

“To See and Hear That Which is Not Present”: Aristotle on the Objects of Memory

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Abstract: In this paper, we show that there are some strong philosophical and exegetical reasons to argue that according to the view developed in the first chapter of Aristotle’s *De Memoria*, the objects of memory are non-present, or absent, things and events rather than our past acts of awareness of them. We argue that on Aristotle’s account, the objects of memory can be particulars or universals, perceptibles or intelligibles, and that all these kinds of things are past in the same sense, namely, in the sense of previously having been present to the perceiver or knower. Aristotle’s claim that we remember that we previously learned or saw something is the description of *how*, rather than *what*, we remember.

Keywords: Aristotle, memory, past, pathos, present

1. Introduction

According to Aristotle, the object of memory (*mnēmē*) is the past.¹ At first glance, this seems unduly restrictive. For, it is obvious that you can remember not only that Coriscus walked yesterday after lunch but also that he was bald, even if he is still bald at the moment of remembering. Furthermore, Aristotle admits that one can remember the objects of knowledge or study,² which are always true. For instance, one can remember that every triangle has the sum of its interior angles equal to two right angles (that every triangle has 2R, for short).

How, then, to understand Aristotle’s insistence that memory is of the past? Richard Sorabji thinks that “Aristotle is not in a position to defend his view that the thing remembered belongs to the past.”³ Other commentators have been more charitable to Aristotle. Some of them have argued that Aristotle’s account of memory in *DM* 1 commits him to the view that the objects of memory are our past cognitive encounters with things and events rather than things and events themselves. John Cooper, for one, says that

Aristotle’s considered theory makes each act of remembering a likeness of an act of seeing or other awareness. This comes out in his occasionally speaking (cf. 450 a 20) of one’s remembering *having seen* or learned something rather than remembering the thing itself:

¹ *De memoria (DM)* 1.449b15; b28.

² *DM* 1.449b19, 21; 450a12, 21, 25.

³ Sorabji (2004), 13.

strictly, on his theory, all remembering is in the first instance the remembering of such acts of awareness.⁴

In the same vein, Julia Annas has argued at length that Aristotle's memory corresponds to what she calls personal memory, that is, memory of our past experiences, while recollection (*anamnēsis*), which is discussed in the second chapter of *DM*, corresponds to non-personal memory, that is, the recovery of knowledge or perception that one previously had.⁵

If objects of memory are our past acts of awareness of things or events rather than things or events themselves, Aristotle's insistence that memory is of the past seems undisputable. Such an understanding of his view on memory also allows us to understand what is going on when we remember our past emotional states, such as our yesterday's fear, thrill or excitement, which Aristotle does not discuss in *DM*, but which apparently should be somehow covered by his account of memory. It seems that what you remember when you remember that you were frightened yesterday is your fear rather than the object that caused the fear, even if this object is known to you.

The text of *DM* is not straightforward and clear in this regard. For, on the one hand, Aristotle says that one remembers *that* one learned or heard or saw something,⁶ which may suggest that he maintains that the objects of memory are our past acts of awareness of things or events. On the other hand, however, he also says that one remembers *what* one saw.⁷ We want to argue that the latter form of expression is more accurate when it comes to the objects of memory. That is to say, we think that there are some strong philosophical and exegetical reasons to argue that according to the view developed in *DM* 1, the objects of memory are non-present, or absent, things and events rather than our past acts of awareness of them.⁸ We will argue that on Aristotle's account, the objects of memory can be particulars or universals, perceptibles or intelligibles, and that all these kinds of things are past in the same sense, namely, in the sense of previously having been present to the perceiver or knower. Aristotle's claim that we remember that we previously learned or saw something is the description of *how*, rather than *what*, we remember. While elucidating what we believe are the proper objects of memory according to Aristotle, we will hopefully throw some light on some other interpretive problems surrounding Aristotle's discussion in *DM* 1. Finally, we will briefly show that our account of the objects of memory fits well with Aristotle's understanding of the place and the role of memory in the hierarchy of cognitive abilities as it is discussed in *Metaphysics* A.1 and *Posterior Analytics* 2.19.

⁴ Cooper (1975), 69.

⁵ Annas (1992); see also Rowe (1974), 95; Caston (1998), 258, n. 18; King (2009), 29.

⁶ *DM* 1.449b20–23; 450a20–21.

⁷ *DM* 2.451a30; see 1.450a27, b14–15, 19.

⁸ Similar views are found in Sorabji (2004), Bloch (2007, 83), Parsons (2016, Chapter 1), and Castagnoli (2019, 247–248), but on completely different grounds, and occasionally with strong qualifications. See also King: "[T]o explain memory we need to understand what it is we remember. A crucial element in the answer to this question is the past (449b15), that is, I take it, past perceptions *and so what we perceived in past perceptions*" (2018, 10; our italics).

