

HIGHER-ORDER AWARENESS IN ALEXANDER OF APHRODISIAS

VICTOR CASTON

The opening lines of Alexander's *De anima* are bound to excite the modern reader.¹ He argues that in order to find fulfilment and live in accordance with nature, we must follow the Delphic maxim, 'Know Thyself'; and that such knowledge belongs to *psychology*, the subject of his treatise. We might easily be led to expect that self-knowledge, and with it the nature of the self and of consciousness, will be discussed from an Aristotelian perspective.

But in fact Alexander's reasoning runs on slightly different lines. In order to find fulfilment, his words make clear, we must have a clear understanding of *what sort* of thing we are, namely, humans; and we are human in virtue of our souls. So by learning about the soul, we learn what makes us human and what our fulfilment consists in (1.2-2.4). He is thus far from the tradition represented by Plato's *First Alcibiades*, which takes the Delphic maxim to be a quest to know our individual selves (130 c-e). He is closer to Socrates' understanding of the maxim in the *Phaedrus*, as the attempt to find out just what kind of thing he is, whether a monster like Typhon or something that has a share in the divine (229e-230a); and closer still to a Peripatetic view, explicitly attributed to Antiochus of Ascalon,² but presumably older, that spells the maxim out in terms of our nature and characteristic activity as human beings. Although this construal may seem strange to us, it is a natural development of an even older and more traditional way of taking the maxim, regarding our place and limits as human beings. One of Alexander's ultimate concerns in the *De anima* is our mortality, something he makes evident in the very first line, when he declares that he will speak only about the soul of a body that 'comes to be and perishes' (περὶ ψυχῆς εἶπεῖν τῆς ἐν γενέσει τε καὶ φθορᾷ σώματος, 1.2-3). That inevitable limitation, he suggests, is something Aristotelian psychology helps us to accept about ourselves, while at the same time allowing us to marvel at the amazing powers we have and the 'extraordinary magnificence of nature' (τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀμήχανόν τε καὶ περιττόν, 2.12-25 at l. 12). Aristotelian science thus supports the traditional understanding of the Delphic maxim, by deepening our appreciation of mind's place in the world.

¹ This article is dedicated in the memory of Bob Sharples, with whom I read and studied the Alexander's *De anima* in graduate school. I learned immensely from his work and from his example. To my mind, he has done more of lasting value for Alexander than anyone else in the last one hundred years. I would also like to thank my audiences in London, Toronto, and Chicago for much valuable discussion, and especially Joel Yurdin, my commentator in Toronto.

² Cicero *Fin.* 5.44; cf. 5.26-7, 34.41; 4.25-6; also Aug. *CD* 19.3.

Does Alexander have anything of interest to say about consciousness or self-knowledge, then? I believe he does, though there is little of it in his own *De anima*. In the miscellany of puzzles and solutions known as the *Quaestiones*, there is an extended discussion of Aristotle's discussion in *De anima* 3.2 of perceiving that we perceive. Part of the interest of this passage is how Alexander develops what has subsequently become the mainstream reading of Aristotle's argument. But Alexander also makes a stronger and more interesting claim, about how this sort of higher-order awareness *follows* from Aristotle's other doctrines about perception and indeed cognition more generally. This stronger claim is more problematic, though, and it is hard to see how he can make good on it fully.

1. Higher-order perceptual awareness

Quaestiones 3.7 offers a detailed exegesis of the opening of *De anima* 3.2 (425b12-426a26), which at the same time develops Aristotle's points in distinctive and important ways. It follows the order of Aristotle's text so closely that it is easy to think of it as a draft for part of Alexander's lost commentary on the *De anima* (as distinct from his own treatise, likewise titled *De anima*), or perhaps a later rethinking of the passage. I will speak of its author as 'Alexander' for convenience, since it could conceivably have been written by someone else within his own circle, although in this case I fully expect that 'Alexander' is just Alexander.

The title and opening line of the *quaestio* frame the discussion of *De anima* 3.2 as primarily concerned with how *sunaisthêsis* comes about. The use of this term is already significant. For while *sunaisthêsis* and the cognate verb *sunaisthanesthai* do occur in Aristotle, they do not appear in *De anima* 3.2; and where they do occur, they are not used in the sense that they are used here (though they are not entirely unconnected either).³ What does Alexander mean, then, when he describes perceiving that we perceive as *sunaisthêsis*? In discussions of post-Aristotelian philosophers, including the Stoics and Alexander, *sunaisthêsis* is often rendered as 'self-awareness' or even 'consciousness.'⁴

³ *EN* 9.9, 1170b4, 10; *EE* 7.12, 1244b25. On the notion of awareness in these passages, see L. A. Kosman, 'Aristotle on the desirability of friends', *Ancient Philosophy* 24 (2004) 135-54, who offers a brilliant reading of the complex and difficult argument of *EE* 7.12. He suggests that *sunaisthêsis* should be understood quite literally as a kind of joint or shared perception between two friends engaged in a common enterprise, to be contrasted with a kind of subjectivity inherent in our desire for life and experience (see esp. 147-54). For further (and more speculative) exploration of the ethical dimensions of the notion, see A. Flakne, 'Embodied and embedded: Friendship and the sunaesthetic self', *Epoché* 10 (2005) 37-63.

⁴ Sharples uses 'self-awareness' in his translation of *Quaest.* 3.7 and in R. K. Sorabji, *The philosophy of the commentators, 200-600 AD: A sourcebook, volume 1: Psychology* (London 2004) 144-45. For a defence of this translation of the term, based on a broad survey of different terms for self-awareness in late antiquity, see R. K. Sorabji, 'Neoplatonist terminology drawn from the Stoics', in *The philosophy of the commentators, 200-600 AD: A sourcebook, volume 1: Psychology* (London 2004) 159-61. He argues that *sunaisthêsis* is 'very commonly used for self-awareness' by Plotinus and the commentators on Aristotle – this is, in fact, 'the commonest meaning' in Alexander and certain other commentators (p. 159) – and that this usage is based on earlier Stoic uses of the term, especially in Hierocles' *Elementa moralia*. On Neoplatonic usage specifically, see also M. Perkams, *Selbstbewusstsein in der Spätantike: Die neuplatonischen Kommentare zu Aristoteles' 'De anima'* (Berlin 2008) 337-41.

But while there are occasions where Alexander and the Stoics use the term *sunaisthêsis* for awareness of our own psychological activity, I do not think this is the *meaning* of the term or even its commonest use, as I argue below at greater length for Alexander. Its most common use in these earlier periods is for awareness in the less theoretically freighted sense of *noticing* or *being cognizant of* and takes a wide range of objects, including external ones. (For a brief and very incomplete survey, see H. R. Schwyzer, 'Bewusst und unbewusst bei Plotin', in *Les sources de Plotin*, ed. E. R. Dodds, W. Theiler (Geneva 1957) 341-90 (355-60). Even where awareness of

Against this tendency, however, I would argue that the term does not *mean* either of these things in Alexander, even if in a given passage (such as the present one) it should turn out that he is in fact *referring* to consciousness or self-awareness. The distinction is important, and not just methodologically. In approaching Alexander's remarks, we should initially keep open the question of whether he has consciousness specifically in mind. But even if he does, there is still a further more substantive question of precisely what he is claiming when he describes an activity as *sunaisthēsis*.

