforces the potentiation produced at time t_0 . This theory therefore at least has the potential to capture the phenomenon of *consolidation* of memories.

2.3 Deprivation (*sampramōṣa-*)

The last major cluster of terms related to memory that I would like to discuss comes from the definition of memory (*smṛti-*) found in Buddhist *Abhidharma* texts, as well as the nearly identical definition found in the *Yōgasūtras*.

Let's begin with Vasubandhu's *Encyclopedia of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmakōṣa*) and his commentary (*Bhāṣya*) thereon, composed in the fourth century CE. There, Vasubandhu recognizes memory (*smṛti-*) as a mental factor (*caitta-* [*dharma-*]), and specifically one of the ten mental factors characterize all mental events (*mahābhūmika-*). These are sensation (*vēdanā-*), volition (*cētanā-*), motion (*saṃjñā-*), desire for action (*chanda-*), contact (*sparśa-*), discernment (*prajñā-*), the act of attention (*manaskāraḥ*), approval (*adhimukti-*), and absorption (*samādhi-*). The definition of *smṛti-* occurs between that of discernment (*prajñā-*) and attention (*manaskāra-*) [2.24 = Pradhan ed. p. 54]:

smṛtir ālambanāsampramōṣaḥ.

Smṛti- is when, regarding the support, there is no *sampramōṣa-*.

I will return to the very problematic word *sampramōṣa-* in a moment. But even without translating it, Vasubandhu's definition should be very surprising to anyone expecting an account of the psychological faculty of recollection. As many scholars have noted, Vasubandhu — and indeed *Abhidharma* scholars more generally — had two major commitments when it came to *smṛti-*. The first is the psychological faculty of recollection. The second is the notion of mindfulness, denoted by exactly the same word, that was so foundational to Buddhist practice. Whether these two notions were really separate, or instead represent “two sides of the same coin,” has been discussed at length, both by *Abhidharma* scholars themselves, their commentators (in Sanskrit and Chinese), and by modern scholars. One view, held by the person who coined the translation “mindfulness” for *sati-* in Pali, T. W. Rhys Davids, and still held by some scholars today, takes *sati-/smṛti-* to be one of the critical terms that the early Buddhists appropriated and redefined, alongside *dharma-*, *karma-*, and so on. Since the important study of Cox (1992), it has been taken up again in a debate between Levman (2017, 2018) and Anālayo (2018b,a).

This interesting and wide-ranging debate, about the relationship between mindfulness as a Buddhist practice and memory as a general psychological faculty or action, mostly lies outside of the scope of the current chapter. I mention it in the context of Vasubandhu's definition, however, because it appears to have been formulated in order to apply to both notions. One of the main features that discriminates mindfulness from memory, as the latter is usually understood, is that memory, as both Aristotle and Praśastapāda said, is "of the past." Mindfulness is generally of the present. The *objects* of memory and mindfulness therefore belong to different moments in time. Vasubandhu's definition makes no reference to time. Some authors have seen his definition as referring primarily to memory *of the past*. Sthiramati, one of Vasubandhu's most influential followers and commentators, clearly and repeatedly glosses the object of memory as something "previously experienced" (*pūrvānubhūta*;- see Griffiths 1992: 110,111). This is also the position of the Dārṣṭāntika scholar Śrīlāta (Cox 1992: 83). Others make a point to say that it necessarily includes awareness of the *present*. The Chinese commentator Puguang, for example, says "it does not merely mean remembering [a] past object" (kuo Lin 2020: 309). The most explicit statement on the relation between memory and mindfulness among premodern authors that I have encountered is that of Saṅghabhadra, the author of a rejoinder to Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakōṣabhāṣya*. As translated by Cox (1992: 84), it reads:

[Śrīlāta's statement that mindfulness] is used as a provisional designation with regard to past objects establishes unequivocally that it functions with regard to present object-supports, [for] if there is no fixing (or noting) (**abhilapana* = 明記 *míngjì*) with regard to a present object, no recollection (**pratīsmaraṇa*/**saṃsmaraṇa*) of the past object will be produced afterward.

Vasubandhu's definition appears to have been carefully formulated to *avoid* reference to past time and therefore to include mindfulness of the present under *smṛti*-. And as kuo Lin (2020) has recently shown, it was also formulated to *avoid* reference to both a subject and an object of memory. Memory, as noted above, was one of the key arguments that Naiyāyikas adduced for the existence of a soul: memories are inaccessible to everyone *except* the person who originally experienced the event that is being remembered. For Buddhists, and especially idealist Buddhists like Vasubandhu, the psychological faculty

of memory must be described without reference to the individual person. In this chapter we will not be able to discuss whether the alternative that they propose, namely the retention of the mental events as “seeds” stored within a continuous “storehouse consciousness,” is meaningfully different from what kuo Lin (2020) calls the “self theory of memory.”

More relevant to this discussion, however, is Vasubandhu’s choice to name the *object* of memory a support (*ālambana-*) rather than an object or content (*viṣaya-*). In the context of his own philosophical development, this choice is obviously motivated by the conviction that we must make sense of mental phenomena *without* recourse to the external world. In this sense memory can have a “support” without having an “object”: when we remember, we remember a *mental event* (a cognition, a thought, a feeling, a sensation, and so on) rather than an external object. But one does not need to be an idealist in order to legitimately raise the question of whether the object of memory is itself a mental event or the *object* of that mental event.

We have spent a lot of time on Vasubandhu’s definition of *smṛti-* in the *Abhidharma-kōṣa*, but the central elements of this way of thinking about memory are shared in other Abhidharma texts, both in Sanskrit and in Pali. Asaṅga’s *Collection of Abhidharma* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*) defines it as follows (Kramer 2013: 1002):

saṁstutē vastuni cētasō ’sampramōṣaḥ

When there is no *sampramōṣa-* of the mind regarding a familiar entity.

