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KNOW THYSELF: PLATO AND ARISTOTLE ON AWARENESS

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The most valid and surest starting point for the dialogues of Plato, and, practically for the whole of philosophical consideration, is, in our opinion, the discerning of our own being.¹

With this statement Proclus opens the introduction to his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*. This statement seems appropriate at the celebration of the 50th jubilee of the De Wulf Mansion Centre for the Study of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. In this Centre the study of Proclus is currently flourishing as never before. Indeed, ‘the whole of philosophical consideration’ has found such an attractive place in Leuven, and not least ‘the discerning of our own being’, in major publications on consciousness and changing selves. Therefore it is a pleasure to congratulate the present inhabitants of the Centre on the 50th anniversary of their institute.

1. INTRODUCTION

Discerning one’s own being is no easy matter. It is even more difficult to achieve what Proclus promises us a few pages further on: ‘the clear and unadulterated knowledge of ourselves determined in scientific terms and securely established by causal reasoning’.² For him, Plato led the way to knowledge of one’s own being, and thereby to knowledge of one’s own cause and origin, as a constitutive characteristic of philosophy — indeed as a constitutive characteristic of mankind as a whole.

*Thanks are due to the participants of the Leuven conference for their critical remarks to a remote ancestor of this paper, in particular to Victor Caston. I am grateful to Pavel Gregorić who kindly made his book available to me and saved me from a number of infelicities, as well as to Annick Stevens for providing me with a copy of her text in the final stages of my writing. It should be noticed here that they both did so in the inspiring surroundings of Delphi.

¹ Procl. in *Alc.* 1.3-5.1: Τῶν Πλατωνικῶν διαλόγων καὶ πάσης, ὡς εἶπεῖν, τῆς φιλοσόφου θεωρίας ἀρχὴν κυριωτάτην καὶ βεβαιωτάτην εἶναι νομίζομεν τὴν τῆς ἑαυτῶν οὐσίας διάγνωσιν. Transl. O’Neill (1971).

² Procl. in *Alc.* 4.19-5.1: Ὡστε καὶ φιλοσοφίας ἀπάσης καὶ τῆς τοῦ Πλάτωνος πραγματείας ταύτην ἂν ἀρχὴν κυριωτάτην νομίζομεν, ὅπερ εἶπομεν, τὴν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν καθαρὰν καὶ ἀκίβδηλον εἶδῃσιν ἐν ὅροις ἐπιστημονικοῖς περιγεγραμμένην καὶ τοῖς τῆς αἰτίας λογισμοῖς βεβαίως καταθεθεῖσαν. Transl. O’Neill (1971).

In this paper I would like to explore part of Aristotle's contribution towards such 'clear and unadulterated knowledge of ourselves'. The Proclean expression 'knowledge of ourselves' (ἐπιστήμη ἑμῶν αὐτῶν) suggests that there is a type of 'knowledge' which has 'ourselves' as its object. In his discussion Proclus draws heavily on the Platonic antecedents of this expression in the *First Alcibiades* and *Charmides* where problems are raised about the exact nature and object of this type of 'knowledge'. It is well-known that in *DA* III 2 Aristotle may be seen as taking up the challenge of the *Charmides*: 'What we need, my friend, is some great man to give an adequate interpretation of this point in every detail' (169a1–3), i.e., whether it is possible for something to possess a δύναμις in relation to itself. His discussion of perceptual awareness in *DA* III 2 echoes the wording and argument of the *Charmides*, as we shall see. This passage, together with relevant sections from *De somno* and *De insomniis*, has received much attention in the modern debate on consciousness.³ Since Plato tends to discuss awareness as a function of the rational part of the soul, Aristotle is perceived as criticizing Plato when he locates perceptual awareness in the perceptual capacity of the soul. However, in *DA* III 2 Aristotle merely wants to provide an account of perceptual awareness in all animals,⁴ not merely humans, so that rationality cannot come into play in *DA* III 2. Perceptual awareness, then, is explained in terms of the perceptual capacity of the soul, and commentators usually point to the common sense as the appropriate locus of awareness even though the common sense is not mentioned in *DA* III 2. Gregorić has suggested that Aristotle may be refraining from mentioning the common sense because he wants to criticize Plato in Plato's terms.⁵ We shall see, however, that the premises of Aristotle's argument and its position in *DA* III 2 already entail so much of Aristotle's own psychological theory that this suggestion does not carry conviction. The absence of the common sense here will have to find another explanation.