If we look at other occurrences of the term and its cognates in Alexander's corpus, there can be little doubt that the primary meaning of *sunaisthēsis* is simply:

the 'self' is at issue, it has to be understood in a fairly broad sense, and not a narrowly psychological one. In Hierocles, *sunaisthēsis* is used centrally for an animal's awareness of its own body, its strengths and weaknesses, and threats and opportunities in its environment, as the foundation for the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiōsis*: see G. Bastianini, A. A. Long, 'Hierocles: Elementa moralia', *Corpus dei papiri filosofici greci e latini*: vol. 1 (Florence 1992) 268-441 (2.1-3, 20, 23, 37-38; 4.57-58; 7.46-48). (Schwyzer, 'Bewusst und unbewusst' (above) 356 notes that *sunaisthēsthai* is in fact used frequently by late medical writers for awareness of one's own body.) In light of this, A. A. Long warns specifically against identifying *sunaisthēsis* in Hierocles with consciousness (A. A. Long, 'Hierocles and *oikeiōsis* and self-perception', in *Stoic studies* (Cambridge 1996) 250-63 (first publ. in A. A. Long, *Hellenistic philosophy*, ed. K. J. Boudouris, 2 vols (Cambridge 1993) 1 93-104) (256, 260), despite his appeal to Nagel's notion of 'what it is like' to be a bat on p. 259, and likens it instead to *proprioception*: see Long, 'Hierocles and *oikeiōsis*' (above) 258-59 and at greater length in Bastianini, Long, 'Elementa moralia' (above) 387-90; and more generally B. Inwood, 'Hierocles: Theory and argument in the second century AD', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 2, ed. J. Annas (Oxford 1984) 151-83. Vaguer references to *sunaisthēsis*, such as at *Elem. mor.* 3.55-56 should also be understood along the same lines, as should references to an animal's awareness of its self and its constitution in other discussions of *oikeiōsis*: Cic. *Fin.* 3.16 (= *SVF* 3.182); Sen. *Ep.* 121.5, 9, 12-13 (= *SVF* 3.184); Stob. *Ecl.* 2.7.3c, 2.47.13 Wachsmuth; and above all in the quotation from the first book of Chrysippus's *De finibus* in Diog. Laert. 7.85 (= *SVF* 3.178), if the common emendation of συνείδησιν to συναισθήσιν is correct (on the latter, see Inwood, 'Hierocles: Theory' (above) 169, n. 19; and more critically Bastianini, Long, 'Elementa moralia' (above) 384). Similar remarks could be made about the Stoics' use of *parakolouthēsis* for an animal's awareness of its own movements, based on a broader, more ordinary notion of reflection: see the range of evidence listed in D. E. Hahn, 'A neglected Stoic argument for human responsibility', *Illinois Classical Studies* 17 (1992) 23-48, esp. 36-39 and 44. When Epictetus uses the term for the awareness of the self, it is still used quite broadly, not for one's occurrent psychological state, but for an awareness of one's own character, ignorance, weaknesses, 1.2.30; 1.4.10; 2.11.1; 2.21.10.

In saying that reflexive awareness of our psychological states is not part of the *meaning* of the term *sunaisthēsis* in earlier authors such as the Stoics, I am not claiming that they lacked such a notion or that they never used *sunaisthēsis* to express it. Galen quotes Chrysippus's use of the term in this way on at least two occasions: once, when we 'perceive, as it were,' the various passions we are currently undergoing (ὡσανεὶ συναισθανόμενοι, *PHP* 3.1.25, 172.20-26 De Lacy = *SVF* 2.886; though cp. ὡσανεὶ αἰσθανόμενοι at 2.7.8, 152.30-33 De Lacy = *SVF* 2.887), and again when we feel distress in our central governing power when we have a pain in our foot (3.7.4, 212.14-18 De Lacy = *SVF* 2.900). But typically other expressions are used. Thus, Hierocles speaks of perceiving ourselves (ἐαυτῶν αἰσθανόμεθα) undergoing a corresponding qualitative change in our sense when we perceive external things which are white, sweet, or hot (6.1-10; Inwood, 'Hierocles: Theory' (above) 166, 177; Bastianini, Long, 'Elementa moralia' (above) 432-33); or of the reflexive character of every governing power, including the perceptual one, which perceives itself (ἐαυτῆς αἰσθάνοιτο, 6.10-22; see Inwood, 'Hierocles: Theory' (above) 166-67; Bastianini, Long, 'Elementa moralia' (above) 433-35). But the most important evidence for reflexive awareness, as Long points out (A. A. Long, 'Representation and the self in Stoicism', in *Stoic studies* (Cambridge 1996) 264-85 (first publ. in *Psychology: Companions to ancient thought*, vol. 2, ed. S. Everson (Cambridge 1991) 101-20) (271)), is surely the definition of representation (*phantasia*) in Aetius as something that 'reveals itself' (ἐνδεκνύμενον αὐτό) to the subject as well as its cause (Aetius 4.12.1 = *SVF* 2.54 = LS 39B; cf. Sext. *Adv. Math.* 7.161).

(1) Being aware of something *while perceiving something else*.

As, in fact, its etymology would suggest (συν + σῖσθησις). The most common cases involve cross-modal awareness of an object: for example, when we touch the hard, round surface of the brass sphere at the same time that we see its burnished golden colour, or when we see crossed fingers as one even though by touch we can feel that there are two.⁵ But Alexander also uses it for the awareness we have, while listening, of the distance of a sound,⁶ and of the resistance we sense when we make contact with an object.⁷ His only other uses of the term are for:

(2) The mutual sensitivity of one part of the body for another,⁸

(3) The way in which self-evident principles are known to us ‘from our own awareness’ (ἐκ τε τῆς ἰδίας συναίσθησεως).⁹

In none of these cases is awareness of the *self* or of *mental states* specifically at issue, even in (3). In the most common case,¹⁰ (1), there is only:

a. An awareness of the primary object (which belongs to perception proper);

b. An accompanying perception or awareness of something else.

Moreover, the object of this accompanying perception need not be part of our mental activity at all, as the examples above show, but rather a different feature of the external world. The translation of *sunaisthêsis* in (b) as ‘accompanying perception’ is simply for convenience and is not intended to prejudge any questions about the ontological analysis of such acts. In particular, it is *not* meant to imply that there is a distinct and separate act of perception, but only that in such cases we are perceiving *something else in addition* to the primary object of perception. It is meant to be neutral as to how this achieved.

The opening of *Quaestiones* 3.7 fits the same general pattern. Whenever we perceive something, we *also* perceive that we perceive – this second, higher-order perception accompanies the first. Alexander states that this second kind of perception accompanies *every* act of sense perception and explains the sense in which we are aware ‘of ourselves’:

When we perceive, we perceive *ourselves*,¹¹ because anyone perceiving has, in addition to the awareness [ἀντίληψις] of the thing he is perceiving, an accompanying perception [συναίσθησις] that he perceives.¹²

⁵ *In Metaph.* 321.28-30; *In Sens.* 36.11-19; 163.11-16.

⁶ *DA* 50.18-20.

⁷ *Mant.* 130.22-24. This last case is somewhat complicated, as it involves consequences of an opponent’s theory which he thinks conflict with our actual experiences: according to the Stoic theory of vision, we see by tensing the intervening *pneuma* and making contact with the object, like a blind person tapping objects with a stick; but if so, Alexander argues, we should *also be aware* of resistance when we strike the object, which we are not.

⁸ *In Metaph.* 363.21-24; *DA* 15.15-17.

⁹ *In Metaph.* 317.38-39.

¹⁰ *Contra Sorabji*, ‘Neoplatonist terminology’ (n.4, above) 159.

¹¹ I accept Bruns’s correction of the mss’ αὐτῶν to αὐτῶν at 91.29 since the referent here can only be the subject of the sentence.

Such perception does not require a concept of a self, or any conception of our selves individually. Indeed, it cannot, if Alexander's generalizations are to apply to *all* perceivers and *all* acts of sense perception, since on his view nonhuman animals perceive even though they are without understanding and so lack concepts.¹³ His point might be put as follows. When we perceive, the accompanying perception we have is not merely an awareness that perceiving is, so to speak, going on. Rather, we perceive with regard to ourselves that *we* are perceiving: in short, we have an essentially *de se* attitude, which is perceptual in character, regarding our perceptions of first-order objects. So we are not merely aware of the fact that we are perceiving,¹⁴ but of ourselves doing it.

Elsewhere Alexander adds that while we perceive, we are aware *continuously* of our perceiving and existing, without even the briefest interruption. If certain temporal durations could not be perceived, he argues:

... it would follow that during that time someone will fail to notice that he is perceiving and that he exists and will not perceive himself existing, so that during a period in which he perceives himself perceiving, he would not perceive himself either existing or perceiving. But this is impossible. For everyone, when he perceives, has an accompanying perception [συναισθάνεται] of himself existing and perceiving.¹⁵

The higher-order perception in question, then, is an on-going activity, much like the first-order perceptual awareness it accompanies. It is an awareness or experience of something rather than a mere judgement or acceptance of a fact.