Here we see two additional qualifications that Vasubandhu may have intentionally dispensed with: the object of *smṛti-* is said to be “familiar” (*saṁstuta-*), which I take to mean previously experienced, and the definitional feature of *smṛti-*, namely the absence of *sampramōṣa-*, is said to happen to the mind (*cētas-*).

Let us now finally turn to “the absence of *sampramōṣa-*.” It is rather incredible to me that the definition of *smṛti-* that prevailed in Buddhist circles was a *negative* one. Memory was defined by the absence rather than presence of a feature. That feature, *sampramōṣa-*, has been translated in a variety of ways: since it is definitionally the opposite of memory, suggestions have included “forgetfulness,” “dropping,” or “loss.” As far as

I am aware, the word *sampramuṣ-* itself is only ever used in reference to memory. But it is composed of *sam*, a prefix that often connotes totality or completion, and *pramuṣ-*, a verb that otherwise refers to taking something away by stealth, i.e., robbing or stealing something.⁹ In its most literal sense, *pramōṣa-* refers to something or someone “sneakily taking away” something from something or someone else; *sampramōṣa-* will therefore refer to such a theft that is executed completely. In other words, memory is what we call it when our minds are not robbed of the contents of their mental events. The most adequate translation I have seen is that of Griffiths (1992), who rendered *asampramōṣa-* as “nondeprivation.”

The *Yōgācārabhūmi* of Asaṅga defines *smṛti-* somewhat differently, not using the term *asampramōṣa-* but rather *abhilapanā*.¹⁰ This term, like *asampramōṣa-*, poses unique interpretive problems. Cox (1992) discussed a number of different ways of understanding this term, which is spelled *apilap-* in Pali and *abhilap-* in Sanskrit. The first is taken back to the root *plu* and understood as the state of “not drifting” (*a-pilāpana-tā*), which seems fanciful to me but is accepted by the *Critical Pali Dictionary*. The Sanskrit word is transparently derived from *abhi + lap*, which means to speak. Precisely how either of these words can be understood as a criterial feature of memory must be left to the ingenuity of commentators. Clearly the Abhidharma authors understood something quite precise by it, because the term continues to appear in discussions of memory. Cox understands it in these contexts to refer to “fixing” the object, while Griffiths suggests “taking note.” I personally feel that *abhilapana-*, at least, specifies that the object remembered can potentially be “verbalized” at a later stage. To remember is to be able to “speak of” or “verbalize” what one has experienced, at least in principle. Obviously this understanding would exclude certain phenomena, such as implicit memories, that psychologists tend to categorize under the larger heading of memory. But as a *test* of whether someone remembers something or not, we could do a lot worse than simply ask that person to state what it was that he or she experienced in the past.

Vasubandhu’s other important work of Abhidharma, the *Pañcaskandhaka*, combines both of these features in its definition of *smṛti-*:

9. I am most puzzled by Jaini’s contention (1992: 48) that the root means “to release” or “to let go.”
10. I do not discuss this definition in detail (*yat saṁstutē vastuni tatra tatra tadanugābhilapanā*, Kramer 2013: 1002) because I am still uncertain of its precise meaning.

saṁstatē vastuny asaṁpramōṣaś cētasō 'bhilapanatā

Regarding a familiar entity, (a) the fact of the mind not being totally robbed regarding a familiar entity [and/or] (b) the capacity of verbalizing.

Vasubandhu refers to “one’s memory being robbed” (*muṣitasmr̥titā*) as an *upaklēṣa*- or “minor problem” in this same *Pañcaskandhaka*.

Before turning to the earlier sources for these definitions, we can note one that clearly belongs with this group in inspiration and content, although it is usually thought of as belonging to a different religious tradition: the *Yōga Sūtras*. *Yōga Sūtra* 1.11 uses the same term that we have now repeatedly seen in Buddhist Abhidharma literature:

anubhūtaṣayāsaṁpramōṣaḥ smr̥tiḥ

Memory is the fact of not being totally robbed of an experienced content.

The debate continues about whether the author of the *Sūtra* and the *Bhāṣya* of the Yōga system are the same, but one piece of evidence for the *contra* position is the fact that the theory of memory in the *Sūtra* uses the language of Buddhist Abhidharma, whereas the theory of memory in the *Bhāṣya*, although ostensibly explaining what is meant in the *Sūtra*, appeals to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika model of traces, discussed above.

We might wonder whether the Buddhists or the Yogis are to be credited with the concept of “nondeprivation” as the definitional feature of memory. This question can be answered rather clearly, because the Abhidharma authors were deliberately and self-consciously recasting earlier textual material. Among that textual material were a number of lists of synonyms for *smṛti*-/sati- given in several earlier Sanskrit and Pali texts. The criterial features of the later discussion, namely “nondeprivation” (*asaṁpramōṣa*-) and “verbalization” (or however else we are to understand *abhilapana*-), are present in these lists, alongside a number of other terms. In fact these lists are organized by “synonym clusters,” as an example of which we might cite the *Vibhaṅga* and the *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* (quoted from Cox 1992: 98 n. 64; the translation is my own):

sati- = recollection (*anussati*-), remembering (*paṭissati*-);

sati- = calling to mind (*saraṇatā*-), retaining in mind (*dharaṇatā*-), verbalizing (*apilāpanatā*-), nondeprivation (*asammusanatā*);

sati- = the faculty of *smṛti-* (*satindriya-*), the power of *smṛti-* (*satibala-*)
→ this is correct *smṛti-* (*sammāṣati-*) etc.

Add the Pudgalavādin material from ?

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