

Joshua Trubowitz*

Aristotle on Perceptual Self-Consciousness

<https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2024-0159>

Abstract: Aristotle’s account of perceptual self-consciousness (“perceiving that we perceive”) is typically approached as an attempt to explain how we know our own mental states. In particular, Aristotle is taken to understand perceptual self-consciousness as a function of the mind or soul’s quasi-perceptual relation to itself. I argue instead that Aristotle understands perceptual self-consciousness as the (veridical) perception that we are confronted with an external object. This is not a matter of knowing our own mental states, but of knowing that we know: in particular, of knowing that an external object is apparent to us through our sense-organs. I conclude with a discussion of Aristotle’s broader interest in perceptual self-consciousness.

Keywords: Aristotle; perception; consciousness; reflexivity; self-knowledge

1

The topic of this paper is Aristotle’s famous, obscure, and controversial account of a phenomenon that he calls “perceiving that we perceive.” In one way or another, what Aristotle offers is an account of our awareness of our own seeing, hearing, etc.: what I will call perceptual self-consciousness.

Instead of turning straight to Aristotle’s *De anima*, I would like to start by recalling a familiar moment from Descartes’ Second Meditation. Descartes has just introduced his *cogito* and established with certainty that he is “a thing that thinks”: that is, “a thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sense-perceptions” (A. T. VII 28). At this point in the *Meditations*, the final item on this list is surprising. Descartes still doubts the existence of his own body and of a world outside his mind. How can he be certain that he has sense-perceptions? Perception, we might think, is a relation to what is “out there,” apparent to us through our sense-organs. Descartes anticipates this objection. Instead of removing sense-perception from the scope of his *cogito*, he redefines it:

*Corresponding author: Joshua Trubowitz, University of Chicago, John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought, Chicago, United States; jtrubowitz@uchicago.edu.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6387-988X>

I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called sense-perceiving (*sentire*) is strictly just this; and in this restricted sense it is none other than thinking (*cogitare*). (A. T. VII 29, trans. Cottingham, modified)

For Descartes, seeing and hearing are strictly speaking a matter of *seeming* to see and *seeming* to hear. As such, they are modes of “thought” (*cogitatio*), or of “that which is in us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it” (A. T. VII 160). Understood this way, our awareness of our seeing and hearing does not involve an awareness of anything “out there.” It is an awareness of what is going on “in here,” in our minds.

I have opened with these reminders about Descartes because the dominant recent approach to Aristotle’s account of perceiving that we perceive strikes me as broadly Cartesian. It takes Aristotle to be concerned, like Descartes, with the knowledge of one’s own mind or mental states. According to Thomas Johansen, Aristotle thinks that an “inner sense” perceives our “mental states.” Indeed, he takes Aristotle to have anticipated Locke’s conception of consciousness as “the perception of what passes in a Man’s own mind.”¹ According to Victor Caston, Aristotle thinks that our mental states possess a subjective, “felt quality” that renders them the objects of a reflexive awareness.² And according to Aryeh Kosman, Aristotle thinks that the “mind” or “consciousness” becomes its own object in the act of perception, and thereby perceives itself.³ These three interpretations have set the terms of the contemporary debate over Aristotle’s account of perceiving that we perceive. The differences between them are profound and far-reaching, but there is one fundamental point on which they agree: that Aristotle’s topic is, broadly speaking, the mind or soul’s consciousness of itself and its own activity.⁴

I would like to push back against this point of basic agreement. As I read Aristotle, he means to account for our awareness of our own seeing and hearing in

1 Johansen 2005, esp. 261–262, 269, 274. See also Johansen 2012, 185–198. For Locke, see *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.i.19. Johansen also takes Aristotle to anticipate the views of contemporary “inner sense” theorists like David Armstrong and William Lycan (Johansen 2005, 235, 255, 269).

2 Caston 2002, esp. 788–791. According to Caston, Aristotle believes that “there is a sense in which our experience [i. e., a given mental state] is genuinely perceptible and so has a phenomenal character that is accessible to consciousness” (Caston 2002, 789).

3 Kosman speaks of “consciousness [or “mind,” “using “mind” as Descartes did,” 518] being conscious of itself” (Kosman 1975, 516). See also Kosman 2005.

4 These scholars are aware that there is no perfect equivalent in Aristotle’s philosophy for “mind” or “mental state” as these terms are used in contemporary philosophy. I will comment briefly on this point at the end of the paper.

such a way that these words retain their normal, innocent, non-Cartesian meaning. To perceive that we see, or so I will argue, is to perceive, by using our eyes, that something, an external object, is (in fact) apparent to us. On the picture that will emerge, Aristotle's account of perceptual self-consciousness is not addressed to questions about how we know our occurrent mental states. Instead, it makes direct contact with Socratic concerns about whether we can know what we know and do not know, and also with Hellenistic epistemology, where the central philosophical problem is, in effect, whether we are ever in a position to answer the question "How do you know?" with "Because I see it."⁵

2

Let us begin by considering Aristotle's account of perceiving that we perceive in *De anima*. It is brief enough to reproduce in full:

[1] Since we perceive that we see and hear, one must perceive that he sees either by sight (ὄψει) or by some other [sense]. [2] But the same [sense] will be of sight and of the underlying color, so that either two senses will be of the same thing, or one will be of itself. [3] Furthermore, if the sense which is of sight were other than sight, then either they will go on to infinity or there will be some sense that is of itself; so that one should grant this about the first. [4] But this involves a difficulty (ἔχει δ' ἀπορίαν). For if to perceive by sight is to see, and what is seen is color or what has color, then if someone is to see what sees (τὸ ὁρῶν), what sees first must have color. [5] It is clear, then, that perceiving by sight is not one thing; for even when we do not see, we discern (κρίνομεν) both darkness and light by sight, though not in the same way. [6] Furthermore, what sees is in a way colored (ὡς κεχρωμάτισται). For each sense-organ (αἰσθητήριον) receives the perceptible object without its matter. That is why even when the perceptible objects are gone, the perceptions and appearances remain in the sense-organs. (*De an.* 3.2, 425b12–25)

⁵ I take certain aspects of my interpretation to be anticipated in different ways by Osborne 1983; Everson 1997; McCabe 2007; Twomey 2019; and Gregoric 2021. But it seems to me that we need a response to the general approach represented by Kosman, Caston, and Johansen. McCabe and Twomey make important first moves in this direction, but they take this dominant approach to reflect a concern with phenomenal consciousness while Johansen denies that Aristotle offers an account of phenomenal consciousness (Johansen 2005, 273–276). What unifies the dominant approach in the literature is the view that Aristotle is accounting for our awareness of our own mental states.

Nearly every word in this passage is controversial, but the basic structure of Aristotle's argument is relatively clear. He asks whether we perceive that we see "by sight" (ὁψει) or by some other sense [1].⁶ Two considerations decide in favor of the former, and he concludes that sight is "of itself" [2 and 3].⁷ He finds this puzzling: if we are to see "what sees" (τὸ ὁρῶν), what sees must be colored [4]. He solves the problem by pointing out, first, that "perceiving by sight is not one thing" [5], and then by suggesting that there is a sense in which "what sees" is colored: when we see something, the organ of sight "receives" its color [6].