Later in *Quaestiones* 3.7, Alexander is more specific about the content of this higher-order perception. We are aware not merely of ourselves perceiving, but of our perceiving *the particular first-order objects* we happen to perceive on that occasion. In fact, he claims that this sort of higher-order perception *necessarily* includes awareness of these objects:

¹² *Quaest.* 3.7, 91.29-31: αἰσθανόμεθα δὲ αὐτῶν αἰσθανόμενοι. παντὶ γὰρ αἰσθανομένῳ τινὸς πρὸς τῇ ἀντιλήψει τούτου οὐ αἰσθάνεται, γίνεται συναίσθησις τις καὶ τοῦ ὅτι αἰσθάνεται. (All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.) For a parallel, see also his *DA* 65.3.

¹³ Although *Quaestiones* 3.7 does not address the issue of nonhuman animals explicitly, it does state its conclusion in a fully general form, as applying to 'all perceivers' (παντὶ τῷ αἰσθανομένῳ, 93.20); and the grounds he offers in support of this conclusion are equally general, turning on the nature of perception itself (92.31-93.20). Elsewhere, he takes the standard Aristotelian line that humans are the only animals that possess understanding, while all animals perceive (*DA* 30.10-15). Aristotle makes this denial in a number of places: see *DA* 2.3, 414b18-19 (τὸ διανοητικόν τε καὶ νοῦς), 415a7-8 (λογισμὸν καὶ διάνοιαν); 3.10, 433a12 (οὐ νόησις οὐδὲ λογισμὸς); *Mem.* 1, 450a15-18 (νοητικόν); *PA* 1.1, 641b7-8 (διάνοια); *NE* 1.7, 1098a1-5 (λόγος); *EE* 2.8, 1224a25-27 (λόγος); *Pol.* 7.13, 1332b3-5 (λόγος). For discussion of these passages, see R. K. Sorabji, *Animal minds and human morals: The origins of the Western debate*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology - Townsend Lectures, vol. 54 (Ithaca 1993) 12, 14, 32-34, 38-39, 54-55.

¹⁴ As Bob Sharples's translation of 90.30-31 might suggest.

¹⁵ *In Sens.* 148.5-10: εἰ γὰρ εἴη τοιοῦτον, δῆλον ὡς ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ χρόνῳ λήσεται τις αὐτὸν καὶ ὅτι αἰσθάνεται καὶ ὅτι ἔστι, καὶ οὐκ αἰσθήσεται ὄντος ἑαυτοῦ· ὥστε ἐν ᾧ χρόνῳ αἰσθάνεται τις ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθανομένου, καὶ οὐκ αἰσθήσεται οὔτε ὄντος ἑαυτοῦ οὔτε αἰσθανομένου· ὁ ἀδύνατον· πᾶς γάρ, ὅτε αἰσθάνεται, ἑαυτοῦ ὄντος τε καὶ αἰσθανομένου συναισθάνεται.

... so the [sense] that perceives the seeing will at the same time be a [sense] that perceives the colours as well. For the [sense] that perceives the occurrent activity concerning perceptibles would also perceive the things the visual activity concerns, namely, colours. For seeing is nothing but engaging in activity with sight concerning objects that can be seen, so that the perception of seeing is a perception of the occurrent activity concerning objects that can be seen by the visual sense. It is *not possible* to have a perception of the activity concerning specific things, without our perceiving those very things that the occurrent activity concerns.¹⁶

Alexander assumes, additionally, that the second-order perception is not of first-order objects like colours ‘accidentally’ or *extrinsically* (κατὰ συμβεβηκός), but rather intrinsically (καθ’ αὐτά). Otherwise, his reconstruction of Aristotle’s *reductio* will not work. As Alexander understands it (see below, pp. 39-40), Aristotle begins from an initial dilemma about the number of *capacities* involved in this kind of higher-order perception, such as when we perceive that we see. If it occurred through some capacity other than sight, there would be *two different types* of perceptual capacity that perceive colour; and that, Alexander thinks, is absurd (ἄτοπον), since according to Aristotle colours are intrinsically perceptible to sight *exclusively* (τὰ ἴδια, 92.12-13). But this last claim is contradicted only if colours were *intrinsically* perceived by another sense. Aristotle is explicit on this point: something that is intrinsically perceptible to one sense exclusively can nevertheless be perceived *extrinsically* by each of the other four senses (*DA* 3.1, 425a30-b2). So when Alexander argues that this higher-order perception must also be a perception of the first-order objects and *therefore* cannot be carried out by a different sense, he assumes that the first-order objects are intrinsically perceived in this higher-order perception.

But what about Alexander’s initial claim, that the higher-order perception must inevitably be a perception of the first-order objects as well? The argument he offers gives us little reason to accept it. The key part of the inference (92.6-8) runs as follows:

1. Seeing is ‘nothing other than’ (οὐ ... ἄλλο τι ἢ) engaging in activity directed at visible objects with sight.
2. Therefore (ὥσθ’), we must perceive an activity directed at visible objects.

The inference turns on the essence of seeing, on *what it is* to see: to perceive our seeing *as such*, we must perceive it as an activity directed at visible objects. This seems entirely reasonable. But it will not get us to his conclusion, that we cannot perceive an activity directed at specific objects (περὶ τὰδε τινὰ) without thereby perceiving those very objects (τῶνδε). Imagine that the activity of seeing were itself *intrinsically* perceptible (something which has not been ruled out so far), and that we perceived it as something directed at first-order objects. It does not thereby follow that we would perceive the first-order objects themselves. Even if we helped ourselves to Aristotle’s doctrine that the activity of perception is ‘one and the same’ as the activity of the first-order object – a doctrine that

¹⁶ *Quaest.* 3.7, 92.3-10: ... ἔσται ἢ τοῦ ὄραν αἰσθανομένη ἄμα καὶ χρωμάτων αἰσθανομένη. ἢ γὰρ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῆς περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ γινομένης αἰσθανομένη αἰσθάνοιτο <ἀν> καὶ τούτων, περὶ ἃ ἡ ἐνέργεια ἢ κατὰ τὸ ὄραν, ἔστι δὲ ταῦτα τὰ χρώματα. οὐ γὰρ ἔστι τὸ ὄραν ἄλλο τι ἢ ἐνεργεῖν τῇ ὄψει περὶ τὰ ὄρατά, ὥσθ’ ἢ τοῦ ὄραν αἰσθησὶς αἰσθησὶς ἔστι τῆς γινομένης περὶ τὰ ὄρατά ἐνεργείας ὑπὸ τῆς ὄρατικῆς αἰσθήσεως. οὐχ οἶόν τε δὲ αἰσθέσθαι τῆς περὶ τὰδε τινὰ ἐνεργείας μὴ καὶ τῶνδε αἰσθανόμενον, περὶ ἃ ἡ ἐνέργεια γίνεται.

Alexander discusses at the end of *Quaestiones* 3.7 (see below, §4) – it would at most follow that we perceive the first-order objects *extrinsically*, since these two activities would still differ ‘in being’ (*DA* 3.2, 425b27, 426a16-17).¹⁷ When Alexander assumes, then, that the first-order objects are perceived *intrinsically* in the higher-order perception, he is effectively making an independent assumption about the character of the awareness involved in perceiving that we perceive. It is not something that genuinely follows from the rest of the theory.

So Alexander thinks that whenever we perceive with any of the five senses, we perceive that we perceive, and in a very specific way: the accompanying perception is a *continuous* awareness of *ourselves* perceiving that includes an awareness of the first-order perceptible objects *intrinsically* as such.

