

Plotinus on Soul's Memory in Enn. IV.4

Chapter 3 of Plotinus' Treatise 28 (IV, 4) discusses the soul's memory once it has left the body in which it previously resided. When separate from the body, the soul therefore preserves memories of its previous life. When it reaches the intelligible, it no longer has any memory of its previous lives, simply because there can be no memory in the intelligible. When the soul begins to separate itself from the intelligible, however, then all its memories are reborn, particularly the memory of itself as a being distinct from the intelligible, the memory of the earthly or celestial lives it approaches. Memory returns with this kind of decline of the soul that has proved unable to keep contemplating, and finds itself once again overwhelmed by the cares of the body. Plotinus notes that the most dangerous memories are unconscious memories, for according to him it is possible to have memories without being aware of them. If the soul has these memories again, it is because it already had them in the intelligible, albeit only potentially. Memory in human beings definitely varies as a function of the situation of their soul with regard to a body, be it the one it has left or the one into which it is to be implanted, for when confronted by the intelligible, this soul can have only an intuition that has nothing to do with time.

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