

Phantasiai as Memory Images in Plato

In the *Theaetetus* (152c1) Plato coins the word φαντασία as an epistemological cognate to φάντασμα. He initially describes φαντασία as synonymous with sense-perception (αἴσθησις); however, in the *Theaetetus*' sequel, the *Sophist*, φαντασία has true and false qualities (263d6-8), exists through sense-perception (264a4), and is a mixture of sense-perception and opinion (264b2 δόξα). In short, φαντασία doesn't remain synonymous with sense-perception. It evolves conceptually between *Theaetetus* 151c1 and *Sophist* 263d8. In this paper I will explore how this evolution occurs.

Scholars have offered various suggestions for what Plato meant by φαντασία. Watson (1988) understands φαντασία as a fixed concept in Plato and unsuccessfully attempts to differentiate between perception (φαντασία) and sensation (αἴσθησις). Silverman (1991) argues that Plato's φαντασία does evolve but maintains that "memory has no role in Plato's account of *phantasia*." Discounting memory's involvement leaves out one of the *Theaetetus*' best "gains" (Sedley 2004)—the wax tablet metaphor—by not accounting for the presence of φαντασία in the metaphor. Grönroos (2013) defines φαντασία as one of two types of belief but disregards how the *Theaetetus* corrects several important epistemological ideas from the *Republic* (Cooper 1970). I argue that the evolving concept φαντασία takes on the description of the memory image arising from αἴσθησις and contributing to δόξα. The evolution occurs in the *Theaetetus* but receives support from later dialogues, specifically the *Philebus* (37a-39c5) and *Timaeus* (71a).

I begin where Socrates separates past and present sense-perceptions (163d-164b). Because they differ ontologically—the past ones exist while the present are ever becoming—he does not grant Protagoras' request that sense-perception pertain to both past and present (166b). For present, ongoing sense-perception Socrates retains the name αἴσθησις; past perceptions

remain nameless memory images. I next connect memory images to the wax tablet metaphor furnished for the soul by the memory (190e-195b). All pieces necessary to form opinion according to the *Sophist*—sense-perception, memory images, and intellect (διάνοια)—are present; φαντασία alone is not named. Nevertheless, the memory images arise from sense-perceptions, exist correctly or incorrectly depending on the wax's quality, and bridge sense-perception and opinion. The memory images match the definitions of the *Sophist* 263d6-264b2.

There are two advantages to interpreting φαντασίαι as memory images in the wax tablet metaphor. First, this helps explain how Plato lessens his suspicion of φαντάσματα produced by the painter and poet of the *Republic*, Book Ten: in the *Republic*, φαντάσματα stand directly opposite true reality, lack knowledge entirely, and are morally destructive. In the *Sophist*, however, Plato develops the art of image making—φανταστική—and describes one branch of φανταστική in very positive terms. He calls it ιστορική, a knowledge-based skill in which one person impersonates another for the sake of inquiry. Socrates' defense offered on behalf of the deceased Protagoras in the *Theaetetus* is a prime example of ιστορική. Φαντασίαι as memory images in the *Theaetetus* lets us see how Plato gets there: by understanding cognition in terms of matching images, φαντασίαι has as much an inclination to create correct opinions as incorrect ones. Secondly, interpreting φαντασίαι as memory images describes the role of φαντασίαι in recognition. In the middle of the wax tablet metaphor, Plato highlights the fact that what's really going on is recognition (193c1 ἀναγνώριστις). Plato describes it as fitting one's foot inside an existing footprint. The allusion is to Aeschylus' *Choephoroi* 205 ff where Electra identifies her brother Orestes by stepping into his footprints and deducing that he has returned to avenge his father's death (Cornford 1957). Thus, recognition for Plato is the process in which the intellect makes rational use of sense-perceptions. The process, however, is impossible without the

memory images that arise from sense-perceptions, are compared to sense-perceptions, and assist one in forming opinions.

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