2. *A moderate capacity reading*

The main body of *Quaestiones* 3.7 follows the first half of Aristotle’s *De anima* 3.2 quite closely. Alexander begins from the opening dilemma, concerning whether we perceive that we see by the same *aisthêsis* or a different one. He then considers each of the arguments Aristotle offers, one concerning duplication, the other an infinite regress, followed by the *aporia* Aristotle raises and his two solutions. Alexander follows this with a brief discussion of the subsequent passage in Aristotle, which Alexander takes to shed light on how this awareness comes about. The parallels are straightforward:

<i>Quaestiones</i> 3.7	<i>DA</i> 3.2	
91.28-34	425b12-13	opening dilemma
92.1-13	425b13-15	duplication argument
92.13-20	425b15-17	infinite regress argument
92.20-23	425b17-19	aporia
92.23-27	425b20-22	first solution
92.27-31	425b22-25	second solution
92.31-93.22	425b25-426a27	how it comes about

To many ears, the details of Alexander’s interpretation will sound unexceptionable or at least very familiar. For Alexander is the first, to my knowledge, to articulate the reading most popular today, something I have elsewhere labelled a *moderate capacity reading*.¹⁸

¹⁷ Aristotle holds that it is only when *X* and *Y* are the same ‘in being’ that whatever can be said of *X* can be said of *Y* and vice versa; if they are only the same ‘in number’ (as these activities are), the predicates will be true of them extrinsically at best. See *Soph. El.* 24, 179a35-39; *Phys.* 3.3, 202b14-16.

¹⁸ See V. Caston, ‘Aristotle on consciousness’, *Mind* 111 (2002) 751-815 (761-63).

The issue turns on a systematic ambiguity that infects most, if not all, of Aristotle's formulations in the opening of *De anima* 3.2. The most central word in the passage, *aisthēsis* or 'perception', can be used for both:

- a. The *activity* of perceiving;
- b. The *power* or *capacity* to perceive.

The ambiguity of this term in the present context can hardly be doubted. Aristotle explicitly distinguishes these two senses later in the very same chapter and says that the ambiguity extends to all of the terms used for the five senses and for their objects (426a6-9). In fact, he excoriates his predecessors for not having taken this difference into account and cites it as the cause of their errors (426a20-27). Nor is this an isolated point. The distinction between a power and the activity it issues in is fundamental to the overall framework of Aristotle's psychology. His examination of perception in general in *De anima* 2.5 turns crucially on it (417a9-b16), as does his definition of the soul as a first actuality in *De anima* 2.1 – in fact, he appeals there to the example of sight as a clearer case of the same distinction he wishes to make in the case of the soul (412b17-413a3; cf. 412a22-b6; 2.2, 413b11-13).

The character and force of Aristotle's arguments in *De anima* 3.2 look very different depending on which sense one takes to be in play at each occurrence. Following Brentano, I have argued (see Caston, 'Aristotle on consciousness' (n.18, above)) that Aristotle's arguments make the best sense if construed primarily in terms of *activities*: that is, as concerned with whether perceiving that we see is a *second* activity, distinct from the original first-order activity of sight, or whether there is instead *just one* activity with (at least) two aspects, a first-order visual one and a higher-order reflexive one. Aristotle offers two arguments against the first option, objecting that when we perceive that we see, we would have two activities of perception directed *toward the same* first-order objects; and also that if a second activity were necessary, it would follow that there were *infinitely many* of them.

Most modern readers do not notice this ambiguity, much less take it into account. Like Alexander, they simply assume that the arguments concern the number of *powers* or *capacities* involved in perceiving that we see. So understood, the opening dilemma is whether there is a *second sense* responsible for perceiving that we see or whether the *sense of sight* on its own is sufficient. The subsequent arguments then claim that on the first option there would be two senses for perceiving colour; and that if two such senses were necessary, there would have to be infinitely many of them. But it is difficult to make sense of the actual wording of Aristotle's arguments, if we construe them consistently in terms of capacities. Consider the first two sentences when taken in this way:

Since we perceive that we see and hear, we must perceive that we see either by sight or by another [sense]. But then there will be the same [sense] for both sight and the colour that serves as its object, so that either there will be two [senses] of the same thing or the same [sense] will be of itself.¹⁹

¹⁹ Arist. *DA* 3.2, 425b12-15: ἐπεὶ δ' αἰσθανόμεθα ὅτι ὁρώμεν καὶ ἀκούομεν, ἀνάγκη ἢ τῇ ὄψει αἰσθάνεσθαι ὅτι ὁρᾷ, ἢ ἐτέρῳ. ἀλλ' ἢ αὐτῇ ἔσται τῆς ὄψεως καὶ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου χρώματος, ὥστε ἢ δύο τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται ἢ αὐτῇ αὐτῆς.

If taken literally, these lines would be asking whether a second sense perceives the *power of sight* (τῆς ὄψεως, b14) or whether the same *sense* perceives *itself* (αὐτῆ αὐτῆς, b15). But it would be preposterous to claim that in perceiving that we see, what we perceive is the *power* to see, rather than the *activity* of seeing. So even though most commentators translate the passage this way, no one actually takes this rendering to mean what it says (something I have called an *extreme capacity reading*). Instead they temporize, by having Aristotle switch repeatedly between the two senses, even within a single sentence. On this more moderate reading, Aristotle argues that it is *by sight* (τῇ ὄψει, b13) that we have a perception of *seeing* (τῆς ὄψεως, b14); and the way in which a sense will ‘itself be of itself’ (αὐτῆ αὐτῆς, b15) is that the sense perceives its own *activity*. On a moderate capacity reading, the arguments’ conclusions concern the *number* of capacities, but it is their activities which serve as the *objects* of higher-order perceptions.

It would be reasonable at this stage to ask whether it is plausible to construe these terms as switching referent so quickly, even within a single phrase like ‘itself of itself’ (αὐτῆ αὐτῆς, b15) where a reflexive pronoun is used, and whether we should be tied to a capacity reading in the first place.²⁰ But however that may be, Alexander shows no signs of unease. Here is how he disambiguates the opening dilemma:

Does this accompanying perception arise in us through the same sense through which we have awareness of the perceptible object, so that it is by sight that we both see things seen and perceive ourselves seeing; or do we perceive visible objects by sight, but perceive *seeing itself* with some other [sense]?²¹

In this sentence, he clearly distinguishes between the perceptual power *through which* (δι’ ἧς) we perceive an object and the awareness (ἡ ἀντίληψις) that results, and then asks whether the same sense is responsible (διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰσθήσεως) for the accompanying, higher-order perception. He consistently distinguishes between the power of sight (ὄψις) and seeing (ὄραν), both here and in the remainder of the discussion (91.33-34; 92.2, 6-8, 20-23). In each case, he makes the object of the higher-order perception an activity, and not the underlying capacity, just as a moderate capacity reading should.

But not even Alexander can avoid the ambiguity of these terms entirely. We thus find him alternating between perception understood as an activity and understood as a capacity in a single sentence (92.7-8):

... so that the *perception* (αἴσθησις) of seeing is a *perception* (αἴσθησις) of the occurrent activity concerning objects that can be seen due to the visual *sense* (τῆς ὀρατικῆς αἰσθήσεως).²²

²⁰ This is one of the motivations for the alternative activity reading I offer in Caston, ‘Aristotle on consciousness’ (n.18, above).

²¹ *Quaest.* 3.7, 91.31-34: αὐτῆ δὲ ἡ συναίσθησις πότερον ἡμῖν διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰσθήσεως γίνεται, δι’ ἧς καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἡ ἀντίληψις, ὡς τῇ ὄψει ἡμᾶς ὄραν τε τὰ ὀρώμενα καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἑαυτῶν ὀρώντων, ἢ τῇ μὲν ὄψει τῶν ὀρατῶν αἰσθανόμεθα, ἄλλη δὲ τινι αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὄραν; I accept Bruns’s emendation αὐτοῦ at 91.34 for the mss’ οὐ τῇ, which makes little sense. Bruns rightly refers to the parallel at 92.21.

²² For the Greek text, see n.16 above.

The first two uses plainly refer to the act of perceiving, the last one explicitly to the capacity. He then reverts to the more regimented use of these terms he employed previously: on the hypothesis he is criticizing there will be several *senses* (πλείους αἰσθήσεις), some of which perceive external perceptible objects primarily (αἰσθανόμεναι αὐτῶν προηγουμένως) and others which perceive the *activities* of the senses concerned with these objects (τῶν ἐνεργειῶν τῶν περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων αἰσθανόμεναι, 92.10-12).