2. Memory is of the past

Aristotle wants to answer three questions about memory: what it is, what is the cause of its coming to be, and to which part of the soul it belongs.⁹ He begins by focusing on the objects of memory (*ta mnēmoneuta*), in line with his recommendation elsewhere¹⁰ that to explain a power of the soul one must first explain its activity, and to explain an activity, one must first explain its corresponding objects. While, however, in his discussion of perception he offers quite a detailed account and classification of its objects (*DA* 2.6), in *DM* he fails to provide an unambiguous answer to the question what precisely it is that we remember. Rather, he goes a great length to argue that the object of memory is the past, leaving open which kinds of things can count as past in the relevant sense:

First, then, we must examine what kinds of things are the objects of memory, for this is often a source of mistakes. For, it is not possible to remember the future (*to mellon*), but it is the object of opinion and expectation (*doxaston kai elpiston*) ... nor is memory of the present (*to paron*), but it is the object of perception; for, with perception we cognize neither the future nor the past (*to genomenon*), but only the present. Memory is of the past. No one would say that he is remembering (*mnēmoneuein*) the present when it is present (*to paron hote parestin*), for instance this white thing when he is looking at it, <nor would one say that he is remembering> the object of theoretical knowledge (*to theōroumenon*) when he is attending to it theoretically and thinking about it (*theōrōn kai ennoōn*), but in the former case he will say only that he is perceiving it, and in the latter case that he is knowing it. (449b9–11, 13–18)

The object of opinion and expectation is the future, the object of memory is the past, while the object of perception and knowledge is the present. What could possibly be a source of mistakes here?¹¹ It seems that there are two kinds of mistaken views that Aristotle can have in mind. First, Aristotle seems to think that the view that memory is of the past but not of the present is far from being uncontroversial. For, while he does not give a separate argument for the claim that memory is not of the future (even though it seems that it can be of the facts concerning future events, e.g. if a person remembers that the meeting will take place tomorrow¹²), he obviously thinks that the view that memory is not of the present needs some elaboration. Now, it is reasonable why someone might think that memory is both of the past and of the present. One can remember not only that Coriscus walked yesterday after lunch but also that he is bald, even if he is still bald at the moment of remembering. Likewise, as we noted in the Introduction, Aristotle allows that one can remember the objects of scientific knowledge, which are always true. Hence, the first mistaken view is that memory is both of the past and of the present.

⁹ *DM* 1.449b3–5.

¹⁰ *De Anima (DA)* 2.4.415a13–22.

¹¹ Aristotle does not identify the author of the mistaken views on memory, but the obvious candidate is Plato. See Sorabji (2004), 65–66; Lang (1980), 385 (Lang provides a thorough discussion of the Platonic language in *DM* and its anti-Platonic reinterpretation).

¹² We are grateful to a reviewer for clarification on this point.

The second mistake, related to the previous one, concerns the proper discrimination of memory, on the one hand, and perception and knowledge, on the other. Having identified the object of memory as the past, Aristotle says: “Thus, memory is neither perception nor belief (*hupolēpsis*), but a having (*heris*) or an affect (*pathos*) of one of these, when time has passed.”¹³ The word “belief” (*hupolēpsis*) is apparently meant to cover a wide range of cognitive states. According to *DA* (3.3.427b25–26), it includes knowledge, opinion, intelligence (*phronēsis*) and their opposites, and we may assume that “belief” is used in this, or a similar, meaning here as well.¹⁴ If so, Aristotle’s remark at 449b24–25 implies that there is a mistaken view according to which memory is the same as perception, knowledge or belief. Again, it is reasonable why someone might assume that memory is the same as knowledge or belief. For, if one has memory of Coriscus’s walking yesterday after lunch or of his being bald, it is reasonable to say that one thereby knows or believes these things. If one has memory of every triangle’s having 2R, including perhaps the memory of how to demonstrate this, it is reasonable to say that one thereby knows that every triangle has 2R.¹⁵

So, there are two kinds of error concerning memory that Aristotle can have in mind at 449b9–10: the wrong assumption that the objects of memory are both the past and the present things and events, and the wrong assumption that memory is the same as knowledge or belief. It is not immediately clear, however, how one can also assume that memory is the same as *perception*, which is also implied at 449b24–25. There are two different reasons that can lead to this conclusion, and that can also strengthen the impressions that memory is the same as knowledge or belief and that it is of the present.

First, the assumption that memory is the same as perception can be seen as grounded in the mistaken view that memory should be understood in terms of a disposition or an ability rather than corresponding activity. Considered as an ability, memory has as its objects the same things and events that are the objects of perception. A person is able to remember the same thing or event that she is able to perceive. What is more, a person is able to remember the same thing or event that she is actively perceiving (provided, of course, that she perceived it before): she is able to remember that Coriscus is bald even while looking at him. Therefore, the objects of memory *qua* ability are just the objects of potential or actual perception, and there are no specific objects of memory that are not the objects of perception. Consequently, perception and memory amounts, in a sense, to the same thing. A similar argument can be used to show that memory can be assimilated to belief or knowledge: a person is able to remember the same thing or event that she believes or knows, whether potentially or actually, and there are no objects of memory that are not the proper objects of perception, belief or knowledge.

¹³ *DM* 1.449b24–25.

¹⁴ See Sorabji (2004), 69; Castagnoli (2019), 240 n. 15. See also Moss and Schwab (2019, esp. sect. 4), who argue that *hupolēpsis* is the generic attitude of taking to be true that is central to the modern notion of belief.

¹⁵ See also Plato’s *Theaetetus* 163d.

