



THE MEMORY PALACE OF JORGE LUIS BORGES

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Jorge Luis Borges in "Funes the Memorious" describes Funes as "not very capable of thought." This observation certainly serves to undermine Socrates notion that knowledge is recollection of an innate wisdom. In the same paragraph, Borges continues: "To think is to forget a difference, to generalize, to abstract."

These three categories are precisely constituents of knowledge and the process of recollection that Socrates explores, and they are precisely the processes that are missing in Funes.

Funes is a compiler of information. Bu having a perfect memory he has the capability of storing vast amounts of knowledge. However, he cannot abstract or generalize these facts. He cannot see the pattern that these facts fall into, or create.

When Socrates states that wisdom is intimately linked to recollection, he is clearly giving us a cause for consciousness. Funes, by merely recording perfectly, does is not aware as to what constitutes consciousness.

Funes is like a computer that can store vast amounts of information, yet it cannot think. Information in and of itself is not wisdom.

Wisdom comes from recollection, because when we recollect we construct patterns of thought, we seek similarities, we seek meaning that will congeal facts into a process of consciousness, allowing us to understand what it is that makes us aware.

As well, by stressing the importance of recollection in the process of acquiring wisdom, Socrates is also valorizing imagination.

Thus to possess consciousness is to possess imagination. This is precisely the difference between pure storage of information, and the imaginative use of that information.

As well, when we recollect something, we immediately re-construct that fact into a symbol or metaphor that becomes a cue to our own understanding of reality.

Because Funes has a perfect memory, and most of us do not, he cannot give the past a distinct identity, which independent from the external world that we ourselves inhabit. Socrates allows for the construction of precisely this world.

Through the imaginative process, which is also the act of recollection, we remember something imperfectly, and then proceed to construct thoughts that qualify this recollection, thereby arriving at imaginative thought.

And this precisely what Funes does not possess. He is a vast archive of information, a library, where

information is certainly stored, but where imagination must be brought into play in order to transform, and therefore construct, facts into wisdom. Here we can ask, does a library have a memory? Or memory brought into the library by consciousness.

As well, it is important to realize that by stating that Funes is not capable of thought, Borges is also setting Funes as an opposite to the Socratic principle of wisdom.

Where Socrates describes consciousness as linked to memory in that recollection is an active re-construction of reality, and is therefore imagination – Funes is not part of consciousness; he is merely a “storage facility.”

Funes' memory is merely an exact copy of external reality. It is perfect. Socrates' process of recollection on the other hand is completely different from Funes' memory. Socrates is speaking about consciousness, which is imperfect and inherently selective. Imperfect memory actively seeks out imagination and creativity – which is very the definition of thought.

In effect, Funes' incapability of thought is in direct opposition to Socrates who links memory with recollection, and thereby consciousness and creative thought.

The [photo](#) shows, "Wedding on the Roof Garden," by Dodo (Dörte Clara Wolff), painted in 1929.

