



# Remembering and Imagining

by

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Remembering and imagining are two foundations for our soul life. They are so encompassing and important that we have already described a very large part of a person's uniqueness if we can tell what his abilities to remember and to imagine really are. They determine so much that they can be used as the basis for a typological description of human beings. For example:

**1. The Remembering Type:** He remembers everything easily and has an unlimited ability to collect results from his experiences. He has a “photographic memory” that stores both important and unimportant details. When he draws, paints or writes, it is very difficult for him to find something new or original. But if he is given an example, he copies it with great joy and detail. When he played as a child, he preferred that others decided what to do. When he leads as an adult, it is quickly apparent that others lead for him.

This type is the receptive and dependent human being—the scientist as far as he limits himself to collecting facts, the bureaucrat, who becomes confused if a new case appears that does not fit in his scheme of things or when he is required to act with a flexible imagination. He is the subordinate worker, no matter what profession, who must be guided along when he must deal with a new situation that is not identical to the last one he mastered.

**2. The Imaginative Type:** He bubbles over with ideas and intentions. If given an example, he may look at it but he will not usually follow; rather, he will make something new. When it is necessary to be accurate, he is not always able to answer correctly. Without even knowing it, he has already changed and colored it!

**3. The Passive Combination Type:** With his power of imagination he moves beyond the existing conditions but is unable to create something new. Memories are cloudy, and he is not capable of calling up relevant facts. He is the romantic daydreamer who lives in his imaginative castles that never become real.

**4. The Great Ingenious Prominent Figures:** These people have both abilities in rich variations, for example: Goethe, Shakespeare, da Vinci, Mozart, Brahe, Kepler, Ford, Alexander the Great, Caesar.

**5. The Rest:** There is an entire scale of somewhat evenly dispersed abilities, without ingeniously great forces of remembering or imagining. These are the many-talented, respectable, practical people: the inventive housewife, the enterprising club leader, artists, craftsmen, technicians and scientists, all who are able to move in new directions.

But life is never as simple as just five categories. Remembering and imagining cover a number of different fields of activity, and their activities are not spread out evenly. For example: He, who has the power of imagination when dealing with colors or forms, may be totally unproductive in the worlds of sound and words; he who is obviously without imagination in regard to color, forms, sounds and words may still be a sparkling source of new ideas in business; or he who may be just the opposite.

Likewise with the various fields of remembering: Some learn verses by heart merely by reading or hearing them a couple of times. Others can try to memorize a poem a hundred times and remain unsuccessful, but if asked about dates or telephone numbers, suddenly the correct numbers sprinkle out of them, one after the other. Yet another type has the greatest difficulty remembering verses, names, melodies and numbers but can

recall pictures colorfully, dramatically and in great detail, as if they were recently experienced.

Every single person has his or her own unique ability to remember, his own ability to imagine, colored by his individual being. Therefore when psychology presents different, schematically limited types of remembering and imagining and then a series of types of combinations, we become very tired of all of these types, for life is so much more endlessly rich. The limitless and colorful richness in the human soul's diversity cannot replace the personal experiences we have individually and with others.

Remembering and imagining are two basic forces that are aimed in opposite directions and therefore supplement each other much like inhaling and exhaling direct our breathing processes.

Remembering's ideal is to re-experience something as completely as possible so the original experience appears in all of its details without adding or subtracting anything, but in clarified form. Otherwise you would be hypnotized or possessed by the previous experience. The pictures from remembering shall be ordered, clarified, objectified and understood as well as possible. All chaotic and cloudy conditions make the picture-remembering less complete. Remembering is our organ of the past.

Imagination, to the contrary, is not connected with a specific past. It uses what it will and forms everything new. The ability to imagine is free-reigning, picture-creating, picture-forming. It creates something in our inner life that may also appear in the outer world in the future. Its ideal is the sparkling well that never dries out and where people wait excitedly for something new to appear. When compared to the clarified pictures from remembering, it makes an impression of being chaotic and cloudy—not because it is messy, but because imagination so sumptuously brings out the fullness of sprouting life. Further, at the beginning of the creative process, it is not clear what will finally appear in the future.

### **Imagination is our organ of the future.**

Every time we create something new in our own daily activities, imagination has been active. We have not merely repeated what took place before, retained in memory and followed by well-practiced habits. In

our inner life we have boldly formed pictures of something new that will become real.