The same sort of vacillation in meaning occurs in the second argument. He begins by speaking about whether there is one sense which perceives (ἡ αἰσθανομένη) and another 'in virtue of which we perceive ourselves' (καθ' ἣν αἰσθανόμεθα ἑαυτῶν αἰσθανομένων, 92.14-15). But he then goes on to use the same term to speak both of perceptions and senses in the ensuing regress:

For then we will have an accompanying perception of the *perception* (αἴσθησις) of seeing through some further *sense* (δι' ἄλλης τινὸς αἰσθήσεως), and this further *sense* (κάκεινη) in turn, which produces the accompanying perception by perceiving it [sc. the seeing], will have still another *sense* (ἄλλην τινὰ) that perceives [it]; and this will continue to infinity, which is completely absurd. The remaining alternative is that we perceive perceptibles and our activities concerning them by the same *sense* (τῇ αὐτῇ).²³

Alexander imagines *two* regresses, in effect, parallel to each other: first, a *regress of activities*, of ever higher-order perceptions directed at the perceptions at the previous level; and second, a *regress of capacities*, which individually underwrite the higher-order perceptions at each new level. But his conclusion addresses *only the second* regress: there must be a single capacity by which we have both higher- and lower-order perceptions (92.18-20).

What Alexander fails to recognize is that blocking the second regress does not block the first: there might still be a regress of higher-order perceptions, even if there is just a single capacity. Once he allows that a *single* capacity can support perceptions of *different* orders, with some directed at others – as his own considered view allows – it becomes reasonable to ask whether we must perceive every perception we have, regardless of order, with a *distinct* activity. The moderate capacity reading of the regress argument assumes this and Alexander nowhere questions it. But then Alexander is *committed to a regress of activities too*, even though there is only a single capacity, and this is surely equally absurd. If, on the other hand, he rejects this assumption and blocks the regress of activities directly, he thereby blocks the regress of capacities, without having to do anything further.

The broader context of Aristotle's *De anima* might explain why Alexander focuses on capacities. In the first chapters of *De anima* Book 3, Aristotle is busy counting capacities: he is concerned with whether higher perceptual functions require anything more than the five sense modalities discussed in Book 2. The general thrust of Aristotle's argument is that nothing more is required, either for perceiving common perceptibles, perceiving perceptibles extrinsic to a given sense or to all the senses, or discriminating between

²³ *Quaest.* 3.7, 92.15-20: καὶ γὰρ τῆς τοῦ ὄραν αἰσθήσεως πάλιν ἔσται συναίσθησις ἡμῖν δι' ἄλλης τινὸς αἰσθήσεως, κάκεινη πάλιν, οὗ αἰσθανομένη ποιεῖ τὴν συναίσθησιν, ἄλλην τινὰ ἕξει τὴν αἰσθανομένην, καὶ τοῦτ' εἰς ἄπειρον, ἀτοπώτατον δὲ τοῦτο. καταλείπεται τὸ τῇ αὐτῇ τῶν τε αἰσθητῶν αἰσθάνεσθαι ἡμᾶς καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ αἰσθητὰ ἑαυτῶν ἐνεργείας.

cross-modal perceptibles. On this reading, Aristotle is pushing the same line with regard to perceiving that we perceive: it is something we can do with the perceptual power itself whose activity is perceived. We do not have to postulate any further power than the five senses to which we are already committed.

What context does *not* explain is why Alexander fails to consider the apparent conflict between this claim and views Aristotle expresses elsewhere about the common sense, of which Alexander is fully aware. In *De somno* 2, Aristotle *denies* that we perceive that we see in virtue of sight. It is due instead to the common sense:

There is also a power that supervenes on all of them in common, by which one perceives that one is seeing and hearing, for it is surely *not* the case that one sees that one sees *by sight*. And it is certainly not the case that one discerns, or is even capable of discerning, that sweet things are different from pale ones by taste or by sight or by both together, but rather *by a certain part common to all* the sense organs. For there is a single sense and a single principal sense organ, but its being is different for the sense of each kind [of perceptible], for example, of sound and of colour.²⁴

Alexander adopts virtually the same view in his own *De anima*:

We also perceive ourselves seeing, hearing, and perceiving with each sense by this common sense. For the person seeing perceives himself seeing and the person hearing perceives himself hearing, since we definitely do not perceive ourselves perceiving *with any other power* besides the <common> sense. For *we do not see that we see or hear that we hear*, since seeing is *not visible* or hearing *audible*. Rather, it is the activity that belongs to the primary and fundamental sense, described as the ‘common’ sense, in virtue of which perceivers come to have an accompanying perception of perceiving.²⁵

Neither Aristotle nor Alexander addresses how these two views are to be reconciled – if, indeed, they are to be reconciled at all. It is possible, with either author, that one view was discarded in favour of the other at some later stage.²⁶ But it is also possible, at least in

²⁴ Arist. *Somn.* 2, 455a15-22: ἔστι δὲ τις καὶ κοινὴ δύναμις ἀκολουθοῦσα πάσαις, ἣ καὶ ὅτι ὄρα καὶ ἀκούει αἰσθάνεται (οὐ γὰρ δὴ τῆ γε ὄψει ὄρα ὅτι ὄρα). καὶ κρίνει δὴ καὶ δύναται κρίνειν ὅτι ἕτερα τὰ γλυκέα τῶν λευκῶν οὔτε γεύσει οὔτε ὄψει οὔτε ἀφοῦν, ἀλλὰ τινι κοινῷ μορίῳ τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἀπάντων· ἔστι μὲν γὰρ μία αἴσθησις, καὶ τὸ κύριον αἰσθητήριον ἓν, τὸ δ’ εἶναι αἰσθήσει τοῦ γένους ἐκάστου ἕτερον, οἷον ψόφου καὶ χρώματος. I would like to thank Charles Brittain for helpful discussion of the punctuation of the Greek.

²⁵ Alex. *DA* 65.2-10: τῆ κοινῆ δὲ αἰσθήσει ταύτη καὶ ὁράντων αὐτῶν αἰσθανόμεθα καὶ ἀκουόντων καὶ καθ’ ἐκάστην αἴσθησιν αἰσθανομένων. ὁ γὰρ ὄρων αἰσθάνεται αὐτοῦ ὄρωντος καὶ ἀκούων ἀκουόντος. οὐ γὰρ δὴ ἄλλη τινὶ δυνάμει παρὰ τὴν <κοινήν> αἴσθησιν αὐτῶν αἰσθανομένων αἰσθανόμεθα. οὐ γὰρ ὁρώμεν ὅτι ὁρώμεν οὐδὲ ἀκούομεν ὅτι ἀκούομεν. οὔτε γὰρ τὸ ὄραν ὁρατὸν οὔτε τὸ ἀκούειν ἀκουστόν, ἀλλ’ ἔστιν αὕτη ἡ ἐνέργεια τῆς πρώτης τε καὶ κυρίας αἰσθήσεως καὶ κοινῆς λεγομένης, καθ’ ἣν γίνεται συναίσθησις τοῖς αἰσθανομένοις τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι. Bruns’s insertion here <κοινήν> is not strictly necessary, since it is clear from context that the common sense is intended. But for just the same reason, it does not do any real harm either to include it in brackets.

²⁶ In Aristotle’s case, some have argued that *De somno* expresses his mature view (I. Block, ‘The order of Aristotle’s psychological writings’, *American Journal of Philology* 82 (1961) 50-77; I. Block, ‘Three German commentators on the individual senses and the common sense in Aristotle’s psychology’, *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 9 (1964) 58-63, esp. p. 63), while others take this to be found in the *De anima* (A. Torstrik, *Aristotelis De anima*, Libri III (Berlin 1862) 166-67, note *).

Aristotle's case, that both views should be understood as compatible. On this reading, the common sense would not be another sense *distinct* from the individual senses and so vulnerable to the objections raised at the beginning of *De anima* 3.2. Instead, it would be a power we have as a *consequence* of having other senses and possessed in common with all of them (καὶ κοινὴ δύναμις ἀκολουθοῦσα πάσαις, 455a16).