I have said that the most influential recent interpretations of this passage take Aristotle to be interested in our awareness of our own mental states. But if we take Aristotle's remarks at face value, the relatively plain presupposition of the argument is that we perceive that we see by perceiving our own eyes. Consider the basic progression of Aristotle's argument. When he concludes that "sight" is "of itself," he worries immediately that unless "what sees" is colored we will not be able to "see" it. He solves the problem by suggesting that "what sees is, in a way, colored." By way of an explanation, he reminds us that our sense-organs receive perceptible forms (colors, sounds, etc.) from external objects, and that these perceptible forms exist in our sense-organs as "perceptions and appearances." The most straightforward and literal interpretation of these claims is: (i) that the organ of sight becomes visible when it receives color from colored objects; (ii) that because it is visible, we are able to "see what sees"; and (iii) that this enables us to perceive that we see. In short, Aristotle seems to think that we are able to perceive that we see because we are able to see our eyes receive color.

Until recently, this was the standard interpretation of Aristotle's argument.⁸ But nobody considered it a very appealing theory of perceptual self-consciousness. It suggests that Aristotle holds a remarkably crude view according to which we perceive that we see by seeing little images in our eyes. Though some recent scholars have attributed this view to Aristotle,⁹ the dominant tendency over the past few decades has been to find a more philosophically appealing theory of self-consciousness by reading a reference to the eyes out of the text.

6 Caston 2002 disputes this framing. See below.

7 Some deny that [2] is an argument in favor of either alternative identified in [1], and suggest that Aristotle's positive argument comes only in [3]. See Osborne 1983, 401; Johansen 2005, 243–244; Gregoric 2007, 178–179. But [3] begins with "Furthermore..." (ἔτι δ'), which indicates that Aristotle is leveling a second objection to one of the alternatives identified in [1]. Since [3] is an argument to the effect that sight must be "of itself," [2] should be as well.

8 See *inter alia* Slakey 1961, 474; Hamlyn 1968, 122–123; Sorabji 1974, 71–72; Hardie 1976, 406; Everson 1997, 175.

9 Sorabji 1974, 71, 74; Everson 1997, 143–144, 175.

Kosman's seminal article led the way. He grants that there is a sense in which the eye sees itself, but argues that for Aristotle, color's presence in the eye ("seeing") is really just its presence in "consciousness"; that consciousness is nothing but its object; and that it is therefore always, in a sense, a consciousness of consciousness: a seeing of seeing.¹⁰ Caston takes a different tack. He argues that Aristotle's Greek has been misunderstood: to perceive τὸ ὁρῶν is not to perceive "what sees," but our very "seeing."¹¹ Our seeing, a "mental state," becomes "colored" insofar as it characterized by "qualia" that give it a subjective, felt quality. When we see a blue sky, we perceive these qualia and thereby perceive "what it is like" to see the sky. This, for Caston, is perceiving that we see.¹² Johansen offers still another interpretation of Aristotle's "what sees," according to which it refers neither to the eye nor to the act of seeing, but rather to "the faculty of sight *qua* seeing," that is, an aspect of the soul.¹³ We perceive that we see when an "inner sense" registers the colors somehow present in our souls. These otherwise divergent interpretations agree that we do not perceive that we see by perceiving our eyes, but by perceiving, in one way or another, our own souls, minds, or mental states.

As evidence for an alternative along these lines, we might point to Aristotle's claim that "sight" is "of itself." It is natural to think that "sight" names an aspect of the soul, and to conclude on this basis that our ability to perceive that we see must be a function of the soul's quasi-perceptual relation to itself. However, a closer consideration of the text suggests otherwise. When Aristotle concludes in [3] that "sight" is "of itself," he infers immediately that we "see what sees," which he seems to identify in [6] as the organ of sight. If we perceive that we see by seeing what sees, namely, the organ of sight; and if we do so "by sight," which is "of itself"; then it is the organ of sight that is somehow "of itself." In short, "sight" (ὄψις) seems to refer here to the *organ* of sight. When Aristotle says that "sight" is "of itself," he means that the organ of sight has itself for an object.

Can terms like "sight" (ὄψις) and "hearing" (ἀκοή) refer to the organs of sight and hearing? A few relevant passages from the *Parva naturalia* show unambigu-

¹⁰ Kosman 1975, esp. 514–517, 518.

¹¹ For Caston's reading of τὸ ὁρῶν, see Caston 2002, 788. Johansen 2005, 244–248, argues (persuasively, to my mind) that Caston's proposal stretches Aristotle's Greek beyond comfortable limits.

¹² Caston 2002, esp. 791: "The seeing [that we perceive] is in *some sense* 'like' or 'similar to' the perceptible quality it is about (or represents), in so far as it is something that *has to do with* color. But it is *not* the same quality [as the color that we see] – it is rather the 'mental paint' used to represent colored objects that gives our experience the phenomenal character it has, and this somehow is available to us." The term "mental paint" is from Gilbert Harman via Ned Block.

¹³ Johansen 2005, esp. 245–249, 252–253.

ously that they can.¹⁴ In *De somno*, Aristotle says that it is not “by sight” (ὄψει) that we “see that we see,” nor “by sight” nor “taste” nor “both” that we discern (κρίνειν) that what is sweet differs from what is white (οὔτε γεύσει οὔτε ὄψει οὔτε ἀμφοῖν), but rather “by some common part of all the sense-organs” (τινὶ κοινῷ μορίῳ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἀπάντων). This final reference to the sense-organs suggests that Aristotle has been speaking of them all along, so that “sight” (ὄψις) and “taste” (γεῦσις) name the *organs* of sight and taste.¹⁵ A closely related passage from *De insomniis* confirms this interpretation. Aristotle says that when certain motions “from sight” (ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως, 461a28), “from hearing” (ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκοῆς, a29), “and from the other sense-organs” (καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθητηρίων, a30) reach the “principle” of perception, “one seems to oneself to see and hear and perceive” (a30–b1).¹⁶ Here in *De insomniis*, where Aristotle draws upon *De somno*’s account of perceiving that we see, “sight” (ὄψις) and “hearing” (ἀκοή) refer unambiguously to the eyes and ears. It is therefore no surprise that Aristotle slides so quickly in *De anima* from the conclusion that “sight” is “of itself” to the claim that we “see what sees.” For Aristotle, the site of reflexivity in *De anima* is not the mind or soul, but rather, in some sense, the eye.

3

If we assume that a theory of perceptual self-consciousness must explain our awareness of our own minds, souls, or mental states, we will want to resist the suggestion that for Aristotle, visual self-consciousness involves seeing our eyes. But the idea is somewhat less strange if Aristotle means to explain how we are aware

¹⁴ In fact, Aristotle frequently uses the names of the various senses (ὄψις, ἀκοή, etc.) as well as the word “sense” (αἴσθησις) to refer to the sense-organs in which they are housed. For a non-exhaustive list of references, see Hicks 1907, 351; Bonitz [1870] 1961, 21a15–26; Everson 1997, 100 n113. Here is one of many clear instances: “The sight, in all cases, consists of water, not of fire” (μὴ πυρὸς τὴν ὄψιν θετέον ἀλλ’ ὕδατος, *Gen. an.* v 1, 779b19–20, trans. Peck). It is of course the *eye* that consists of water. Peck notes that Aristotle frequently uses “sight” for “organ of sight.”

¹⁵ Here is the full passage (*Somn.* 455a15–20): ἔστι δέ τις καὶ κοινὴ δύναμις ἀκολουθοῦσα πάσαις [int. ταῖς αἰσθήσεσι], ἥ καὶ ὅτι ὁρᾷ καὶ ἀκούει αἰσθάνεται (οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῇ γε ὄψει ὁρᾷ ὅτι ὁρᾷ, καὶ κρίνει δὴ καὶ δύναται κρίνειν ὅτι ἕτερα τὰ γλυκέα τῶν λευκῶν οὔτε γεύσει οὔτε ὄψει οὔτε ἀμφοῖν, ἀλλὰ τινὶ κοινῷ μορίῳ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἀπάντων).