While remembering entails thinking reflections combined with feelings in the background, imagining has a productive, creative element of willpower, and it springs from a strong enthusiasm for something new. In Greek mythology we find both figures: two Titan brothers who in dramatic pictures allow both forces in the human soul to appear:

Epimetheus always thinks afterwards (*epi*). In well-arranged symmetry he receives and orders the results of passive observation. Objectively and peacefully he sits and views the entire world as a beautiful tableau that is neither changed nor influenced by what he remembers. He conserves all of the world's wisdom, and all of the treasures in nature exist already. But he creates nothing. He is the original picture of the power of remembering. We can best imagine Epimetheus at sunset when we look back over what happened that day.

To the contrary, Prometheus steals the gods' fire, and not to observe it and conserve it. He uses fire for newly created actions. From within the darkness of the night, Prometheus arrives before the sunrise carrying a flaming torch. He does not regard what has been. His entire being is directed at what will be. And it is he, Prometheus, who will carry out the works. He does not think afterwards, but before (*pro*). He is therefore the father of all cultural progress, all artists and all technical inventors.

No matter how different imagination and remembering are, we should not forget that they work into each other. They cannot survive without help the other. Epimetheus and Prometheus are brothers.

Let us take an example of remembering: What was the name of the French politician who appeared again and again from the first days of the great revolution, through all of the upheaval to the July revolution? Like a cork he floated to the surface with new governments? Maybe you know the name. Or you can tell us immediately. Let us assume you do not recall. What do you do? You struggle to find the right memory and the wrinkles on your forehead appear! You create trial mental images. Pieces of memory appear: his peculiar nose, his shining eyes. But the name? What was his name? Talbaud, no; Trenardier, no; Trevaljand, no. And then the name finally pops into memory: Talleyrand—of course! As soon as the name is there and the evidence is absolute, all of the false

imaginative, mental images disappear. But imagination was used to serve remembering.

We always use imagination to help in remembering. Imagination helps us both make our memories and recall our memories. Most importantly, imagining helps us fill the holes in our memory, for the memories must be whole if we are to hold onto them well. We color and form all of our memories with the power of our imagination. If we remove imagination, our memories become like pale, lifeless leaves that disappear. We would not be able to remember anything, unless we had an automatic electronic brain—but then we would no longer be human beings.

Perhaps you would argue that remembering needs help from imagining only when concerned with pictures but not numbers. This is how it might appear at first, but with numbers there is still the picture element, just standing in the background and reduced to a minimum. If you look closely you will find it. If you want to hold onto numbers, you need to see them and you need to see them in relation to each other within the greater world of numbers. The more you can walk and hop around in that world, the easier you can retain an accurate memory of the numbers. The ability to live with numbers also depends on our power of imagination.

The power of imagination is like an emerging stream of blood that keeps our ability to remember alive. Without imagination our memories die. And our imagination would be helpless without the ability to remember. This becomes even clearer when we look at an extreme case of strong imagination with no memory. Then, the minute they appeared, all of the experiences would immediately disappear into darkness. There would be no way of looking backwards into the events. New possibilities would flow forward, uncontrollably, nothing held onto, no continuity. Without our memory's ability to hold continuity, the uncontrolled activities of imagining would be lost in bottomless chaos.

Just as imagining is memory's enlivening helper, so is remembering the basis for imagination. Therefore we always have a little power of imagination in our remembering, even if we think it is pale and sterilized. And there is always a little structure from remembering in our imagination, even in the most chaotic and wild activities. Both of these forces are active in every person.

Imaging and remembering are fundamental forces in all education of children. Both are equally important. Yet the greatest and most widespread mistake in education is to appeal mainly to the ability to remember and shelve imagining as a secondary, entertainment-like activity on the side. This is as limiting as only breathing in and never breathing out! Likewise, if you ignore remembering and merely accept imagining, you would be just as limited.

But it is much harder to enliven imagination so it grows and develops into “exact imagining.” This is the teacher’s task in every subject and in every lesson. If the teacher is able to practice this great art, to grasp the content of the subject with imagining’s enlivening and inspiring power, then it is not difficult to allow the pendulum in breathing to appear. With enthusiasm the children remember what appears when they were imagining. And with enthusiasm they can provide order and a clear relationship by developing the relevant concept.