Second, one can argue that when a person exercises her memory, her actual remembering a past thing or event amounts to internal perception of her present awareness of it.¹⁶ Consequently, one can argue that the object of memory is a present item, and that memory is a kind of perception.

Thus, there are some *prima facie* reasons to argue that memory is both of the present and of the past, and that it is identical with knowledge and belief, as well as some more elaborate reasons to argue that memory is the same as knowledge, belief or perception, and that it is only of the present. Aristotle rejects all these reasons and insists that memory is only of the past and that it is not identical with knowledge, belief or perception. His argument can also be seen as proceeding according to his view that to explain an ability or potentiality, one must first explain the corresponding activity or actuality. Considered as an activity, memory cannot be identified with knowledge or perception if they are also considered as activities: one cannot actively remember bald Coriscus while looking at him, just as one cannot actively remember that every triangle has 2R while demonstrating this proposition.¹⁷ Why not? As we mentioned above, according to Aristotle, to explain an activity, one must first explain its corresponding object. Consequently, to recognize a distinction between activities, one must recognize a distinction between their objects. Now, even though it seems that memory, perception, and knowledge can have the same objects—such as bald Coriscus or every triangle’s having 2R—their objects are not the same. The object of active perception is bald Coriscus *as it is presently seen*;¹⁸ hence, it is present. The object of active memory, on the other hand, is absent:¹⁹ it is bald Coriscus *as it was seen*; hence, it is past. Bald Coriscus *qua* the object of one’s act of remembering is past (regardless of whether he is still bald, or wears a wig, or has had his hair transplanted), not because of his ontological status—i.e., because he is a particular, and particulars are in time—but because he *was* present, i.e., he was the object of one’s active perception. Likewise, every triangle’s having 2R *qua* the object of one’s act of remembering is past despite its ontological status, i.e., despite it being a universal truth that holds always. It can be qualified as past because it *was* the object of exercising one’s knowledge.

Thus, to make sense of Aristotle’s claim that memory is of the past only, we should assume that the qualifications “present” and “past” do not belong to things and events absolutely, or according to their independent ontological status, but relative to their being the objects of past or present cognition. This is why Aristotle describes the object of perception as the present *when it is present*²⁰ or the now *in the now*.²¹ Hence, one might say that, for any *x*, regardless of its ontological status, one can say “*x* is past for me” if one can say “I saw (or heard, or learned, etc.) *x*.”

¹⁶ See *DM* 1.450b14 and below, Section 4.

¹⁷ *DM* 1.449b15–18.

¹⁸ See *DM* 1.449b15–16.

¹⁹ Cf. *apon*, 1.450b13, 15.

²⁰ *DM* 1.449b15.

²¹ *DM* 1.449bb25–26.

Consequently, the fact that one can remember things that still exist or that exist always does not provide a counterexample to the view that memory is of the past.

On our account, then, the objects of memory can be particulars or universals, perceptibles or intelligibles—and all these kinds of things are past in the same sense, namely, in the sense of previously having been present to the perceiver or knower. Nothing in Aristotle's account of *mnēmoneuta* at 449b9–25 commits him to the view that perceptibles and intelligibles *qua* objects of memory require separate explanations: at 449b17, remembering an object of knowledge is treated on a par with remembering a white thing. Moreover, nothing in Aristotle's account of *mnēmoneuta* commits him to the view that the objects of memory are our past cognitive encounters with things and events rather than things and events themselves, even though, as we will see, more needs to be said about that.

Commentators are usually skeptical about ascribing to Aristotle the view that universals or intelligibles are the proper objects of memory in the same way in which particulars or perceptibles are. Let us mention two groups of reasons that can give rise to such a skepticism, both of which are, in our opinion, more or less unsatisfactory.

First, it can be argued that what we remember when we remember that every triangle has 2R is a particular triangle drawn during demonstrating or learning this proposition.²² On this view, we remember universals by remembering their particular instances, whose percept (*aisthēma*) is retained in the soul after perception, and of which we have an image (*phantasma*).²³ This is why Aristotle says that the objects of memory are by themselves (*kath' hauta*) the things of which there is imagination (*phantasia*)—that is, perceptible things—while things that are not without imagination—that is, intelligibles or universals, about which we cannot think without images²⁴—are the objects of memory only incidentally (*kata sumbebēkos*).²⁵ This does not mean, however, that intelligibles or universals are *not* the objects of memory. We can draw a parallel with the objects of perception. On Aristotle's view, bald Coriscus is not the object of perception by himself, but only incidentally—namely, because whiteness, which is perceptible by itself, happened to be bald Coriscus²⁶—but this does not mean that he is *not* the object of perception. Furthermore, the fact that we cannot think without images does not mean that intelligibles or universals are not the objects of thinking, but of the power of imagination, or that it is images rather than thoughts that are the objects of thinking. It is true that to remember a universal, or to think about it, we must form an image, whose causal origin is a perceptible thing. But this is a part of the explanation of how memory comes to be rather than of its objects. Thus, the claim that intelligibles or universals are only incidentally the objects of memory has to

²² On this line of argument, see Castagnoli (2019), 251–253; see also Annas (1992, 305–306), who argues against it and claims that a mathematical proposition can be memorable by being recollected.

²³ See *DA* 3.8.432a3–14.

²⁴ *DA* 3.7.431b2–3; 3.8.432a8–9.