¹⁶ Here is the full passage (*Insomn.* 461a26–b1): σωζομένη τῶν αἰσθημάτων ἡ κίνησις ἀφ’ ἐκάστου τῶν αἰσθητηρίων εἰρόμενά τε ποιεῖ τὰ ἐνύπνια, καὶ φαίνεσθαι τι καὶ δοκεῖν διὰ μὲν τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς ὄψεως καταφερόμενα ὁρᾶν, διὰ δὲ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἀκούειν, ὁμοιοτρόπως δὲ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθητηρίων· τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἐκείθεν ἀφικνεῖσθαι τὴν κίνησιν πρὸς τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ ἐγρηγορῶς δοκεῖ ὁρᾶν καὶ ἀκούειν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι.

that we are actually seeing something: that is, confronted with it through our eyes. This is especially true when we step back and consider certain general features of Aristotle's theory of perception.

As we have seen, Aristotle thinks that the perceptible qualities that we perceive are received in some way by our sense-organs.¹⁷ He frequently characterizes these perceptible qualities as “affections” (πάθη) of our sense-organs or “motions” (κινήσεις) within them (cf. *Sens.* 446b21–26, *Insomn.* 461a30–31), so that when we perceive these perceptible qualities, we are perceiving the affections of our sense-organs. This idea is thematic in a well-known passage from the *Physics*:

We say that a thing is altered by being heated or sweetened or thickened or dried or whitened; and we make these assertions alike of what is inanimate and of what is animate, and further, where animate things are in question, we make them both of the parts that have no power of sense-perception and of the senses themselves (τά τε μὴ αἰσθητικά τῶν μερῶν καὶ αὐτὰς τὰς αἰσθήσεως). For in a way even the senses undergo alteration, since actual perception is a motion through the body, the sense being affected in a certain way (πασχούσης τι τῆς αἰσθήσεως). Thus the animate is capable of every kind of alteration of which the inanimate is capable; but the inanimate is not capable of every kind of alteration of which the animate is capable, since it is not capable of alteration in respect of the senses (κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις): and the inanimate is unconscious of being affected (τὸ μὲν λανθάνει), whereas the animate is conscious of it (τὸ δ' οὐ λανθάνει πάσχον), though there is nothing to prevent the animate also being unconscious of it when the alteration does not concern the senses. (*Phys.* 7.2, 244b7–45a2, trans. Hardie and Gaye, modified.)

Aristotle says here that both the animate and the inanimate (meaning, as often, the sentient and the non-sentient) can be altered in respect of their perceptible qualities. For example, both a mirror and an eye can be whitened, or receive the whiteness of a white object (cf. *Meteor.* 342b11–13).¹⁸ They differ in that inanimate things are unconscious of being affected (τὸ μὲν λανθάνει), whereas animate beings are conscious of it (τὸ δ' οὐ λανθάνει πάσχον, *Phys.* 7.2, 244b15–45a1). That is, only

17 Lorenz argues that the soul receives perceptible forms, and that the sense-organs do so only derivatively, insofar as the soul is present in the body (Lorenz 2007). But the natural reading of *De anima* 3.2 is simply that the sense-organs receive perceptible forms (thus 425b23–25, τὸ γὰρ αἰσθητήριον δεκτικὸν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης ἑκάστων). See also *De an.* 3.13, 435a22: δεκτικὸν τὸ αἰσθητήριον; cf. 3.12, 434a29–30; also *Part. an.* 647a7–8: τὸ αἰσθητήριον ἐκάστου δεκτικὸν εἶναι τῶν αἰσθητῶν; also a24–29. Lorenz is trying to avoid Burnyeat's spiritualism and Sorabji's literalism, both of which presuppose that the sense-organ receives perceptible forms. We will see that it is possible to avoid both views without denying that the sense-organs receive perceptible forms. For more detailed discussion see Trubowitz, forthcoming.

18 The “senses” (αἰσθήσεις) in this passage are the sense-organs: they are contrasted with “the parts [sc. of the body] that have no power of sense-perception” (τά τε μὴ αἰσθητικά τῶν μερῶν). Again, Aristotle frequently uses “sense” for “sense-organ.” See note 14 above.

animate beings are conscious of their bodily affections. For this reason, they are capable of perception.¹⁹ Aristotle is following Plato, who frequently describes perception as the consciousness of a bodily affection. In the *Theaetetus*, for example, we “[perceive] as many affections as reach through the body to the soul” (ὅσα διὰ τοῦ σώματος παθήματα ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν τείνει, 186C). In the *Philebus*, bodily affections (τῶν περὶ τὸ σῶμα παθημάτων) that reach the soul do not escape us (μὴ λανθάνειν, 33D).²⁰ For both philosophers, there is a sense, at least, in which perception is the consciousness of a bodily affection. For Aristotle, it is a consciousness of the “whitening” or “sweetening” of our sense-organs. Now, if “seeing” refers to the eye’s reception of color (its whitening, reddening, etc.), it makes perfect sense to think that we perceive that we see by seeing our eyes – especially when we remember the general thrust of Aristotle’s argument in *De anima* 3.2, which is that we perceive that we see by perceiving the organ of sight become in some way “colored” (κεχρωμάτισται).

If this is right, the “see” in “perceiving that we see” refers specifically to the whitening or reddening of our eyes and not, as such, to an act of perception. After all, the *Physics* characterizes perception as a consciousness of the whitening or sweetening of our sense-organs, where these bodily affections are not perceptions in their own right.²¹ Fortunately, Aristotle’s accounts of perceiving that we see in both *De anima* and *De somno* give us good reason to take ‘seeing’ (‘hearing,’ etc.) in this narrow sense. In *De anima*, Aristotle distinguishes “perceiving by sight” (τὸ τῇ ὀφει αἰσθάνεσθαι) from “seeing” (τὸ ὁρᾶν) when he points out that “even when we do not see (μὴ ὁρῶμεν), we discern both darkness and light by sight (τῇ ὀφει κρίνομεν)” (425b20–22). He seems to mean that “perceiving by sight” is more than just “seeing” because we can perceive by sight even when our eyes are unaffected by color, as when we perceive darkness. Heard this way, “seeing” refers specifically to the whitening or reddening of the eyes. Likewise, in *De somno*, Aristotle treats “seeing” as an affair of the eye alone. He says that seeing is “peculiar” (ἰδιον) to sight (τῇ ὀφει, meaning, as I have argued, *the eye*) and does not involve the “common part of all the sense-organs,” that is, the heart (455a14–20). The heart houses the perceptual part of the soul (cf. *Par. an.* 678b2–4, *Somn.* 456a4–6, *Iuv.* 469a5–7), and perception, for Aristotle, involves both the soul and the body (*De an.* 1.1, 403a5–8,

¹⁹ For this interpretation see esp. Everson 1997, 134–137. Caston takes it that (1) “to be altered in respect of the senses [κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις]” is to perceive something, and (2) that to be conscious of this alteration is to perceive that we perceive (Caston 2002, 757). I dispute (1) below.

²⁰ Thus also Burnyeat 1976, 42–43. For extended discussion see Ganson 2005.

²¹ It does not follow that mirrors, which can be affected by color, are able to see. The eye’s reception of color counts as an act of *seeing* because it is the physiological aspect of an act of perception. The same is not true of a mirror. For more on this see below.

