

Complexity and Unity in Aristotle's Theory of Perception

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According to Aristotle, sophisticated perceptual capacities (i.e. those that go beyond the perception of the special-objects by the special-senses) are all accounted for by reference to the unified operation of the perceptual capacity, a capacity that has come, in the literature, to be given the name "common-sense." In this paper, I argue that Aristotle does not offer a mere *virtus dormativa* when he invokes the common-sense and denies it the status of a distinct sixth sense. Instead, I contend, perceptual capacities like joint perception, perceptual discrimination, and perception of the objects common to all of the senses each require that one token mental state be an instance of several perceptual types. I further show that the reference to metaperception that opens *De Anima* III.2 ("Since we perceive that we see and hear") is best read as invoking the general phenomenon of common-sensing: the fact that we perceive our perceptions, when it is joined with Aristotle's later avowal that perceiving and being perceived are the same activity, accounts for the fact that a numerically single activity is able to have a complex content. The standard reading of the opening of the chapter, which takes it as a narrow reference to some type of conscious awareness, is shown both to have difficulty motivating the presence of the claim at that stage of the argument and to be unable to account for the urgency of the puzzles that Aristotle goes on to address in the remainder of the chapter.