²⁵ *DM* 1.450a23–25. See also Sorabji (2004), 79–80.

²⁶ *DA* 2.6.418a20–23.

do with the features of the process by which we remember them rather than with their status as the objects of memory.²⁷

To remember that every triangle has 2R requires having learned, and hence remembered, many things. For, as Aristotle suggests, one can remember only what one learned (or saw, or heard, etc.), and to learn that every triangle has 2R is to learn how to demonstrate this proposition from other geometrical propositions, and, ultimately, to have knowledge of the whole of geometry, including the grasp of its first principles.²⁸ Hence, to remember that every triangle has 2R it does not suffice to having learned that a particular triangle has 2R: one has to understand that—and, more importantly, *why*—the property of having 2R belongs to triangles universally. If a person really remembers that every triangle has 2R, this means that she is able to go through every step of the relevant demonstration. Doesn't this amount to her *knowing* that every triangle has 2R rather than remembering it? This brings us to the second source of skepticism regarding the view that Aristotle's memory can be of universals.²⁹ We *say* we remember universals such as Pythagoras' theorem or a definition of triangle, just as we *say* we see Coriscus walking. Strictly speaking, however, what we actually mean is that we *know* Pythagoras' theorem or a definition of triangle, and that it is *whiteness* that we see: “Aristotle had no intention to overthrow *endoxa*, and to reform ordinary parlance.”³⁰

In a sense, this is true. However, as we will see in the next Section, Aristotle would not allow that if a person remembers that *p* (where *p* is a universal proposition), she thereby knows that *p*. She only “has knowledge” about *p*, and “having knowledge” does not amount to “know” in a standard Aristotelian sense. Let us now see in what sense memory entails having knowledge.

3. Memory as *hexis* and *pathos*

We have argued that there are two wrong assumptions lurking behind Aristotle's description of the objects of memory at the beginning of *DM*: that memory is of the present and that it is somehow the same as perception, belief or knowledge. While Aristotle rejects both assumptions, he admits that, in a sense, to remember actively is to *have* knowledge and perception:

²⁷ See also King (2004), 92. We agree with his remark that “[a]uf diese Weise [i.e. by claiming that universal thoughts, e.g. theorems, are accidental objects of memory] verschafft Aristoteles seiner Theorie eine Allgemeinheit, die von einigen Interpreten vermisst worden ist” (ibid.).

²⁸ For such strict conditions, see e.g. *Posterior Analytics* 1.2.71b19–72a32.

²⁹ Best elaborated in Castagnoli (2019), 253–255.

³⁰ Castagnoli (2019), 254.

But whenever he has (*schē*) knowledge and perception without objects (*aneu tōn ergōn*),³¹ then he remembers thus (*houtō memnētai*):³² in the first case, that he learned or attended theoretically, and in the second case, that he heard or saw or something like that. For always, when one is active in the sense of remembering (*energēi kata to mnēmoneuein*), he says in his soul thus: that he previously heard or perceived or thought that. Hence, memory is neither perception nor belief (*hupolēpsis*), but a having (*hexis*) or an affect (*pathos*) of one of these, when time has passed. (1.449b18–25)

Aristotle argues that when a person is remembering *x*, she has knowledge or perception of *x* in its absence. Obviously, a person who is actively remembering *x* cannot be said thereby to know or perceive *x*, since knowledge and perception require the activity on the side of the object, which is absent. Perhaps it can be said instead that by remembering *x*, a person is *able* to perceive or know *x* because she is able to recognize it when she encounters it again. On this proposal, then, to have knowledge or perception of *x* in its absence is to be able to know or perceive it. More precisely, it is to have a second-level potential knowledge or perception.³³ To have a second-level potential knowledge of *x* is to have acquired knowledge of the domain to which *x* belongs and to be able to exercise it if nothing external interferes, while to have a second-level potential perception of *x* is to have the resources (acquired at birth) necessary for actual perceiving and to be able to see, hear, etc. *x* whenever it is available.

This proposal, however, does not work. For, when you are actively remembering, then it does not make sense to say that you have knowledge or perception of what you are remembering because you are *able* to exercise them. Rather, when actively remembering, you *are* exercising your previous knowledge or perception

³¹ The words *aneu tōn ergōn* are in recent translations of *DM* rendered “without actually exercising them” (Sorabji 2004), “without performing these actions” (Bloch 2007), or “ohne die entsprechenden Aktivitäten” (King 2004). However, the older translations by Beare (in Barnes 1984) or Ross (1906) take *erga* as referring to the *objects* of knowledge and perception rather than activities (see also Ross 1955, 235; Wiesner 1985, 171–173, finds a confirmation for taking *erga* as “objects” in Michael of Ephesus, *In Parva Naturalia* (CAG 22.1) 7.12 – 13 and Sophonias, *In Parva Naturalia* (CAG 5.6) 1.21 – 22). Such a translation is required by the context: Aristotle has argued above (449b15–18) that an object is present when it is actively known or perceived, and now he argues that even when the object is absent, a person can have knowledge or perception of it. Admittedly, the same sense is obtained if *erga* is translated as “activities” or the like—a person can have knowledge or perception of an object even when she is not actively knowing or perceiving it—but it is the absence of the object that Aristotle wants emphasized, for this is what distinguishes memory from knowledge and perception.