Some of these same gambits are available to Alexander. He certainly agrees that there is no sense distinct from the five individual senses (65.21-66.6), and that the common sense is shared by all the individual senses, just as the centre of a circle is shared by all of the radii extending from its periphery (63.6-64.11): it is 'one and the same power constituted from the entire perceptual apparatus and each of its parts' (ἡ δύναμις ἡ αὐτὴ καὶ μία οὐσα ἐκ παντός τε τοῦ αἰσθητηρίου καὶ ἐκάστου τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ, 64.9-10). Alexander admittedly does emphasize the difference between the organs belonging to the peripheral senses and the 'ultimate' central organ belonging to the common sense (τὸ ἕσχατον αἰσθητήριον, 63.15; 64.8; 64.18; 96.31; 97.5, 10; *In Sens.* 168.3). But he also thinks that all perception takes place, strictly speaking, in the ultimate sense organ: the only difference that matters is whether something is perceived in virtue of the generic power of perception, common to all the senses, or in virtue of one of its specific modalities.

This proposal certainly fits Alexander's claim in his own *De anima* that we do not *see* that we see, but only *perceive* that we see: the higher-order perception occurs solely in virtue of the generic power of perception, unlike the first-order perception, which takes place through a specific modality like sight. But *Quaestiones* 3.7 expressly denies this. In laying out the dilemma's two horns, Alexander states the alternative he ultimately prefers as follows: 'it is *by sight* that we both see things seen and perceive ourselves' (ὡς τῇ ὄψει ἡμᾶς ὁρᾶν τε τὰ ὁρώμενα καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἑαυτῶν ὁρώντων, *Quaest.* 3.7, 91.32-33), an awareness which is '*due to the visual sense*' (ὕπὸ τῆς ὁρατικῆς αἰσθήσεως, 92.7-8); and he concludes the discussion by saying that the accompanying perception 'also comes to *see* itself seeing at the same time' (καὶ αὐτὴν ἅμα ὁρῶσαν ὁρῶσα γίνεται, 93.17). Such talk is precisely what triggers the subsequent *aporia* in Aristotle's *De anima* 3.2 about whether *seeing itself* is coloured, on the supposition that everything visible is coloured, a worry Alexander then attempts to solve by exploring the solutions originally offered by Aristotle (*Quaest.* 3.7, 92.23-31). Alexander's response in his own *De anima*, in contrast, is much sharper and cleaner: we do not see that we see *precisely because* seeing is *not* coloured, full stop (*DA* 65.6-8). Rather, we perceive that we see in virtue of the generic power alone (65.8-10). The approach in these two texts is thus fundamentally opposed.

One could try to defend the *Quaestiones* discussion by arguing that it is simply a draft for Alexander's lost commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, or perhaps even an extract from it, and that as such it does not need to go beyond the bounds of the text in question, which does not mention the common sense; and as such it needn't express Alexander's own personal commitments either. But this cannot avoid the issue entirely. Given that Alexander is aware of the discrepancy in Aristotle's expressed views, and that he prefers one of them over the other, why doesn't he mention or address the difference explicitly in *Quaestiones* 3.7? The two treatments can be defended on lawyerly grounds. But philosophically a certain amount of candour is wanting.

3. *How higher-order awareness comes about*

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Alexander's discussion is that he regards the subsequent passage of *De anima* 3.2 (425b26-426a26) as showing *how* this accompanying perception comes about (διὰ τῶν ἐξῆς, ὅτι γίνεται καὶ πῶς γίνεται, δείκνυσιν, 92.32-33), even though Aristotle does not mention higher-order awareness himself in this passage. He only argues that the activities of the perceptual power and the perceptible object are 'one and the same, though their being is not the same' (ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐστὶ καὶ μία, τὸ δ' εἶναι οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ αὐταῖς, 425b26-27). Why does Alexander connect this passage with the earlier one, about perceiving that we see?

A natural suggestion, *not* offered by Alexander, is that this passage is a continuation of Aristotle's response to the *aporia* he raises in the earlier passage at 425b17. The worry can be stated succinctly: if we are able to perceive that we are perceiving, then our perceiving must itself be *perceptible*; and if it is perceived by *the same power* used for the first-order objects, as Aristotle claims on a moderate capacity reading, then won't the perceiving itself be perceptible in the same way? Aristotle uses sight as his example. If:

1. We perceive that we see by sight (425b13-17), and;
2. To perceive by sight is just to see (b18);
3. Anything we see is either a colour or has a colour (b18-19),

then one might worry that:

4. 'What sees' (τὸ ὁρῶν) – or, with Alexander, our *seeing* (τὸ ὁρᾶν)²⁷ – will itself be *coloured* (b19-20).

which seems obviously unacceptable and so would constitute a *reductio ad absurdum* of the position Aristotle has just been arguing for. His first response is to challenge premise (2): although we perceive darkness by sight, we do not *see* it, or at least not in the same way, by its being *visible* (b20-22). Aristotle does not develop this suggestion further, though, and neither does Alexander. But the accompanying perception cannot consist simply in noticing that the 'lights are on,' so to speak, if it also includes an awareness of *the first-order objects* perceived on each occasion, as Alexander insists. Aristotle's second response is entirely different: instead of questioning any of the premises, he reconsiders whether the conclusion might in some sense be acceptable after all. Perhaps 'what sees,' Aristotle says with laconic brevity, is

... *in a way* coloured, because each sense organ is able to receive the perceptible object without the matter.²⁸

The subsequent lines could then be seen as a further explanation of this cryptic remark. If our seeing is 'one and the same' as the activity of colour, one might think, then seeing *is* in a way coloured and so something visible, something that can be seen, thus dissolving the

²⁷ This is how Alexander glosses the argument at 92.22-23: 'then *seeing*, if it is something that can be seen, is coloured' (καὶ τὸ ὁρᾶν, εἰ ἔστιν ὁρατὸν τι, κεχρωσμένον).

²⁸ 425b22-24: ὡς κεχρωμάτισται· τὸ γὰρ αἰσθητήριον δεκτικὸν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης ἕκαστον.

aporia. The suggestion that seeing is coloured is no longer an absurdity to be rejected, but a feature of the view. The activity of seeing would not be *intrinsically* coloured, of course, since it is *only extrinsically the same* as the activity of the coloured object – they still differ ‘in being’ (425b27, 426a16-17). But being extrinsically coloured is sufficient to make seeing something that can itself be seen, at least extrinsically, just as Aristotle thinks the sea or any other large body of water is.²⁹

Alexander’s strategy is bolder. It is not simply that our seeing *can* be seen. It *must* be seen, on every occasion. Initially, he just says that ‘it makes sense’ (εὐλόγως, 93.12) that there is always an accompanying perception. But he concludes his discussion by asserting that it is a *necessary consequence* (ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔπεται) of the Aristotelian view:

It is therefore a necessary consequence that every perceiver will also have an accompanying perception of himself perceiving because it a consequence of a sense’s perceiving an external perceptible that it perceives itself at the same time as well.³⁰

This claim goes far beyond anything that Aristotle says in *De anima* 3.2. At no point does Aristotle offer either argument or evidence for the claim that we perceive that we perceive (425b12). He simply asserts that we do and then argues *from this assumption* to the conclusion that it occurs by means of the same power (or even the same activity involved in the first-order activity, on my reading). Alexander reverses the order of explanation here, arguing from Aristotle’s account of first-order perception *to the conclusion* that higher-order perception must occur.

What is the argument in Alexander’s view that necessitates this conclusion? It is not a logical argument about sameness, so much as a physical or causal one. Perception, for Alexander as for Aristotle, is just a special case of change and modification. In general, a change or modification occurs *in* the thing changed or modified (93.2-4). So, too, in the case of perception:

The change originating from the perceptible object and the modification that comes about due to it, once it has come about in perception taken as a power, necessarily produces perception in activity.³¹

Alexander’s language here suggests, at least at first glance, that the change and modification of the sense is *distinct* from perceiving, which is produced as a further effect. But if perception is analogous to the other cases, as Alexander clearly intends, then the change and modification ‘produce’ (ποιεῖν) perceiving only in the sense that they *constitute* it. There would be only one event, which is *both* a modification *and* a perceiving, such that having a modification in the relevant organs ‘makes’ a perceiver perceive.

²⁹ *Sens.* 3, 439a18-b16; cf. δι’ ἄλλοτριον χρώμα, *DA* 2.7, 418b4-6. According to R. K. Sorabji, Aristotle’s claim that seeing is in a way coloured should be understood precisely in this way, as being extrinsically perceptible. For discussion, see V. Caston, ‘The spirit and the letter: Aristotle on perception’, in *Metaphysics, soul, and ethics: Themes from the work of Richard Sorabji*, ed. R. Salles (Oxford 2005) 245-320 (250-51).