Sens. 436a6–10).²² This suggests that *seeing*, here, is not an act of perception in its own right, but refers specifically to the eye's reception of color.²³ I am not the first to read Aristotle in this way, and it is easy, I think, to see why. If *seeing* is a consciousness of color, it is hard to understand why our awareness of our seeing should involve an awareness of our eyes.²⁴ But if Aristotle understands *seeing*, in this context, as the whitening or reddening of the eye, it makes sense for him to say that we perceive that we see by perceiving our eyes.²⁵

If we are to understand this idea, we need to know what it means to perceive the whitening or sweetening of our sense-organs. For our purposes, the most important thing to keep in mind is that Aristotle identifies two ways in which bodies can possess perceptible forms (colors, sounds, etc.), and two corresponding ways in which bodies can be perceptible.²⁶ A body can have its own perceptible form, so as to be intrinsically perceptible (αἰσθητὸν καθ' αὐτό); or it can have another body's perceptible form, so as to be extrinsically perceptible (αἰσθητὸν δι' ἄλλότριον).²⁷ Consider, for example, a bell that sounds across a plaza. The bell is intrinsically audible: it possesses its own sound, the sound it makes when struck. By contrast, the air through which we hear the bell is not intrinsically audible: it cannot be struck so as to produce a sound (*De an.* 2.8, 419b6–9, b18–25). But when the bell sounds, it causes the air around it to vibrate and become resonant (419b18–25, 420a3–9; see γεγωνεῖ at 420a1).²⁸ At this point, the air has become extrinsically audible. We can hear it, but what we hear in it is not the air's sound (it has no sound of its own), but the bell's sound. That is why the air can receive sound, become audible, and yet enable us to hear the bell. The same goes for the organ of hearing, which is simply

22 For discussion of Aristotle's "cardiocentrism," see Block 1961.

23 Kosman 1975 (followed, famously, by Burnyeat 1992) argues that a sense-organ's reception of a perceptible form is, as such, an act of perception. He points to *De an.* 2.12, 424b16–18 as evidence. This view is now widely rejected on the grounds that Aristotle takes perception, like any affection "common" to soul and body, to feature distinct psychological and physiological aspects (cf. *De an.* 1.1, 403a5–8, a25–27, *Sens.* 436a6–10). See esp. Nussbaum and Putnam 1992, 42–44; Sorabji 2001, 56–59; Caston 2005, 281–285.

24 A point made forcefully by Hamlyn (1968, 122–123), among others.

25 See esp. Everson 1997, 142–143, 175.

26 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the different ways of being affected that Aristotle distinguishes in *De an.* 2.5. For an overview of the debate, see Bowin 2011.

27 See *De an.* 2.7's distinction between a body that has its own color and is therefore intrinsically visible (καθ' αὐτό [ὁρατόν] [...] ὅτι ἐν ἑαυτῷ ἔχει τὸ αἶτιον τοῦ εἶναι ὁρατόν, 418a30–31), and a transparent body, which is not intrinsically visible but becomes visible when it receives color from something else (δι' ἄλλότριον χρώμα [int. ὁρατόν], 418b4–6). For a use of this same distinction, see Tweedale 1992, 227; Sorabji 2001; Charles 2021, 175.

28 For a detailed account see Johnstone 2013; Charles 2021, 165–169.

air walled up inside the inner ear.²⁹ To hear a bell's sound in our ears is to hear the bell *through* our ears.

Aristotle understands the eye and the visual medium's reception of color in much the same way. When light strikes a colored object, it reflects off it through the transparent medium and into the transparent inner eye. Just as a bell's sound is present wherever its vibrations reach, so is an object's color present wherever light from it has been reflected. Depending on the intensity of the reflected light, the medium and the inner eye become "whitened," "reddened," etc., and therefore visible.³⁰ But they are only extrinsically visible: what we see in them are not their own colors (they have no colors of their own), but the colors of other objects. In a way, seeing the colors that our eyes receive is like seeing the colors reflected in a mirror. The color in the mirror is the color of the object reflected in it. But the eye (and the visual medium) becomes colored in an even more attenuated sense: not in the manner of a reflective body, but a transparent one. Aristotle rejects the view, which he attributes to Democritus, that vision involves the presence of an image in the eye. He corrects Democritus: it is not *qua* reflective but *qua* transparent that the eye receives color (*Sens.* 2, 438a13–14: οὐ μέντοι συμβαίνει τὸ ὁρᾶν [int. τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ, a11] ἢ ὕδωρ [that is, *qua* reflective, a8–10] ἀλλ' ἢ διαφανές). Something's color is in the eye in such a way as to be visible *through* it. In short: for someone's eyes to be "whitened" by a piece of chalk, or for the chalk's whiteness to be present in her eyes, is for the white chalk to be visible or apparent *through* her eyes.

This means that what we are conscious of, when we are conscious of the whitening of our eyes, is the appearance, to ourselves, of a white object. Note that what is apparent to us in this sense (visible, audible, etc.) is not, as such, perceived.³¹ As we saw in the *Physics*, perception is not only a bodily affection (a whitening of our eyes or a sweetening of our tongues), but a bodily affection of which we are conscious. It is a familiar fact of life that we can fail to perceive what is apparent to us through our sense-organs. As Aristotle points out in *De sensu*, "People do not perceive things right before their eyes (ὑποφερομένων ὑπὸ τὰ ὄμματα οὐκ αἰσθάνονται) if they are thinking hard, much afraid, or hearing a loud noise" (447a15–17). When someone is lost in thought ("thinking hard"), staring vacantly into the distance, her

²⁹ Aristotle reproduces the relevant characteristics of the different perceptible media in the peripheral sense-organs. Eye: *Sens.* 2, 438a5–15 and *Gen. an.* 5.2. Ear: *De an.* 2.8, 420a3–19. Nose: *De an.* 2.9, 421b26–422a7 with *Sens.* 5 on the medium. For detailed discussion see Johansen 1997.

³⁰ On the relationship between light, reflection, and color, see *Meteor.* 3.4. For discussion, see Sayili 1939; Charles 2021, ch. 5.7–8. Kelsey 2018 argues that Aristotle refers to color's ability to reflect light at *De an.* 2.7, 419a9–11: "This is what it is to be color, to be able to move what is actually transparent (τὸ κινητικῶς εἶναι τοῦ κατ' ἐνέργειαν διαφανοῦς); and the actuality of the transparent is light."

³¹ Pace Burnyeat. See note 23 above.

eyes are being “colored” by external objects. These objects are perfectly apparent to her, right before her eyes, and yet escape her notice. Given that we *see* an object (in the relevant sense of the term) just insofar as our eyes receive its color, it follows that our own *seeing* can escape our notice.³² It can escape us, in other words, that a colored object is apparent to us through our eyes. When it does not, we are perceiving that we see.

4

On the picture that has emerged, perceiving that we see is a matter of perceiving that a colored object is apparent to us through our eyes. This makes it easy to understand Aristotle’s basic purpose and argument in *De anima* 3.2. The starting point for his discussion is the familiar fact that we do not always perceive what is otherwise perfectly apparent to us (as, for example, when we are distracted). In Aristotle’s terms, this means that our *seeing*, namely, the *whitening* or *reddening* of our eyes, can escape our notice. His basic aim is to explain why the affections of our eyes do not always escape us, or how we manage to perceive that we see.

His opening question in *De anima* 3.2 is whether we perceive that we see “by sight” or “by another [sense].” As I have argued, “sight” (ὄψις) refers here, as often in Aristotle’s writings, to the *organ* of sight. Aristotle’s question is whether we perceive that we see by means of our eyes or some other sense-organ.³³ This makes for a clear thematic continuity with *De anima*’s previous chapter, where Aristotle has just concluded that there is no special sense-organ for the perception of attributes like shape and size (οὐδὲ τῶν κοινῶν οἷόν τ’ εἶναι αἰσθητήριόν τι ἴδιον, 3.1, 425a14). Here in *De anima* 3.2, he is interested in a similar question: Do we need to posit any sense-organs beyond the familiar five in order to explain our ability to perceive that we see?