³² We follow Ross (1906, 246) and Bloch (2007, 230) in deleting the words that are found in some manuscripts after *houtō memnētai*, namely, *tas tou trigōnou hoti duo orthais isai*, “that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.” The main problem with these words, as Bloch puts it, is that “an example given here would have to include both epistemic and perceptual examples; this phrase only includes the former.” However, Aristotle might have meant that a person can have perception that every triangle has 2R because she was told so, or because she was listening someone demonstrating this proposition on a particular triangle and looking at the corresponding diagram. (See *Posterior Analytics* 1.31.87b33–39, where Aristotle stresses that even if we could see that triangles have 2R, “we would not, as some say, already know.”) Yet, with some reluctance, we decided to follow Ross and Bloch in omitting these words.

³³ See *DA* 2.5.417a9–b2.

in a sense, by answering, to yourself or to others, to the questions like “What is the sum of interior angles in a triangle?” or “What does Coriscus look like?” The actualization of the previous instances of knowing or perceiving takes the form of thinking about them,³⁴ perceiving them,³⁵ contemplating them,³⁶ or saying in our souls that we have already seen or heard something, or thought about something.³⁷ In other words, while it is not true to say that you know or perceive x when you are remembering it, it is true to say that you *have* knowledge or perception of x then, because the episode of your previous active knowledge or perception is retained as *pathos* of which you are now aware. Your having knowledge or perception on the basis of memory is active, since it consists in your attending to your previous experience.³⁸ Yet it is not the same as active knowledge or perception, because their corresponding objects are absent.

There is a further difference between knowledge or perception that are had on the basis of memory, on the one hand, and the second-level potential knowledge or perception, on the other. To say of someone that she potentially knows that p , it is not required that she previously actively knew that p . Rather, it is sufficient that she has acquired knowledge of the relevant domain, and then she potentially knows every proposition from this domain: if a person has learned the whole of geometry, then she potentially knows every geometrical proposition, and if she knows that every triangle has 2R, then she potentially knows that a particular triangle T has 2R even if she does not know that T exists.³⁹ The same, of course, is true of perception: one is a potential perceiver of x if one is endowed with necessary resources even if one has not perceived x before. Things are different with knowledge or perception that are had on the basis of memory. A person who is actively remembering has knowledge or perception only of the very thing that she previously learned or perceived: she has knowledge that every triangle has 2R only if she previously learned this very proposition, and she has perception that Coriscus is bald only if she previously saw bald Coriscus.

Now, if to actively remember x is to have knowledge or perception of x , and to have knowledge or perception of x in the relevant sense is to have previously actively known or perceived x , then what a person who is actively remembering

³⁴ *DM* 1.450a27–28. We take it that the object of thinking (*noēsai*) at 450a27–28 is *pathos* that is generated in the soul rather than the process of remembering as a whole.

³⁵ *DM* 1.450b15, 18, 28.

³⁶ *DM* 1.450b18, 451a8.

³⁷ *DM* 1.449b22–23. Aristotle’s claim that a person who remembers “says in his soul thus: that he previously heard or perceived or thought that” cannot, of course, be taken literally: when remembering something, we usually do not engage in such an internal soliloquy, which is especially true of non-human animals, some of which, according to Aristotle, possess memory (1.450a15–16; *Metaphysics* A.1.980a29; *Historia Animalium* 1.2.488b25).

³⁸ In this, we very much agree with Parsons (2016, 24–38), who argues that the activity of memory is akin to exercising one’s knowledge. She also argues (33–35, following Lorenz 2006, 159 n. 28) that Aristotle’s use of *hexis* in *DM* is parallel to Plato’s use of this word in the aviary simile in the *Theaetetus* (197b–c), where it refers to actually using or having a thing, as opposed to being able to use it (which is denoted by *ktēsis*).

³⁹ *Posterior Analytics* 1.24.86a22–29; see also 1.1.71a27–30.

x has is not just x , but the experience of previous knowing or perceiving x . In other words, the *pathos* that has been retained as the result of knowing or perceiving includes both the content and experience. It does not follow from this, however, that the object of her memory is this experience rather than x . A person is remembering *by* having the experience of previously knowing or perceiving x , or, to put it differently, to remember *is* to have such an experience in the active sense, that is, to be aware of it.⁴⁰ When remembering something, we are perceiving that we previously heard or saw or learn—this is the description of *how*, rather than *what*, we remember.⁴¹ In other words: what we remember is an absent object, and this is the answer to the question about the objects of memory posed at 1.449b9. The manner in which we remember is by being aware that we saw or learned it previously, and this is (a part of) the answer to Aristotle's second question about memory, namely, about the cause of its coming to be (posed at 449b4).