³⁰ *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.20-22: διὸ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἔπεται παντὶ τῷ αἰσθανομένῳ συναισθάνεσθαι καὶ ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθανομένου τῷ ἔπεσθαι τῇ αἰσθήσει αἰσθανομένη τινὸς τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἕξω ὄντος τὸ ἅμα καὶ ἑαυτῆς αἰσθάνεσθαι.

³¹ *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.4-6: ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ κίνησιν καὶ τὸ γινόμενον ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πάθος ἐν τῇ κατὰ δόναμιν αἰσθήσει γενόμενον ποιεῖν τὴν κατ’ ἐνέργειαν αἰσθησιν.

Perception differs from the other cases, however, in so far as the form of the perceptible object is received ‘without the matter’ (93.9-11). Given that this is the case, Alexander reasons,

... it makes sense that at the same time that we have a perception of perceptible objects, we also have an accompanying perception in virtue of the same sense.³²

As tantalizing as this suggestion is, however, it is hard to make good on it. Alexander does not explain why it makes sense or exactly how the two doctrines are supposed to be related. His subsequent remarks, moreover, do not invoke the manner in which the form is received at all, but merely the fact that it is received and that the sense *possesses* the form of the object as a result:

For there is an awareness of external perceptibles because [the sense] *acquires* (λαμβάνειν) the form from them; but the accompanying perception also in a way perceives [the awareness] for just this reason, namely, because the sense *has* (ἔχειν) the form in itself. For if seeing occurs in virtue of the acquisition of the perceptible’s form (the argument is similar for the other senses too), by acquiring the form it sees and at the same time comes to see itself seeing.³³

Acquiring or receiving the form is clearly sufficient for having the form. But why is having the form sufficient for perceiving the *recipient* or the recipient’s *activity*? There is a crucial shift in objects: by receiving the form we become aware *of the external objects* from which we receive the form; but by having the form, we are also supposed to become aware *of the form’s presence in the perceiver* and thus *of the sense in activity*.

The comparison with other causal cases does not help. Water in a kettle is warmed when it receives warmth from the fire; it now *has* warmth in itself as a result. But is the water is further warmed by having this warmth in it, so that it becomes even warmer? Plainly not. If it did, the kettle would continue to get warmer on its own, even after it had been taken off the flame – if left on its own, in fact, there would be no end to it, once started. And the same would be true for any other material alteration. One might more reasonably hold that by having warmth in it, the water *conserves* the warmth it has received, at least until an opposing factor intervenes. But this is not the result we were seeking either: in the case of perception, it would amount to nothing more than the persistence of the *original* perception, until other circumstances intervene (such as the appearance of a new object of perception, or a change in focus or attention, or various kinds of occlusion). There is nothing in the ordinary reception of form to suggest or explain the crucial shift in object. Nor does the possession of a form explain this. If it did, Aristotle could not object, as he does, to the idea that we always perceive our own sense organs (*DA* 2.5, 417a2-9; *cf. Sens.* 2, 437a26-29). For the sense

³² *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.11-12: γένοιτο ἂν ἡμῖν εὐλόγως ἅμα τῇ αἰσθήσει τῶν αἰσθητῶν καὶ συναίσθησις τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἴσθησιν.

³³ *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.12-18: τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἕξωθεν ὄντων λαμβάνειν τὸ εἶδος ἢ ἐκείνων ἀντίληψις, τῷ δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὴν αἴσθησιν τὸ εἶδος ἔχειν τῶν αἰσθητῶν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ταύτης πῶς αἰσθάνεσθαι ἢ συναίσθησις. εἰ γὰρ τὸ ὄραν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ εἶδους τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ λήψιν γίνεται, ὅμοιος δὲ ὁ λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων, λαβοῦσα τὸ εἶδος ὄρᾶ καὶ αὐτὴν ἅμα ὄρωσαν ὄρωσα γίνεται. Note that Alexander says here that the seeing *sees* itself: see discussion above, pp. 41-42.

organs always possess certain perceptible qualities of their own. The reception and possession of a form is not enough on its own.

This takes us back to the original thought that what matters in the case of perception is the fact that form is received *without the matter*, that it is this difference that makes the difference. But how exactly is this supposed to secure a reflexive awareness of the perceiving itself? Perhaps the idea is this. In perception, we do not merely receive the forms of external objects, we become *aware of* them as a result – perceiving is an *intentional* state, which is directed at the perceptible object acting on the sense. And then we might invoke Aristotle's claim that the activity of the object is 'one and the same' as the activity of the sense perceiving it to arrive at an awareness of the latter as well. This is the strategy suggested, at any rate, by Aryeh Kosman's interpretation of the passage in Aristotle:

For given that the activity of the object of perception as such is the same as the activity of perception itself, there must be a single awareness *of them both*.³⁴

On this view, it is not the sameness of activities by itself that matters, since that is something that holds for causal interactions between agents and patients quite generally. The peculiar result we obtain here is due to the fact that in receiving form without the matter, an intentional state is *directed* at one of these activities as its object. The sameness of activities then gets us to reflexive awareness, of the activity of perception being directed *at itself* as well.

Alexander should resist this inference, though. For us, the snag is that it involves substitution into a non-extensional context: if I perceive something as *F*, that also happens to be a *G*, it does not follow that I perceive it as a *G*. For Aristotle and Alexander, the inference is equally problematic, but the diagnosis is different. Inferences like Kosman's commit what is traditionally known as the 'fallacy of accident.' Sameness for Aristotle and Alexander is *not* identity. Even though the activity of the perceptible object and the perceptual power are the one and the same 'in number,' they differ in *being* (οὐσία, εἶναι); and so they are the same *only extrinsically* or 'accidentally.' But then according to Aristotle it does not follow that what is said of one can be said of the other.³⁵ So even if the *activity* of the perceptible object, rather than the perceptible object itself, were perceived – a questionable assumption and one that Alexander himself rejects, as we shall see – it still would *not* follow that the activity of the sense would thereby be perceived, despite their being 'one and the same.' Kosman's inference cannot be the basis of Alexander's argument.

4. Higher-order understanding & higher-order awareness

Alexander recognizes the difficulty elsewhere. In his *De anima*, he appeals to a similar doctrine to explain how the understanding (νοῦς) can understand itself:

³⁴ See L. A. Kosman, 'Perceiving that we perceive: *On the soul* III, 2', *The Philosophical Review* 84 (1975) 499-519 (514); emphasis mine.

³⁵ For references to Aristotle's discussion of the fallacy, see n.17 above. For discussion of the distinction between sameness in number and sameness in being, see the important papers by G. Matthews, 'Accidental unities', in *Language and logos: Studies in ancient Greek philosophy presented to G. E. L. Owen*, ed. M. Schofield, M. C. Nussbaum (Cambridge 1982) 223-40; F. A. Lewis, 'Accidental sameness in Aristotle', *Philosophical Studies* 42 (1982) 1-36; F. A. Lewis, *Substance and predication in Aristotle* (Cambridge 1991) chapters 3-5.

Since the understanding in activity is nothing other than the form that is understood, as was shown to be the case with perception as well, the dispositional understanding ... at this stage is also able to understand itself.³⁶

Alexander claims earlier in the treatise that perception, as an activity, just *is* the perceptible form's coming to be without the matter in the perceptive power.³⁷ But he does not use this doctrine to argue for higher-order perception there; nor does he refer back to it later when he does discuss higher-order perception (65.2-10; see above, p. 41). So his explanation of how self-understanding comes about is without parallel in the treatise:

For [the understanding] becomes and is the very thing it can understand by understanding it, whenever it understands: it understands the understandable form primarily and intrinsically, but understands itself extrinsically, because it has this characteristic extrinsically, namely, that it becomes that which it understands whenever it understands.³⁸

Here Alexander draws two crucial distinctions. The first is between the primary act of understanding, which is directed at its first-order objects, and the higher-order understanding of this very activity of understanding them. This distinction is reminiscent of the one Aristotle draws in *Metaphysics* Λ 9 between attitudes such as perception, knowledge, belief, and thought being directed at first-order objects and their being directed at themselves 'on the side' (ἐν παρέργῳ).³⁹ Only in God's case is there an understanding that is directed at itself *primarily* (1074b33-34).