In some ways, it is intuitive to think that we will need to posit an additional sense-organ. If the whitening or reddening of our eyes can escape our notice, it

³² For a similar reading of this passage, see Gregoric (2021, 130) and Ierodiakonou (2022, 180–183), who are building on Johansen 2005. On all of their interpretations, however, the “seeing” that can escape our notice is an act of perception in its own right. On my interpretation, it is only the physiological aspect of perception.

³³ This means that I depart from both the “activity” and “capacity” readings of the passage, according to which “sight” names either the activity of seeing or the soul’s power of sight. For the labels, see Caston 2002, 763–773.

is natural to think that when it does *not* escape us, it is not because of our eyes, but because of a sense-organ that somehow monitors them. Aristotle considers and rejects this possibility with two quick arguments. First (425b13–15), he points out that whether we perceive that we see “by sight” or “by another sense,” there will be one sense that has for its object both “sight” (*the eye*) and color. Why? If we perceive that we see by registering color’s presence in our eyes, then whether we do so by means of the eye or another sense-organ, one and the same sense-organ must be directed both towards the eye and the color that it receives. Since only “sight” (namely, the eye) has color for its object, it must be “of itself.”³⁴

We might try to avoid this conclusion by abandoning the principle that the eye alone perceives color. Perhaps another sense-organ is directed towards our eyes and the colors they receive. Aristotle rejects this possibility with a second argument (425b15–17). He points out that if we perceive that we see by means of a sense-organ other than the eye, we must ask about it, too, whether still another sense-organ has it for an object, or whether it is “of itself.” If it can be of itself, the eye should have been of itself in the first place. If the hypothetical sixth sense-organ is *not* of itself, a regress ensues (εἰς ἄπειρον εἶσιν, 425b16). After all, there is no reason that the affection of this sixth sense-organ should escape us any less than the original affection of our eyes. Aristotle concludes that sight must be of itself.

Socrates had expressed skepticism about this possibility in the *Charmides*: “If sight sees itself,” he says, “it must have a certain color” (169D). Aristotle agrees. But he reminds us that according to his theory of perception, there is a sense in which the eye “has color,” and therefore a sense in which it can see itself: when it receives color from colored objects, it becomes “in a way colored” (ὡς κεχρωμάτισται). As a result, it becomes visible. Indeed, it becomes visible to itself. After all, it comes to have its object within itself (namely, color), so that what is seen (τὸ ὁρώμενον) is present in what sees (τὸ ὁρῶν). There is no need for an “inner eye” with which to see our eyes and the colors that they receive. We see our eyes with our eyes. That is, we see the colors “in” them with the very things “in” which they are apparent.³⁵

³⁴ Thus also Hicks 1907 *ad loc.*; Hamlyn 1968, 121; Kosman 1975, 500. For a thorough discussion of this step of the argument, see Perälä 2019. His reconstruction differs in some ways from my own.

³⁵ Aristotle’s question at the beginning of *De an.* 2.5 about why our sense-organs do not perceive themselves should not be taken to mean that there is no way in which our sense-organs can be said to perceive themselves. His question is why perception requires the action of an external body upon our sense-organs given that our sense-organs are themselves perceptible bodies (*De an.* 2.5, 417a3–5). His answer is that the eye, for example, is only potentially seeing, and needs to be acted upon by an external body (417a6–9). This leaves open the possibility that the eye become its own object by receiving something’s color.

Taken on its own, this explanation of the sense in which “sight” is “of itself” does not yet fully account for our ability to perceive that we see. After all, our eyes are “of themselves” just insofar as they receive something’s color. Given that the whitening or reddening of our eyes – that is, our *seeing* – can escape our notice, we still need an account of what makes for the difference between seeing and perceiving that we see.

Aristotle’s answer appears to come in the form of his reminder that “perceiving by sight is not one thing” (οὐχ ἓν τὸ τῇ ὄψει αἰσθάνεσθαι, 425b20). He explains that “even when we do not see, we discern (κρίνομεν) both darkness and light by sight (τῇ ὄψει)” (425b20–22). He is reiterating a point from earlier in *De anima*: “Sight is of the visible and of the invisible: for darkness is invisible, but sight discerns (κρίνει) it, too” (*De an.* 2.10, 422a21). Here in *De anima* 3.2, he adds that while discerning whether it is light or dark is a matter of “perceiving by sight,” it is not a matter of “seeing.” This makes sense if we “see” something just insofar as our eyes receive its color. Indeed, Aristotle has just identified *what is seen* with “color or what has it” (425b18–19). Since light and darkness are not colors or colored things, we do not “see” them.³⁶ “Perceiving by sight” is therefore more than just “seeing.”

What more is it? Aristotle is sometimes taken to mean that sight has more than just color as its object. On this reading, his point is that if sight is not only “of” color but also “of” light and darkness, it might be “of” other things, too, like, for example, one’s own seeing.³⁷ But a closer look at the text suggests that Aristotle has something more specific in mind. He seems to mean that in addition to an act of “seeing,” “perceiving by sight” is an act of “discernment” or “discrimination,” or what he calls “*krinein*.”³⁸ After all, he says that “*even when we do not see, we discern (krinein) both darkness and light by sight*” (emphasis mine). There is some disagreement about how exactly to understand the act of *krinein*, but for our purposes, it is enough to say that it involves the awareness that something is some way (and that this is something of which non-rational animals are capable).³⁹ In the act of *krinein*, a perceiver recognizes or identifies what is apparent to it through its sense-organs.

³⁶ Thus also, e. g., Johansen 2005, 250; McCabe 2007, 161 n67.

³⁷ Ross 1961, note *ad loc.*; Hamlyn 1968, note *ad loc.*; Shields 2016, note *ad loc.*; Perälä 2019, 332–334. Cf. Miller 2021, 126–127.

³⁸ Thus also McCabe 2007, 162–163. But she understands the act of *krinein* as an act of reflective and detached judgment. See below.

³⁹ ‘*Krinein*’ was traditionally translated ‘judge,’ but following Nussbaum (1978, 334), and Ebert (1983), scholars have generally moved towards ‘discern’ or ‘discriminate’ in order to avoid the suggestion that *krinein* is necessarily *logos*-involving. Most scholars nevertheless understand it as some sort of (non-rational) taking-to-be. See, e. g., Sorabji 1993, 35–36; Miller 1999, 204–208; Charles 2000, 112–113; De Haas 2005, 331–337; Kelsey 2022, ch. 6. For an alternative approach, see Corcilius 2014.