Another way to explain what is going on in active remembering is in terms of affect (*pathos*), for, more precisely, memory is a having of *pathos* of a previous episode of perceiving or knowing an object rather than a having of perception or knowledge themselves.⁴² In a nutshell, *pathos* is what one has undergone due to the process of perception, which is retained after the process:

The objects of perception corresponding to each sense organ produce perception in us, and the *pathos* that comes about from them is present in the sense organs not only when perceptions are active but after they have departed. (*On Dreams* 2.459a24–28)

Pathos includes not only the trace of the absent object but of the previous episode of perceiving or knowing it as well. Hence, it should be seen as a complex consisting of contents and experience. Aristotle explains this in terms of movements that are caused by the external object and that persist in us after the object became absent for us.⁴³ In ideal circumstances, *pathos* is retained complete, that is, a person is able to perceive *that she saw or learned x*. Aristotle's abundant use of metaphors in describing what is going on in retaining a previous experience of an

⁴⁰ Thus, we do not share Bloch's claim that "there is no obvious place for an active remembering in the Aristotelian theory" (2007, 97). On the contrary, if our interpretation above is correct, Aristotle speaks of memory in *DM* solely in terms of activity.

⁴¹ Cf. *houtō*, *DM* 1.449b19, *houtōs*, b22.

⁴² Aristotle says that memory is a having *or* a *pathos* of perception or supposition (1.449b25). He also says, however, that memory is a having *of pathos* (1.450a30), and in the final definition at the end of Ch. 1 he says that it is a having of an image (*phantasma*) taken as a representation (1.451a15–16). This sounds inconsistent, or else Aristotle uses *pathos* in different senses. We believe, however, that the difference in formulations is just a matter of emphasis and of increased precision. Memory is first defined as a having of a previous act of knowledge or perception. To say that memory is a having of a *pathos* is just a more precise way to say that it is a having of a previous act of knowledge or perception, and since the more useful and comprehensible way to think of *pathos* is in terms of images, still more precise is to say that it is a having of an image. To say that memory is just a *pathos* is a rather loose way of saying that there is nothing above and beyond memory than having retained a previous act of awareness; see also Bloch (2007, 83; however, we do not agree that "[t]hroughout *De Memoria* he uses [*hexis* and *pathos*] interchangeably" (81), given the active sense of *hexis* as explained above).

⁴³ *DM* 1.451a3–4; cf. *On Dreams* 2.459b3–22; see *DM* 2.451b10–452a25 on how putting these movements in an order constitutes the process of recollection.

object (metaphors of images, seals, imprints, flowing water, old buildings, softness, hardness, etc.), and the emphasis he puts on the dependence of memory on physical constitution, age, quickness or slowness and passions⁴⁴, show, among other things, that he is very well aware of the fact that circumstances are usually far from ideal, and that the way in which *pathē* are retained in us depends on many factors.⁴⁵ A person can have more or less clear image of *x*, but be uncertain as to whether she experienced it or not; she can be aware that she experienced something, but uncertain what it was; she can be doubtful as to whether she experienced *x* or *y*; etc. *Pathē*, just like memory, come in degrees, and in the next Section, we will discuss some cases of unsuccessful memory due to incomplete *pathē*.

4. A puzzle about the object of memory

We have argued that the objects of memory are absent things or events the acts of awareness of which produced *pathos* in us, and that it is our subsequent awareness of *pathos* that constitutes active memory. However, by being aware of the *pathos* we must be aware of non-mental things or events that caused it, for otherwise memory would be assimilated to a kind of internal perception of the present. To be aware of non-mental things or events that caused the *pathos*, on the other hand, would mean that it is somehow possible “to see and hear that which is not present.”⁴⁶ Thus, there is a puzzle about how one remembers that which is not present:

Someone might raise the puzzle how one remembers that which is not present if the *pathos* is present, but the thing (*pragma*) is absent (*apon*). (450a25–27)

Is it this *pathos* that one remembers or that from which it came to be? For, if the former, we would remember none of the things that are absent. If the latter, how do we, in perceiving this *pathos*, remember that which we are not perceiving, namely, that which is absent? (450b12–15)

To show that it is indeed possible to remember that which we are not perceiving, Aristotle uses the comparison with pictures.⁴⁷ A picture painted on a board, he says, is both a picture and a likeness or a representation (*eikōn*): a picture of Coriscus is both a picture, i.e. something in itself, and a representation of Coriscus, i.e. picture of something else, and it can be observed as both. The same is true of *pathos* that came about as the result of a previous act of awareness, which can also be taken as a kind of image: it is both something in itself and of something else. If observed as something in itself, then it occurs just as a thought or an image, and if observed as something that is of something else, then it occurs as a representation and a reminder (*mnēmoneuma*). Hence, to remember is to observe

⁴⁴ If this is the meaning of *pathos* at *DM* 1.450b1.

⁴⁵ On physical constraints on the process of memory, see King (2004), 99–102 and Sutton (2020).

⁴⁶ *DM* 1.450b19–20.

⁴⁷ *DM* 1.450b20–451a2.

pathos as a representation of something. Since it is a representation of an absent non-mental object, to perceive *pathos* as a representation is to be aware of an absent non-mental object.

Such an account raises several questions. Perhaps the most important question is how to distinguish precisely between observing *pathos* as something in itself and observing it as a representation, which is basically the problem that is prominent in various accounts of memory, namely, the distinction between imagining and remembering. R.A.H. King has recently usefully distinguished two basic strategies in approaching Aristotle's position. According to the activist approach, remembering is *doing* something different than imagining, while according to the phenomenalist approach, attending to reminders *appears* differently than attending to thoughts or images taken in themselves. King argues that both approaches are needed: "to put it in a slogan, remembering is an activity involving appearances."⁴⁸ We agree with King's general idea and with his specification of the distinction between the two approaches. In the remainder of this Section, we want to show that the distinction between two different kinds of acting and being appeared to as discussed by King—and, consequently, between remembering and merely imagining (or thinking)—is grounded in a further distinction, which has to do with the way in which the *pathos* is retained. To put it more precisely, it has to do with whether the subject is able to retain both the experiential and the contentual aspect of *pathos*. Let us explain.