Every school day should have both of these elements: summarizing, clarifying exercises in remembering during which the previous day’s products are ordered, digested and understood; but also a new effort, experiencing something new and foreign, always with the power of imagining.

Can a teacher learn to do this? Can we learn to develop and put to use our power of imagining? Only by practicing and practicing will small sprouts appear from within.

A systematic, scientific description of imagining is already a self-contradiction. It can be compared to a pressed flower or a butterfly on pin. For imaging is not so systematically conscious. It is not well defined and ordered. Its core is the over-flowing life, the primal forest of surprises, and the wide-eyed wonder over unimaginatively great realities, the warm enthusiasm and joy over becoming one with things!

When imagination has been productive, we can look back upon it and discover some inherent order. We look back by remembering our observations.

I would like to indicate some of the imagining activities that are central for education. In the *Iliad*, Homer describes everything on Achilles’ enormous shield, but he does not do it from the finished shield. Rather, he does it by following the creation of the shield at Hephaestus’

forge. We “watch” how the actual pictures spring from his talented hammer.

This is the original picture for the art of storytelling! Every static description of a final state (this is it... and that is that... and it is like this...) is boring, but if one follows the living process, the wings of imagination will unfold. We become creative in how it emerges.

A bold philosopher once stated that imagining is the creative power that is the basis for the creation of nature. It must have been someone who could dive into the living reality of things, for no passive observer would be able to say that.

Another redeeming element is the effects of contrasts. For example, if you have taken the time to deepen your experience of a heavy, vegetative, and digesting cow on a succulent, green field—to the extent of becoming sleepy and heavy from constant chewing—how strong does that appear in the imagination when you contrast it with the experience of an eagle soaring over the mountain tops with the sharp, awakened eye, observing the smallest creature on the earth below? Or, how intense does the tropical rainforest with its overwhelming life compare with the ice cold and deadly polar region?

Just as paintings display contrasts between colors, light and darkness so does music present a tense relationship between tones. All imagination flows rhythmically between opposing experiences. Imagining is the most alive faculty in the human soul. It has the entire register of sorrow, joy, tragedy and humor.

If a teacher can develop pictures that allow the subject to appear more vividly, the core of the art of education unfolds. When that element is present the teacher has appealed to something in the children that they experience naturally. They have an abundance of imagination, but it is generally chaotic.

If the teacher stands before a class and explains, dead-seriously, some complicated grammar at the blackboard, perhaps the entire class follows attentively and excitedly only because the students notice a wet mark from the sponge that resembles a face with a long nose!

Let us look more closely at that nose. Consider that the teacher had drawn a face with exactly the same long nose; it would have drawn some attention from the class. But there is another, more liberating interest

for the form from the wet sponge. It is an indication and the children's own imagination is put to use. With inner joy the children's imagination completes the picture.

Here we have one of the many secret arts of imagining: the art of indicating, that opens endless opportunities. This is a condensed sketch, like a seed with the latent possibility of becoming a full-grown oak tree:

“What crashed so loudly?”

“Norway by your hand, King!”

And language, the human being's unconscious, imagination-creating activity, is filled with such indicating, imagination-redeeming pictures: “My legs are black and blue.” Why are they black and blue? And how incomplete that description is. “Black” and “blue” work together with the power of alliteration and awaken a lively, imaginative picture of the legs.

The art of exaggeration is one of the hardest: “He broke every bone in his body!” Wrong! He could not break every bone in his body. Yet with this exaggeration, the core of the experience can be pictured. But one must be careful not to go too far or the effect is ruined.

Just as there are many secret arts to storytelling, so are there many possibilities and dangers within education. Take, for example, drawing on the blackboard. The exact and accurate board drawing is an effective way to explain a situation, but if it is to awaken imagination, two other agents must appear. Either the picture is not only correct, but receives color and form so that a larger reality is indicated. Or you must not form it completely. For example, a partial gesture with the hand on the drawing is enough to set a child's imagination in swing.

The art of education is comparable to swimming in a huge sea. While you are on land you can practice your swimming strokes. But you must throw yourself out into the deep if you want to learn how to swim. You must be prepared to have your head under water many times and completely forget your swimming skills before you learn the royal art of education in real practice.