The second distinction, though, is more important for our purposes here. Alexander contrasts what is understood intrinsically (καθ' αὐτὸν) and what is understood extrinsically (κατὰ συμβεβηκός). Even though the understanding comes to be one and the same as its objects, they differ in being and so are not identical in any strict sense: what it is to be each, what each is intrinsically, is never the same. The understanding thus becomes the same as its object only extrinsically and for a time.⁴⁰ From this, Alexander concludes that the activity of understanding can be understood only extrinsically. That is, we understand the activity of understanding *only because* it is extrinsically the same as a first-order object that we understand primarily and intrinsically – the activity of understanding literally *happens to be* (συμβεβηκέναι) the same as the first-order object we understand at that moment. Compare Alexander's account of extrinsic perception. In his view, certain kinds of things – like the foam on the crest of an ocean wave (τὸν ἄφρον) – are not as such intrinsically perceptible. They are extrinsically perceptible, though, because they are *extrinsically the same* as things

³⁶ Alexander *DA* 86.14-18: καὶ ἐπεὶ ἐστὶν ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν νοῦς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ τὸ εἶδος τὸ νοούμενον, ὥσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἐδείχθη, ὁ ἐν ἕξει νοῦς ... οὗτος ἦδη δύναται καὶ αὐτὸν νοεῖν.

³⁷ Alexander *DA* 39.13-14: τὸ γὰρ εἶδος τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ χωρὶς τῆς ὕλης γινόμενον ἐν τῷ αἰσθητικῷ ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειάν ἐστὶν αἰσθησις.

³⁸ Alexander *DA* 86.20-23: ὁ γὰρ δύναται νοεῖν, τοῦτο αὐτὸ αὐτὸς νοῶν γίνεται, καὶ ἔστιν ὅταν νοῆ προηγουμένως μὲν καὶ καθ' αὐτὸν νοῶν τὸ νοητὸν εἶδος, κατὰ συμβεβηκός δὲ ἑαυτὸν τῷ συμβεβηκέναι αὐτῷ, ὅταν νοῆ, γίνεσθαι ἐκεῖνο, ὃ νοεῖ.

³⁹ 1074b35-36: φαίνεται δ' ἀεὶ ἄλλου ἢ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἢ αἴσθησις καὶ ἢ δόξα καὶ ἢ διάνοια, αὐτῆς δ' ἐν παρέργῳ.

⁴⁰ Initially, while in potentiality, they are relatives, but they cease to be such when they coalesce together in activity (86.23-26).

that are intrinsically perceptible.⁴¹ The fact, therefore, that the understanding is the extrinsically same as its object allows it to be an object of understanding too, at least extrinsically, and it cannot be understood in any more direct way. On Alexander's view, then, human self-understanding is a fairly weak and indirect form of higher-order cognition, which is entirely parasitic on our understanding of the first-order objects of understanding.

A few lines later, however, Alexander goes on to *deny* that this sort of extrinsic sameness results in self-awareness in the case of perception:

The understanding in activity, then, understands itself, because it becomes the very thing it understands, since it understands the forms separate from matter. For it does not understand this specific object [*lit.* the 'this'], but rather what it is to be this specific object, as stated above. Perception in activity, in contrast, is *not* said to perceive itself in a similar way, even though it too receives the forms of perceptibles, because it perceives the things it perceives as being in matter – since perception is of this specific object – but it does not itself become the same as the perceptible, because it does not receive the form as matter. For perception has cognition of enmattered perceptible forms in one way and the understanding in another.⁴²

Perception is like understanding in the following respect: in both cases, the cognitive activity is one and the same as the form of the object, which is received without the matter. But they differ with regard to the kinds of things that can serve as their objects. In the case of the understanding, the object just is the form that is received. In perception, on the other hand, the form is *distinct* from the object of cognition: what we perceive is not the form of the object itself or the resulting activity, but the specific concrete object, that is, the instantiation of the form in a given quantum of matter. But then our perceptual activity is *not* one and the same *as its object* and so there is no longer the link that can take us from the first-order object of perception to a higher-order awareness of itself. Hence, we do not perceive our own perceptual activity simply because we perceive concrete objects. In his view, we understand the activity of understanding precisely because there is *no difference* between the object of understanding and the form we receive. Our understanding becomes one and the same *as the actual object* of understanding itself. The explanation of self-perception in the *Quaestiones* turns simply on sameness and as such

⁴¹ Alexander *DA* 41.6-10: 'For example, if someone were to say that foam is perceptible, it would be because foam happens to be white, which is perceptible. So things said to be perceptible in this way are not perceptible at bottom, because the sense is not modified in any way by them in so far as they are such things.' (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς δὲ αἰσθητὰ τῷ συμβεβηκέναι τι αὐτοῖς αἰσθητὸν αἰσθητὰ καὶ αὐτὰ καλοῦμεν, οἷον εἴ τις τὸν ἀφρόν αἰσθητὸν εἶναι λέγοι, διότι συμβεβηκεν αὐτῷ λευκῷ εἶναι, τοῦτο δὲ αἰσθητὸν. τὰ μὲν οὖν οὕτως λεγόμενα αἰσθητὰ οὐδὲ αἰσθητὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν, ὅτι μηδὲ πάσχει τι ἢ αἰσθησις ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἢ τοιαῦτα.) For discussion, see the notes on 41.6-8 and 41.8-10 in V. Caston, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: On the soul, Part 1: Soul as form of the body, parts of the soul, nourishment, and perception*, Ancient Commentators on Aristotle Series (London forthcoming).

⁴² 86.28-87.6: ὁ μὲν οὖν νοῦς ὁ κατ' ἐνέργειαν αὐτὸν νοεῖ. δὲ γὰρ νοεῖ, τοῦτο αὐτὸς γίνεται. τὰ γὰρ εἶδη χωρὶς ὕλης νοεῖ. οὐ γὰρ τόδε, ἀλλὰ τὸ τῷδε εἶναι νοεῖ, ὡς προείρηται. οὐκέτι δὲ ὁμοίως ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν αἰσθησις αὐτῆς αἰσθάνεσθαι λέγεται, καίτοι καὶ αὐτὴ τὰ εἶδη τῶν αἰσθητῶν λαμβάνουσα, ὅτι αἰσθάνεται μὲν ὡς αἰσθάνεται ὡς ὄντων ἐν ὕλῃ (τοῦδε γὰρ ἢ αἰσθησις), οὐ γίνεται δὲ αὐτὴ τῷ αἰσθητῷ ἢ αὐτῇ, ὅτι μὴ ὡς ὕλη τὸ εἶδος λαμβάνει. καὶ γὰρ τὰ ἐνυλα εἶδη καὶ αἰσθητὰ ἄλλως μὲν ἢ αἰσθησις, ἄλλως δὲ ὁ νοῦς κρίνει.

applies equally to perception and understanding. In the *De anima*, in contrast, it turns on a point of disanalogy in their objects and so applies to the understanding alone.

It is striking that in his *De anima*, Alexander does *not* argue that we perceive that we perceive because of how perceptual activity arises, as he does in his exegesis of Aristotle in *Quaestiones* 3.7. This leaves us with a puzzle. Why, in Alexander's own considered view, must we perceive that we perceive and how do we do it? Saying that it is with the same *power* or *sense* that is employed in the first-order perception does not furnish us with the missing details about how or why this activity is generated. Nor can we get any further with the qualification that we achieve this only in virtue of the general or common power which this sense shares with the other senses, that is, the common sense. What we would like to know is whether Alexander himself believes that other Aristotelian doctrines *entail* that we perceive that we perceive and *explain how* it is possible. It may be significant that in his treatment of the issue in his own *De anima*, he quietly drops the stronger claims of the *Quaestiones*. This would not be unreasonable, since Aristotle makes no such claim himself in his *De anima*. He claims there that we have such higher-order perception, and in other places like *Nicomachean Ethics* 9.9, he even claims that it occurs in every instance of perceiving. But Aristotle never tries to argue *why* this is so, much less derive it from his other doctrines. It is, he believes, simply a fact about consciousness we ought to accept.

University of Michigan