In some circumstances, when an observer sees a picture of Coriscus, she immediately sees it as a representation of Coriscus, that is, recognizes that it is a picture of Coriscus. This is the case when the observer knows Coriscus, knows how he looks, the picture faithfully represents Coriscus, the observer is not distracted by some other features of the picture or prevented to recognize Coriscus because she is perturbed, ill, short-sighted, etc. If circumstances are such that an observer is unable to immediately recognize Coriscus, she can concentrate on some other features of the picture—that is, she can look at it as it is in itself—and then change her perspective and look at it as a representation of Coriscus. But in normal circumstances—i.e., circumstances in which nothing obstructs her looking at the picture as a representation—the observer cannot but recognize Coriscus. In normal circumstances, her default perspective is that the picture is representation. It is true that observing the picture as a representation is doing something else than observing it as it is in itself, and that the ways in which these two kinds of activities appear to the observer are also different. But what makes a further and, in our opinion, more important difference between these two kinds of looking at the picture is the whole range of circumstances that surround observing it, some of which concern the picture itself, and some the observer.

Likewise, in normal (or, rather, ideal) circumstances, when a person is aware that she saw or learned that *p*, her default perspective on this *pathos* is that it is a representation (that is, a remainder), and she remembers that *p*. Aristotle does not provide the account of when circumstances are ideal. In *DM*, he is first

⁴⁸ King (2018), 10.

and foremost interested in physical fitness to receive *pathē*, and he discusses various physiological reasons why someone can have poor memory, for instance the excessive fluidity or hardness of the part of the body which is supposed to receive *pathos*.⁴⁹ In extreme cases, for some people “the image [i.e., *pathos*] does not remain in the soul, while for others it does not take hold.”⁵⁰ In less extreme cases of physical obstructions, *pathos* is not retained as needed for successful memory, and then a person has to make an additional effort to ensure that she is remembering rather than imagining. We take it that some of these cases are discussed at *DM* 1.451a2–12:

(1) We sometimes do not know, when such movements from prior perception occur in our soul, whether it happens in accordance with our having perceived (*kata to ēisthēsthai*), and we are in doubt whether it is memory or not. (451a2–5)

(2) But at times it happens that we reflect and recollect (*ennoēsai kai anamnēstēnai*) that we heard or saw something earlier. This happens whenever after considering it as itself we change (*metaballēi*) and view it as of something else. (451a5–8)

(3) But sometimes the opposite also happens, just as happened to Antipheron of Oreus and to other agitated people; for they spoke of their images as things that actually happened (*hōs genomena*) and claimed to remember them. This happens whenever someone considers that which is not a representation as a representation. (451a8–12)

(1) A person is aware that she saw Coriscus walking. In normal circumstances, this would amount to remembering. In this case, however, she is not certain whether that of which she is aware corresponds to what she actually saw (say, she is not certain whether she saw Coriscus or Callias). That is to say, she is aware of the experiential part or aspect of the *pathos* (she is aware that she experienced something), but uncertain about its contentual part or aspect (she is unable to identify properly what it was that she experienced). The cause of her uncertainty can be interpreted as unfitness of her physical condition to grasp and keep the *pathos* firmly enough so as to be perceived complete. Consequently, she does not perceive it as a representation, since all she is aware of is that she saw *someone*. This corresponds to the situation in which a person is trying to look at a picture as a representation, but fails, since she is not certain who the picture represents.

(2) A person is aware that *p*, for instance, that Coriscus is bald. She perceives this *pathos* as it is in itself, namely, as a thought that Coriscus is bald. But then she realizes that she previously saw that Coriscus is bald and begins to perceive the *pathos* as a reminder. Consequently, she remembers that Coriscus is bald. She has made a switch⁵¹ from “I am aware that *p*” to “I am aware that I saw that *p*,” and this switch can be interpreted as a transformation from perceiving a part of the *pathos* to perceiving it as complete. Again, we may presume that her inability to perceive the complete *pathos* has to do with conditions in which it has been

⁴⁹ See *DM* 1.449a32–b11.

⁵⁰ *DM* 1.449b10–11.

⁵¹ See Bloch (2007), 35.

retained. This corresponds to the situation in which a person is looking at a picture and subsequently realizes that it is a representation of Coriscus.

(3) A person is aware that *p* and claims that she had an experience that *p*, even though she did not. So, she is just thinking or imagining that *p*. Aristotle ascribes such a phenomenon to people who are agitated or distraught (*existamenoī*), and while he does not provide the details of their condition, we can safely presume that he sees them as physiologically impaired to such an extent that they are unable to manipulate properly with *pathē* they retained.

