

Five Passages not Implying the Passivity of the Perceptive Soul

In Sections 7.4 and 7.5, I argued that the two most important passages that could *prima facie* suggest that Aristotle makes the perceptive soul the proper subject of being affected by and assimilated to perceptual objects (i.e. *An.* 2.12, 424a17–28 and 3.8, 431b20–432a3) are in fact better read in a different way. In that context, I mentioned five other passages within *An.* 2–3 that can make a similar impression on the reader. In this appendix, I explain why none of these actually implies any genuine passivity on the part of the perceptive soul.

In *An.* 2.8 and 3.2, we find Aristotle saying that a certain kind of object ‘moves αἴσθησις’ in a certain way.¹ This could *prima facie* sound like a straightforward endorsement of the *Platonic Formula*. But we are lucky enough to have a larger context here which shows very clearly that this is not what Aristotle means. In the second passage, he says that the object κινεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἢ τὴν νόησιν – that is, the activity of thinking; and, a bit further on, he spells the thought out by saying, as often, that perceiving (ἡ αἴσθησις) and thinking (ἡ νόησις) are kinds of being affected by the forms of the respective objects.² So what the objects are said to move is clearly αἴσθησις in the sense of the activity of perceiving (α_{ACT}), along the lines of the ubiquitous idea of perception as a kind of being affected or moved by perceptual objects: there is nothing to be learnt about the role of the perceptive soul from here. And it is natural to assume that Aristotle uses the expression κινεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν with the same meaning in the earlier

¹ ‘[F]or high [is that which] moves αἴσθησις (κινεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν) over a short time to a great extent, whereas low [is that which moves it] over a long time to a small extent’ (*An.* 2.8, 420a30–1, quoted and discussed in Section 2.6). ‘For if it is sweet, it moves αἴσθησις or νόησις (κινεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἢ τὴν νόησιν) in a certain way, if bitter, then in the opposite way, and if white, then in an altogether different way’ (*An.* 3.2, 426b31–427a1).

² *An.* 3.2, 427a8–9.

passage (i.e. at *An.* 2.8, 420a30–1) as well: here, too, αἴσθησις seems to mean the activity of perception as an internal (effected) object of κινεῖν.³

Later at *An.* 3.12, 435a8–9, Aristotle says that ὀψις ‘is moved by’ the air, rather than ‘going out’ to its object.⁴ The meaning of ὀψις here is unclear: it cannot be synonymous with κόρη, but it is also strange to interpret it as the perceptive capacity properly speaking (what would it mean for it to ‘go out’?). One option is to understand ὀψις as the activity of seeing that can reasonably well be described as ‘going out’ of the eye and that, as we have seen, can also be described as ‘being moved by’ the visible object. Indeed, ὀψις in this sense seems to be exactly the object of the optics.⁵ Another option would be to interpret ὀψις as the organ of vision more broadly conceived (α_{COMP}), so that it can be identified, for instance, as fire. That would fit well with how Aristotle describes the theory under consideration elsewhere.⁶ His alternative then would be an organ (like the eye-jelly) that remains in the perceiver and is, instead, moved by the perceptual object. Either way, there is nothing to be learnt about the role of the perceptive soul from this passage.

One passage that looks more promising comes in *An.* 2.10 where Aristotle asserts that ‘the γεῦσις is in a way affected (πάσχει τι) by the tastable qua tastable’ (422b2–3). This would not be very striking on its own, for we know that γεῦσις can mean different things, including the organ of taste. But the assertion is a part of the passage applying the assimilation model from *An.* 2.5 to tasting.⁷ Aristotle explicitly applies it here to the perceptive organ (τὸ αἰσθητήριον) of taste, described as that which is capable of tasting (τὸ γευστικόν), and this creates an expectation that when he uses the expression γεῦσις in the same context, he should mean *the capacity of taste* rather than the organ. It is thus striking to hear that γεῦσις is ‘in a way affected’ by the tastable. The truth is, however, that Aristotle does not fix the meaning of γεῦσις here by spelling out its relation to the organ (as he does at *An.* 2.11, 423b29–424a1 and 2.12, 424a24–8). So, perhaps the correct understanding is α_{COMP}, after all. Alternatively,

³ For instances of κινεῖν with an internal object (κίνησις) in the *De Anima*, see e.g. 3.9, 432a17 (active voice) and 2.8, 420a16–17 (passive voice).

⁴ ‘Therefore, also in the case of reflection it is better than saying that ὀψις goes out and is reflected back to say that the air is affected by the shape and colour . . . Hence it [i.e. the air] in turn moves ὀψις (τὴν ὀψιν κινεῖ), as if a seal in wax were to be passed through to the uttermost limit’ (*An.* 3.12, 435a5–10).

⁵ Cf. e.g. *Metaph.* M.2, 1077a4–6; M.3, 1078a14–15.

⁶ See e.g. *Sens.* 2, 437b10–438a5.

⁷ *An.* 2.10, 422a34–b10 discussed in Section 6.3; see also the summary at 422b15–16.