Aristotle says, for example, that perceivers can “*krinein* that one [object] is two [objects]” (ἐκρίνομεν τὸ ἓν δύο, *Insomn.* 460b22), or “that [something] is white” (ὅτι λευκόν, *De an.* 3.3, 428b21).⁴⁰

Why should Aristotle remind us in *De anima* 3.2 that “perceiving by sight” is not just “seeing,” but also an act of *krinein*? It is a reminder that perception is more than just a matter of being appeared-to through our sense-organs. It is also a matter of using our sense-organs (usually automatically and unreflectively) to discern how things are: for example, that something looks *thus* or sounds *so*. We have seen that for Aristotle, something’s looking *thus* or sounding *so* to us is none other than our seeing or hearing it. So, when we are not only appeared-to in such and such a way, but perceive that we are so appeared-to (or, in other words, that something appears *thus* or *so* to us), we are perceiving that we see or hear. Likewise, when we perceive that nothing is apparent to us (as, for example, when we perceive that it is dark), we are perceiving that we do *not* see.⁴¹

Understood this way, Aristotle’s argument in *De anima* establishes a very simple point: we perceive that things look *thus* or sound *so* to us – or, in other words, that we see or hear them – by means of our eyes and ears. The reason this does not go without saying is that objects can look *thus* or sound *so* to us without our perceiving them. That is, they can be apparent to us through our sense-organs and yet escape our notice. This makes it seem as if our eyes and ears are not sufficient for perceiving that we see and hear, and that we will need to posit some additional sense-organ to monitor them. But this impression rests on an artificially restrictive conception of the way in which our eyes and ears figure in perception. In Aristotle’s terms, it rests on the mistaken belief that “perceiving by sight,” for example, is only “one thing,” namely, *seeing*. For Aristotle, the eyes and ears do not simply receive appearances (“see,” “hear”). They are also the instruments of our acts of *krinein*, or the acts in which we use our eyes and ears to discern that things look *thus* or sound *so*. When our seeing or hearing escapes our notice, it is because we are, for example, “thinking hard, much afraid, or hearing a loud noise” (cf. *Sens.* 447a15–17), and not using our eyes and ears to discern how things appear to us.⁴²

⁴⁰ With *De an.* 3.3, 428b21, see *De an.* 2.6, 418a14–15: “Each sense *krinei* about [its proper objects] and is not deceived that there is color (ὅτι χρώμα) or that there is sound (ὅτι ψόφος).”

⁴¹ For the same observation see Themistius, *De an. par.*, 83.24–26 Heinze; Ps.-Simplicius, *In de an.*, 189.15–19 Hayduck; Johansen 2005, 249–250; Gregoric 2007, 184; Gregoric 2021.

⁴² This helps to resolve the well-known tension between *De anima*’s claim that we perceive that we see “by sight” and *De somno*’s claim that it is *not* “by sight” that someone “sees that he sees,” but rather “by some common part of all the sense-organs” (455a15–20). In *De somno*, this part of the body is not an “inner eye.” It houses a “common power” (κοινή δύναμις) by means of which we are able “to *krinein* [for example] that sweet things differ from white things” (κρίνειν ὅτι ἕτερα τὰ

5

It is clear at this point that Aristotle's account of perceptual self-consciousness is not an account of the mind or soul's quasi-perceptual relation to itself. We do not perceive our own seeing or hearing because we perceive our mental states with an inner sense; or because we experience their qualitative character; or because the mind or soul somehow becomes its own object. We perceive that we see and hear by perceiving worldly states of affairs that obtain between our sense-organs and external objects.

In one way, this conception of perceptual self-consciousness resembles a view in the contemporary philosophy of mind according to which our awareness of our own mental states is "transparent" to the worldly states of affairs that they represent.⁴³ On this view, we come to know whether we believe that *p* simply by considering whether *p*. Likewise, we come to know whether we see that *p* simply by using our eyes to determine whether *p* (for example, whether there is a cat on the mat). At one level, Aristotle's view is much the same: we determine whether we see a colored object by determining whether a colored object is apparent to us through our eyes. But for Aristotle, unlike the contemporary philosopher of mind, the awareness of our seeing or hearing is not the awareness of our mental (or psychological) states. What we are conscious of, when we are perceptually self-conscious, is not the state of our minds or souls, but a relation between our sense-organs and objects in the world.

This has significant implications for how we understand Aristotle's approach to the study of perceptual self-consciousness. In the contemporary philosophy of mind, a theory of self-consciousness (or what is often called self-knowledge) typically takes as its starting point the idea that we know our own minds in a manner that is fundamentally different from the way in which we know both other people's minds and worldly states of affairs. Our access to our own minds seems somehow immediate or peculiar or privileged. The task for a theory of self-consciousness is to explain the nature of this privileged access: are mental states somehow self-intimating? Known through an inner sense? Transparent to the world?⁴⁴ These are

γλυκέα τῶν λευκῶν, 455a18). Aristotle's point is that perceptual self-consciousness requires both the eye's reception of color and an act of *krinein*. His claim in *De anima* that "perceiving by sight is not one thing" makes the same basic point. Aristotle acknowledges later in *De an.* 3.2 that some one part of the body should house a perceiver's power of *krinein* (426b12–23 with *De an.* 3.7, 431a20–23).⁴³ Many point to Evans (1982, 225–227) for the first formulation of this idea. It is developed in different ways by Moran 2001; Byrne 2018; and Boyle 2024.

⁴⁴ This is a very loose characterization. For a helpful and detailed survey of this general approach to self-consciousness, see Byrne 2018, ch. 1.

the sorts of questions that the most influential recent interpretations of Aristotle's theory of perceptual self-consciousness have tried to answer. But for Aristotle, seeing and hearing are not mental states (or states of our souls). He is offering a theory of perceptual self-consciousness that is not addressed to the question how we know our own minds.

We have seen that Aristotle's account of perceiving that we perceive responds to Plato's *Charmides*, where Socrates' interest in perceptual self-consciousness (or whether "sight" and "hearing" are ever "of themselves") is one moment in a broader inquiry into the possibility of self-knowledge.⁴⁵ In this context, self-knowledge is the knowledge of what one does and does not know. It is an important theme of the dialogue that at least in general, knowledge is possessed self-consciously. Consider doctors, for example. In the first instance, they know about health and disease. But they are also able to tell whether other people are doctors. (They know what questions to ask, what to look for, etc.) The art of medicine is therefore not only a knowledge of health and disease, but also, in a sense, a knowledge "of itself": it enables its possessor to recognize its presence or absence in others (170D–171C). But a doctor who can tell whether someone else is a doctor is also in a position to tell that she herself is a doctor. As Critias remarks (and Socrates agrees), "When a person possesses a knowledge which knows itself [that is, a knowledge that is "of itself"] [...] he will be a person who knows himself" (169E). In other words, a person whose knowledge is "of itself" is someone who knows herself to know what she knows. She is a self-knowing or self-conscious knower. This form of self-consciousness is of great practical significance (cf. *Charm.* 171D–172A). Unless doctors know health and disease self-consciously (that is, knowing that they know it), they will not know that *they* are the ones who should make diagnoses and practice surgery. When a doctor judges that a wound should be cauterized, she does so conscious of herself as a doctor, or one who is well-positioned to pass judgments about health and disease.

I suggest that perceptual self-consciousness is significant to Aristotle for similar reasons. Consider, for example, his observation that "it is not when we are fully exercising [our senses] (ἐνεργῶμεν ἀκριβῶς) with regard to an object of perception that we say this appears to us to be a man (ὅτι φαίνεται τοῦτο ἡμῖν ἄνθρωπος), but rather when we do not perceive it distinctly (μὴ ἐναργῶς αἰσθανώμεθα)" (*De an.* 3.3, 428a13–15). Aristotle is imagining a case in which someone sees a distant figure that resembles a man. She is aware that she does not see it clearly or distinctly, so she says only that there *appears* to be a man in the distance, not there *there is* one. If she blinks a few times, rubs her eyes, and looks again, she might judge that there *is*, after all, a man in the distance. If so, it is because she has *perceived* that she

45 My reading of the *Charmides* owes much to McCabe 2007 and esp. Tuozzo 2011.

sees a man. She has determined, by looking, that a man is apparent to her through her eyes. Like the *Charmides'* self-conscious knower, this self-conscious perceiver is conscious of herself as well-positioned to pass judgment. She judges that there is a man in the distance because she perceives that she sees him.⁴⁶