(1)–(3) are cases in which a person is able to observe a *pathos* as something in itself, i.e. as a thought, but fails, at least initially (as in (2)), to observe it as a representation. However, the possibility of observing a *pathos* in two ways, by itself, is not sufficient to explain memory failures.⁵² We believe that such failures have their further explanation in the subject's inability to retain *pathos* as complete. (1) and (2) are cases in which *pathos* has not been retained properly, i.e., it has not been imprinted in such a way that a person is able to attend to it as complete: in (1), a person has properly retained only the experiential aspect of the *pathos*, while in (2), she has properly retained only the contentual aspect. It is only in such cases of obstructed or distorted reception of *pathos* that the question of the differentiation between remembering and imagining arises. In ideal cases, i.e., in cases in which there are no obstructions, to attend to *pathos* is to remember. When observing a drawn picture, if you are immediately aware that it is a representation, you can begin looking at it as it is in itself, or to concentrate on some of its non-representational features, only if you abstract away its representational features, or, rather, your recognition of such features. In the case of remembering, if you are aware that you saw or learned that *p*, you cannot but remember that *p*. If you want to observe such *pathos* as it is in itself, you have to focus on its contentual part only, and imagine or think about *p* alone.

Unlike pictures, however, there is no non-representational part or aspect of *pathos*. That is to say, what *pathos* represents is both that *p* and a previous act of awareness that *p*. For, if it were a representation of a previous act of awareness only, then (1) would be a case of successful memory, which it is not, and if it were a representation that *p* only, then a person in (2) would remember that *p* even before she made a switch and began observing the complete *pathos*, which is not the case. This, however, does not mean that the object of memory is the previous act of awareness that *p* rather than *p*. Note that, in the first formulation of the puzzle, Aristotle asks: if *pathos* is present, while *pragma* is absent, how one remembers that which is not present?⁵³ The word *pragma* certainly does not refer to previous act of awareness, but to a thing or event. In the second formulation, Aristotle asks whether we remember *pathos* or that which generated it,⁵⁴ and that which generated the *pathos* is the perceptible thing⁵⁵ rather than the act of

⁵² *Contra* King (2004), 106.

⁵³ *DM* 1.450a25–27.

⁵⁴ *aph' hou egeneto*, *DM* 1.450b13.

⁵⁵ See above, *On Dreams* 2.2.459a24–28.

perception, which can itself be called *pathos*.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he asks how, when perceiving the *pathos*, we can remember that which we do not perceive, i.e., that which is absent (*apon*),⁵⁷ where *apon* can refer only to the object rather than to the act of awareness of it. Hence, even though what *pathos* represents is a previous perception or knowledge of an object, and even though the remembered object is remembered as past, which is to say, as previously perceived or known—and not as independently existing—what we remember is that object rather than that we perceived or knew it.

5. Conclusion: beyond memory

Such an account of the objects of memory fits with Aristotle’s understanding of the place and the role of memory in the hierarchy of cognitive abilities as it is discussed in *Metaphysics* A.1 and *Posterior Analytics* 2.19. In both texts, Aristotle places memory between perception and experience (*empeiria*), and argues that the plurality of memories brings about experience:

In human beings experience comes about from memory; for many memories of the same thing (*tou autou pragmatos*) bring about the power (*dunamis*) of one experience. (*Metaphysics* A.1.980b28–981a1)

So, from perception comes about memory, as we say, and from memory, when it occurs frequently about the same thing, comes about experience; for memories that are many in number are a single experience. (*Posterior Analytics* 2.19.100a3–6)

Just as in *DM*, *pragma* in the *Metaphysics* passage (as well as “the same thing” in the *Analytcs* passage) does not refer to our perception of things, but to the things themselves. The scope of *pragma* as the object of memory is not restricted to middle-sized physical things, but includes events, states of affairs, and facts as well.⁵⁸ To have many memories of the same *pragma* is to have memory of particular instances of the same type of *pragma*. For instance, to follow Aristotle’s example in the *Metaphysics*, a person had seen, and subsequently remembered, that a certain treatment benefited Coriscus when he was burning with fever; he had seen, and subsequently remembered, that the same treatment benefited Callias when he was burning with fever; and so on with Socrates and other individuals. These memories enable her to conclude that this treatment benefits all people when they burn with fever, a conclusion that is a matter of experience. Thus, memory is the necessary step in grasping the universal, *all people burning with fever*, which enables an experienced doctor to apply the same treatment to other individuals. At a higher level in cognitive hierarchy, a doctor who possesses skill (*technē*) is able to

⁵⁶ *DM* 2.451a26, 30; see *DA* 3.2.426a2. Hence, we do not agree with Annas (1992, 305) that “[t]he memory-images are said to result from our perceivings of things, not from the things themselves.” The things themselves are the ultimate causes of memory-images.

⁵⁷ *mnēmoneuomen hou mē aisthanometha, to apon*, *DM* 1.450b14–15.

⁵⁸ Just as in *DM*, see the list of the objects of memory in Sorabji (2004), 1.

grasp a truly explanatory universal—*all people in such and such physical condition when burning with fever*—and to know *why* this treatment is beneficial.⁵⁹ Hence, memory provides a necessary material for grasping universals, and this is a further reason why we should assume that its objects are things and events rather than our previous acts of awareness of them. For, it is our subsequent understanding that the instances of the same type of *pragma* can be grouped together that makes a transition from memory to experience.⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ *Metaphysics* A.1.981a5–12.

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