Aristotle may mean α_{ACT} , which could be understood in light of the passages discussed above.

However, the main point is the following: even if we read Aristotle's assertion here along the lines of α_{CAP} , what the larger context suggests is that the meaning of $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$ should not be straightforwardly identified with that of *An.* 2.5, for what Aristotle does in the passage is to apply the assimilation model from *An.* 2.5 (including the notion of preservation) specifically to *the organ* of taste. This then leaves several options open for how we could understand the claim that $\gamma\epsilon\ddot{\upsilon}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (α_{CAP}) is in a way affected (if this were indeed what Aristotle means). It could mean that the perceptive capacity is affected *coincidentally* insofar as the organ is affected in its own right (in the way defined in *An.* 2.5); or it could mean that the capacity is affected in the sense that its activity is *occasioned by* the agency of the object, or, indeed, *precisely determined by* it, so that it can be described as receptive, although the soul is an efficient cause of perception. The three meanings can complement each other.⁸ None of this is, of course, directly suggested by the present passage; but none of this is excluded by it, either. What matters is that the passage as a whole does certainly not suggest that the soul, according to Aristotle, is affected in its own right in the sense implied by the assimilation model from *An.* 2.5: even if it is true that a capacity of the soul is described here as being affected by the perceptual object, this is likely to mean something different.

No more suggestive is Aristotle's assertion at *An.* 3.2, 426a3–5 to the effect that 'it is necessary for both the sound ($\tau\acute{o}\nu \psi\acute{o}\phi\omicron\nu$) and the hearing in activity ($\tau\acute{\eta}\nu \acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\theta\eta\nu \tau\acute{\eta}\nu \kappa\alpha\tau' \acute{\epsilon}\nu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\gamma\epsilon\iota\alpha\nu$) to be $\acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\eta \kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha} \delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\nu$, for the activity of the agent and of the mover takes place in that which is affected ($\acute{\epsilon}\nu \tau\tilde{\omega} \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\chi\omicron\nu\tau\iota \acute{\epsilon}\gamma\gamma\acute{\iota}\nu\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$ '. Even if we leave aside the textual issue (*Codex Parisinus* 2014, followed, for example, by Ross, has $\tau\tilde{\omega}$ instead of $\tau\eta$, which makes the whole passage entirely innocuous),⁹ the larger context suggests that Aristotle is very unlikely to be making a point here about the perceptive capacity specifically (as contrasted with the perceptive organ). Just a few lines before, he spelled out the idea of 'that which sees' ($\tau\acute{o} \acute{o}\rho\tilde{\omega}\nu$) being somehow coloured in terms of 'each perceptive organ' ($\tau\acute{o} \alpha\acute{\iota}\sigma\theta\eta\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$) being receptive of the perceptual object without the

⁸ Cf. Section 7.4.

⁹ Alexander's *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.5 attests $\tau\eta$, so one would have to assume a very early corruption. Still, the fact that a change of a single letter (attested in the manuscript tradition) makes the passage entirely neutral on the role of the soul already signals that caution is warranted here.

matter' (425b23–4). And in the same spirit he opened the passage about the numerically identical activity of what perceives and what is perceived by correlating 'that which has hearing (is capable of hearing)' with 'that which has sound (is capable of sounding)' (425b25–426a2) – that is, the perceptive animal (or its organ), with the external bearer of sound.¹⁰ Immediately after the passage quoted above, Aristotle picks up on this correlation in terms of 'that which can hear' and 'that which can sound' (426a6–7), the former being 'that which is affected' and the latter being 'that which acts' (426a9–11). Throughout the passage, Aristotle thus seems to be localizing the activity of hearing in the hearing animal or its auditory organ. If he intended to claim that the activity is strictly speaking located in the auditive capacity itself, one would expect him to announce this important amendment in a much clearer and more consistent way. As the text stands, it seems most natural to take ἐν τῇ κατὰ δύναμιν as referring to the auditive organ (α_{COMP}), as ἀκοή unambiguously does at *An.* 3.1, 425a3–5.

But even if one wanted to interpret the phrase as referring specifically to the auditive capacity (α_{CAP}), this would not necessarily imply that this capacity itself is treated as the proper subject of πᾶσχειν here. The thought could equally well be that the activity/form comes to be, somehow, *in* the capacity of the soul when the body, of which it is a capacity, is affected.¹¹ Furthermore, even if one took Aristotle to be implying that the auditive capacity *is*, somehow, affected, the passage would not tell us anything about how to understand that claim in the context of the assimilation model as applied to the perceptive organ elsewhere in *An.* 3.2 and throughout *An.* 2.7–11. For both the idea of the perceptive capacity being affected, as well as the idea of the form of the perceptual object being present in that capacity, we would need to turn to other passages (as discussed in Sections 7.4 and 7.5), in order to understand what Aristotle may have in mind.

¹⁰ Cf. Section 4.2.

¹¹ Cf. *An.* 3.8, 431b20–432a3, as discussed in Section 7.5.