Of course, she might be wrong. Our capacity to perceive that we see and hear is fallible, as Aristotle makes clear in *De insomniis*:

It is because the motion arrives at the ruling principle (τὴν ἀρχὴν) from there [that is, “from sight,” “from hearing,” and “from the other sense-organs,” 461a28–30] that also in waking life one seems to see and hear and perceive (καὶ ἐγρηγορῶς δοκεῖ ὁρᾶν καὶ ἀκούειν καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι); and it is because sight seems sometimes to be moved, though it is not, that we affirm that we see (ὁρᾶν φαμέν), and because the sense of touch reports (εἰσαγγέλλειν) two motions that one object seems to be two. For in general the ruling principle affirms what comes from each sense (τὸ ἀπ’ ἐκάστης αἰσθήσεως φησιν ἡ ἀρχή) unless something more authoritative contradicts it (ἀντιφῆ). (*Insomn.* 461a30–b5)

We merely seem to ourselves to see or hear or feel something when our sense-organs merely seem to be moved or affected in a certain way. Aristotle refers in particular to a tactile illusion in which, crossing two fingers, we seem to feel two things when in fact there is only one. In this case, we do not *perceive* that we feel two things, but only *seem* to do so. When we are dreaming, we seem to ourselves to see or hear something that is not really there. Unless something in us “contradicts” (ἀντιφῆ) the appearances, we take it that something is apparent to us through our sense-organs when nothing is there at all (*Insomn.* 461b29–462a8).⁴⁷

Given that we are not always taken in by appearances, it is natural to wonder whether there is a mark by which we can be certain that we see something (or something of a particular sort) and do not merely seem to see it. Some have found glimmers of this idea in Aristotle’s claim that we cannot be deceived about the proper objects of sense (color, flavor, etc.; see *De an.* 2.6, 418a11–16). But the question does not become central for Aristotle as it does in Hellenistic philosophy, where the debate between skeptics and dogmatists centers on the question whether there exists a “cataleptic impression” (φαντασία καταληπτική), an appearance self-certi-

⁴⁶ The reflective judgment about whether one really sees something is not the act of perceiving that one sees. We can make such judgments because we can perceive that we see. Cf. McCabe (2007, 160–170), who identifies the act of perceiving that we see with the reflective judgment that we are (in fact) seeing something. Her account has trouble accommodating non-rational animals (as she recognizes: see McCabe 2007, 163 n73), which, for Aristotle, are unable to withhold assent from appearances. See esp. *De an.* 3.3, 428a18–24; McCready-Flora 2014.

⁴⁷ Note, again (see note 46 above), that non-rational animals cannot contradict appearances. They ‘affirm’ appearances only in a loose, extended sense. When a dog is dreaming, there is some sense in which it ‘takes’ itself to be confronted with a rabbit. For discussion, see Block 1960, 99–101.

fyng, as it were, in its clarity and distinctness. The cataleptic impression, if it exists, would be so clear and distinct as to guarantee that things could not be otherwise than they seem. We could be certain that we *see* a man, for example, and do not merely *seem* to see one.⁴⁸ This Hellenistic debate is a development of the fundamentally epistemological interest in self-consciousness that we find in Aristotle's account of perceiving that we perceive. In effect, skeptics and dogmatists disagree about whether perceptual self-consciousness can be infallible. It is well known that the debate over the cataleptic impression grows out of Socratic concerns about whether we can know what we know and do not know.⁴⁹ At this point, we can see that Aristotle's account of perceiving that we perceive belongs to the same broad family of epistemological concerns.

These epistemological concerns bring us back to Descartes, whose search for infallible knowledge leads him to his famous *cogito*. Descartes claims to be certain that he is seeing light or hearing a noise. But he is not taking sides in the Hellenistic debate between skeptics and dogmatists. The Hellenistic philosophers wanted to know whether we can ever be certain that it is actually light out or that we are really hearing something.⁵⁰ Descartes finds his certainty only by defining seeing and hearing as *seeming* to see and *seeming* to hear, and, more generally, by bringing sense-perception under the umbrella of the *cogito*. In Descartes' hands, seeing and hearing become modes of "thought" (*cogitatio*), or of "everything which we are aware of as happening within us (*in nobis fiunt*)" (A. T. VIII 7).

This moment in the *Meditations* is the first time in the history of philosophy that perception gets counted as a mode of "thought," or as what we today would call a mental state.⁵¹ Indeed, many have argued that Descartes' definition of perception as a form of thought marks the birth of the modern concept of the mind as an inner space, containing the objects of our immediate awareness, and known to us in some peculiarly direct and intimate way.⁵² Only if we operate with a concept of mind along these Cartesian lines does it make sense to think that we could explain our awareness of our own seeing or hearing by suggesting that the mind

48 On cataleptic impressions, see *inter alia* Frede 1987 and Sedley 2002. I borrow "self-certifying" from Long and Sedley 1987, 1:250.

49 See, e. g., Frede 1987, 151–152.

50 The Cyrenaics lay claim to infallible knowledge of how things appear to them, but the appearances in question are the affections of their sense-organs, e. g., the whitening of their eyes or the sweetening of their tongues. See Sextus Empiricus, M VII.191–192. For discussion, see esp. Burnyeat 1982, 27–28; Everson 1991. For an alternative view, see Fine 2003.

51 For discussion, see Burnyeat 2008, 11–14.

52 See esp. Matthews 1977, 22–25; Burnyeat 1982, 38–39. As both authors note, the Cartesian picture is in some ways anticipated by Augustine in *Contra Academicos* 3.26.

or soul stands in some sort of quasi-perceptual relation to itself. That is, only if we grant that seeing and hearing are inner states of mind will we try to explain perceptual self-consciousness by positing an inner sense; or by suggesting that the mind somehow becomes its objects in the act of perception; or by claiming that the qualitative character of our mental states renders them self-conscious. Aristotle, innocent of this Cartesian concept of mind, is innocent of the temptation to explain perceptual self-consciousness in terms of some metaphorical self-perception on the part of the mind or soul. For Aristotle, we really do *perceive* our own seeing and hearing: we determine, by looking and listening with our eyes and ears, that something looks *thus* or sounds *so* to us.

Acknowledgement: My greatest debts are to Sean Kelsey and Gabriel Richardson Lear. Thanks also to Matt Boyle, Arnold Brooks, Agnes Callard, Martha Nussbaum, Linus Recht, and the participants of the University of Chicago's Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop.

Bibliography

- A. T. Adam, C. and Tannery, P. (eds.) 1996. *Ouvres de Descartes*. Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin.
- De an.* Ross, W. D. (ed.) 1961. *Aristotle: De Anima*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- De an. par.* Heinze, R. (ed.) 1899. *Themistii In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca. Vol. V. Berlin: Reimer.
- Gen. an.* Peck, H. L. (ed. and trans.) 1942. *Aristotle, Generation of Animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- In de an.* Hayduck, M. (ed.) 1882. *Simplicii In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Commentaria*. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca. Vol. XI. Berlin: Reimer.
- Insomn.* Ross, W. D. (ed.) 1955. *De insomniis*. In *Aristotle: Parva Naturalia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Iuv.* Ross, W. D. (ed.) 1955. *De iuventute et senectute*. In *Aristotle: Parva Naturalia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- M* Bury, R. G. (ed. and trans.) 1935. *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Meteor.* Lee, H. D. P. (ed. and trans.) 1962. *Aristotle: Meteorologica*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Par. an.* Peck, A. L. and Forster, E. S. (eds. and trans.) 1937. *Parts of Animals*. In *Aristotle: Parts of Animals. Movement of Animals. Progression of Animals*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 53–431.
- Phys.* Ross, W. D. (ed.) 1936. *Aristotle's Physics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Sens.* Ross, W. D. 1955. (ed.) *De sensu et sensibilia*. In *Aristotle: Parva Naturalia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Somn.* Ross, W. D. 1955. (ed.) *De somno et vigilia*. In *Aristotle: Parva Naturalia*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

