

Aristotle on Recollection

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1. 'But occasionally it happens that we get a sudden idea and recollect that we heard or saw something formerly. This happens whenever, from contemplating a mental object in itself, one changes his point of view, and regards it as relative to something else.'
2. 'Recollection is not the recovery or acquisition of memory; since at the instant when one at first learns or experiences, he does not thereby recover a memory inasmuch as none has preceded, nor does he acquire one ab initio.' (OM.,¹ 451a19-²²)
3. 'Even the assertion that recollection is the reinstatement of something which was there before requires qualification- it is right in one way, wrong in another. For the same person may twice learn, or twice discover the same fact. Accordingly, the act of recollecting ought to be distinguished from these acts; i.e. recollecting must imply in those who recollect the presence of some source over and above that from which they originally learn.' (OM., 451b6-10)
4. 'Acts of recollection are due to the fact that one movement has by nature another that succeeds it. If this order be necessary, whenever a subject experiences the former of two movements thus connected, it will experience the latter; if, however, the order be not necessary, but customary, only for the most part will the subject experience the latter of the two movements.' (OM., 451b11-14)
5. 'Whenever, therefore, we are recollecting, we are experiencing one of the antecedent movements until finally we experience the one after which customarily comes that which we seek. This explains why we hunt up the series, having started

¹ Abbreviations used in this paper:

OM.

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in thought from the present or some other, and from something either similar, or contrary, to what we seek, or else from that which is contiguous with it. That is how recollection takes place; for the movements involved in these starting points are in some case identically, in others, again, simultaneous, while in others they comprise a portion of them, so that the remnant which one experiences after that portion is comparatively small.’ (OM., 451b17-22)

6. ‘It is that persons seek to recollect, and thus, too, it is that they recollect even without seeking to do so, viz. when the movement has supervened on some other. For, as a rule, it is when antecedent movements of the classes here described have first been excited, that the particular movement implied in recollection follows.’ (OM., 451b23-28)
7. ‘When one wishes to recollect, this is what he will do: he will try to obtain a beginning of movement whose sequel shall be the movement which he desires to reawaken.’ (OM., 451b28-32)
8. ‘In order of succession, the movements are to one another as the objects. Accordingly, things arranged in a fixed order, like the successive demonstration in geometry, are easy to remember, while badly arranged subjects are remembered with difficulty.’ (OM., 451a1-4)
9. ‘It often happens that, though a person cannot recollect at the moment, yet by seeking he can do so, and discovers what he seeks. This he succeeds in doing by setting up many movements, until finally he excites one of a kind which will have for its sequel the fact he wishes to recollect. For 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)
10. ‘Persons are supposed to recollect sometimes by starting from ‘places.’ The cause is that they pass swiftly from one point to another ...’ (OM., 452a14-15)
11. ‘The middle point among all things is a good starting point. ...’ (OM., 452a17-19)