

Aristotle on Memory

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Aristotle's points about memory are as follows:

1. 'Memory even of intellectual objects involves an image and the image is an affection of the common senses. Thus memory belongs incidentally to the faculty of thought, and essentially it belongs to the primary faculty of sense-perception.' (OM.,¹ 450a¹⁰⁻¹³)
2. The fact that animals have memory proves that it is a function of sense perception and not thought: 'If memory were a function of the thinking parts, it would not have been an attribute of many of the other animals.' (OM., 450a¹⁴⁻¹⁷) Memory 'is a function of the primary faculty of sense-perception, i.e. of that faculty whereby we perceive time.' (OM., 451a¹⁶⁻¹⁷)
3. To have memory, one needs to have the faculty of perceiving time because 'whenever one actually remembers having seen or heard or learned something, he perceives in addition ... that it happened before.' Thus, not all animals that have sense-perception can have memory. (OM., 450a¹⁷⁻²⁰)
4. Memory and imagination. Memory is a function of those parts of the soul 'to which imagination also appertains.' Thus, 'all objects of which there is imagination are in themselves objects of memory, while those which do not exist without imagination are objects of memory incidentally.' (OM., 450a²¹⁻²⁵)
5. Memory is of what is in soul, not its reference. 'Granted that there is in us something like an impression or picture, why should the perception of this be memory of

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper:

OM.

On Memory

something else, and not of this itself? For when one actually remembers, this impression is what he contemplates, and this is what he perceives. How then will he remember what is not present? (OM., 450b11-)

6. Memory 'is the having of an image, related as likeness to that of which it is an image.' (OM., 451a15-16)
7. 'It is only at the instant when the state or affection is implanted in the soul that memory exists, and therefore memory is not itself implanted concurrently with the implantation of the sensory experience.' (OM., 451a²¹-24)
8. 'Remembering is the existence of a movement capable of stimulating the mind to the desired movement, and this, as has been said, in such a way that the person should be moved from within himself, i.e. in consequence of movements wholly contained within himself.' (OM., 452a8-12)
9. 'When the movement corresponding to the object and that corresponding to its time occur, then one actually remembers. ... If, however, the movement corresponding to the object takes place without that corresponding to the time, or, if the latter takes place without the former, one does not remember.' (OM., 452b23-30)