- Block, I. 1960. 'Aristotle and the Physical Object.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 21(1), 93–101.
- . 1961. 'The Order of Aristotle's Psychological Writings.' *American Journal of Philology* 82(1), 50–77.
- Bonitz, H. [1870] 1961. *Index Aristotelicus*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Bowin, J. 2011. 'Aristotle on Various Types of Alteration in *De Anima* II 5.' *Phronesis* 56(2), 138–161.
- Boyle, M. 2024. *Transparency and Reflection*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Burnyeat, M. 1976. 'Plato on the Grammar of Perceiving.' *Classical Quarterly* 26(1), 29–51.
- . 1982. 'Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed.' *Philosophical Review* 91(1), 3–40.
- . 1992. 'Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind Still Credible? (A Draft).' In M. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 15–26.
- . 2008. *Aristotle's Divine Intellect*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
- Byrne, A. 2018. *Transparency and Self-Knowledge*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caston, V. 2002. 'Aristotle on Consciousness.' *Mind* 111(444), 751–815.
- . 2005. 'The Spirit and The Letter: Aristotle on Perception.' In R. Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul and Ethics: Themes from the Work of Richard Sorabji*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 245–320.
- Charles, D. 2000. *Aristotle on Meaning and Essence*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 2021. *The Undivided Self: Aristotle and the "Mind-Body Problem."* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Corcilius, K. 2014. 'Activity, Passivity, and Perceptual Discrimination in Aristotle.' In J. F. Silva and M. Yrjönsuuri (eds.), *Active Perception in the History of Philosophy*. New York: Springer, 31–53.
- De Haas, F. A. J. 2005. 'The Discriminating Capacity of the Soul in Aristotle's Theory of Learning.' In R. Salles (ed.), *Metaphysics, Soul and Ethics: Themes from the Work of Richard Sorabji*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 321–344.
- Ebert, T. 1983. 'Aristotle on What is Done in Perceiving.' *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 37(2), 181–198.
- Evans, G. 1982. *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Everson, S. 1991. 'The Objective Appearance of Pyrrhonism.' In S. Everson (ed.), *Psychology. Companions to Ancient Thought* 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 121–147.
- . 1997. *Aristotle on Perception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fine, G. 2003. 'Subjectivity, Ancient and Modern: The Cyrenaics, Sextus, and Descartes.' In J. Miller and B. Inwood (eds.), *Hellenistic and Early Modern Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press: 192–231.
- Frede, M. 1987. 'Stoics and Skeptics on Clear and Distinct Impressions.' In *Essays in Ancient Philosophy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 151–176.
- Ganson, T. S. 2005. 'The Platonic Approach to Sense-Perception.' *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22(1), 1–15.
- Gregoric, P. 2007. *Aristotle on the Common Sense*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2021. 'Perceiving That We Are Not Seeing and Hearing: Reflexive Awareness in Aristotle.' In P. Gregoric and J. L. Fink (eds.), *Encounters with Aristotelian Philosophy of Mind*. New York: Routledge, 119–137.
- Hamlyn, D. W. 1968. *De anima, Books II and III (with passages from Book I)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hardie, W. F. R. 1976. 'Concepts of Consciousness in Aristotle.' *Mind* 85(339), 388–411.
- Hicks, R. D. 1907. *De Anima*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ierodiakonou, K. 2022. 'Perceptual Attention and Reflective Awareness in the Aristotelian Tradition.' In C. Cohoe (ed.), *Aristotle's On the Soul: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 174–194.

- Johansen, T. K. 1997. *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2005. 'In Defense of Inner Sense: Aristotle on Perceiving that One Sees.' *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 21, 235–276.
- . 2012. *The Powers of Aristotle's Soul*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Johnstone, M. 2013. 'Aristotle on Sounds.' *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, 631–648.
- Kelsey, S. 2018. 'Color, Transparency, and Light in Aristotle.' *Phronesis* 63, 209–210.
- Kosman, L. A. 1975. 'Perceiving that We Perceive: On the Soul III, 2.' *Philosophical Review* 84, 499–419.
- . 2005. 'Commentary on Johansen.' *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 21, 277–283.
- Long, A. A. and Sedley, D. 1987. *The Hellenistic Philosophers*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lorenz, H. 2007. 'The Assimilation of Sense to Sense-Object in Aristotle.' *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 33, 179–220.
- Matthews, G. 1977. 'Consciousness and Life.' *Philosophy* 52(199), 13–26.
- McCabe, M. M. 2007. 'Perceiving that we see and hear: Aristotle on Plato on judgement and reflection.' In M. M. McCabe, and M. Textor (eds.), *Perspectives on Perception*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 143–177.
- McCready-Flora, I. 2014. 'Aristotle's Cognitive Science: Belief, Affect and Rationality.' *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 89(2), 394–435.
- Miller, F. D. 1999. 'Aristotle's Philosophy of Perception.' *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 15, 177–213.
- . 2021. 'Aristotle on Self-Perception.' In P. Mitsis and H. L. Reid (eds.), *The Poetry of Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Christos C. Evangeliou*. Fonte Aretusa: Parnassos Press, 117–136.
- Moran, R. 2001. *Authority and Estrangement: An Essay on Self-Knowledge*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nidditch, P. H. (ed.) 1979. *John Locke: An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Nussbaum, M. 1978. *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. and Putnam, H. 1992. 'Changing Aristotle's Mind.' In M. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty (eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 27–56.
- Osborne, C. 1983. 'Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.2: How Do We Perceive that we See and Hear?' *Classical Quarterly* 33(2), 401–411.
- Perälä, M. 2019. 'Perceiving that We See and Hear in Aristotle's *de Anima*.' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 101(3), 317–344.
- Sayili, A. M. 1939. 'The Aristotelian Explanation of the Rainbow.' *Isis* 30, 53–83.
- Sedley, D. 2002. 'Zeno's Definition of *Phantasia Katalēptikē*.' In T. Scaltsas and A. S. Mason (eds.), *Zeno of Citium and His Legacy: The Philosophy of Zeno*. Larnaca: Municipality of Larnaca, 135–154.
- Shields, C. (ed. and trans.) 2016. *Aristotle: De Anima*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Slakey, T. J. 1961. 'Aristotle on Sense Perception.' *Philosophical Review* 70(4), 470–484.
- Sorabji, R. 1974. 'Body and Soul in Aristotle.' *Philosophy* 49(187), 63–89.
- . 1993. *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- . 2001. 'Aristotle on Sensory Processes and Intentionality: A Reply to Myles Burnyeat.' In D. Perler (ed.), *Ancient and Medieval Theories of Intentionality*. Leiden: Brill, 49–61.
- Trubowitz, J. Forthcoming. 'Soul and Body in Aristotle's Theory of Perception.' *Journal of the History of Philosophy*.

- Tuozzo, T. 2011. *Plato's Charmides: Positive Elenchus in a "Socratic" Dialogue*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tweedale, M. 1992. 'Origins of the Medieval Theory that Sensation Is an Immaterial Reception of a Form.' *Philosophical Topics* 20(2), 215–231.
- Twomey, R. 2019. 'Aristotle on Joint Perception and Perceiving that We Perceive.' *Journal of Ancient Philosophy* 13(1), 147–180.