It is unfortunate that recent discussions elaborate on perceptual awareness, and tend to postpone discussion of Aristotle's statements concerning awareness of thinking. After all, the *Charmides* focused on *knowledge* of knowledge, and mentions perception only as part of Socrates' strategy against it, as we shall see. For Plato, instances of the pattern 'x of x' as in 'knowledge of knowledge' and 'seeing of sight' are compatible because they address the same structure of an activity of the soul which has itself for an object. In agreement with the *Charmides*, Aristotle also regards such phrases as pointing to the same problem, and provides them with the same answer. He addresses the issue of whether the mind itself can be an

³ For recent discussions that summarize the debate see Caston (2002), Johansen (2006), and Gregorić (2007), 174–192.

⁴ Cf. *DA* III 2, 427a14–16: 'the principle by which we say an animal is sensitive'.

⁵ Cf. Gregorić (2007), 176–177.

object of thought in *DA* III 4, and develops ‘thinking of thinking’ in *Metaph.* Λ 9. I aim to show that the interpretive difficulties that these texts offer may be somewhat alleviated when they are read as contributions to Aristotle’s solution of the same structural puzzle.

It does not seem necessary to regard these issues as problems of *reflexivity* or *self-awareness*. There is, of course, a trivial sense of ‘reflexivity’ involved in ‘*x* of *x*’ activities, in the same way as ‘reflexivity’ is involved in ‘knowledge of oneself’. However, both Plato and Aristotle consider such phrases as signalling a problem concerning the identity and characteristics of the *object* of the activity at hand. They do not imply that in instances of the ‘*x* of *x*’ pattern soul-faculties start acting as observers of their own activity, nor do they point to the person who becomes aware of the activity of his or her soul. The problem is rather whether it is possible that a soul-faculty exercises its function with regard to itself, and what is implied by its becoming an object of its own activity. If so, Aristotle will address questions concerning the *object*, not, for instance, the question whether we are dealing with any higher-order awareness of the activity involved. ‘Awareness’ in this sense is not the issue at all.

If this reading is correct, the questions we ask ourselves in studying the later reception of these views will have to change. Not: how did they develop Aristotle’s notion of reflexive awareness, but: why did awareness become a separate issue, why did they stress reflexivity, why did they make the rational soul or even an independent rational faculty of attention responsible for higher-order awareness? Within the confines of this paper the answers to these questions will have to remain a promise.⁶ Here my aim is merely to set out a sober interpretation of the issues that Plato and Aristotle chose to address.⁷

2. PLATO

There can be no doubt about the goal human beings have in life, according to Plato: in *Timaeus* 41d8–42d2, 87b6–8 and *Theaetetus* 176a8–b2 Plato proclaims that god wishes us to flee the sensible realm where evil necessarily roams about, and to do so by becoming as much like the god as is possible in this life. It is equally clear that it is possible for a human being to achieve that goal: it is a matter of choice, the choice to change one’s focus in life, and thereby to live more in accordance with one’s self. So the first problem lies with getting a reliable picture of one’s current

⁶ For recent accounts of self-awareness in late antiquity from different angles, see Lautner (1994), criticized by Hadot (1997); Perkams (2008).

⁷ Among modern interpretations my view is closest to that of Kosman (1975), (2000), and (2006). I differ in my emphasis on the nature and extent of the heritage of Plato at play in Aristotle, and in details of the interpretation of *DA* III 2.

state of living, comparing it to what ought to be, and to take appropriate steps to change it where necessary. Plato provides his readers with a number of clues about the psychological apparatus humans need for this purpose. Let us have a brief look at two influential dialogues.

In the *First Alcibiades*, which antiquity ascribed to Plato without hesitation,⁸ we find Socrates approaching the already famous Alcibiades in order to persuade him of the lamentable situation he is in. Despite the fact that his political star is rising fast, Socrates considers Alcibiades unfit to lead the Athenians because he lacks proper knowledge of himself. Without it he cannot even begin to advise the Athenians in matters of political and practical interest.⁹ What is the self which Alcibiades has to become knowledgeable about? Socrates determines the self as the essence of mankind, the soul (130d3-e9), in particular the part that contains wisdom (133b7-10). The problem that is already lurking behind this description is that the soul, in particular the rational part, will also be the place where this wisdom resides. Knowledge of oneself reduces to the rational part of the soul knowing itself. How should we understand this?

The *Charmides* explores in more detail what knowledge of oneself amounts to. After three failed attempts at a definition of temperance (σωφροσύνη) by Charmides, Critias continues the discussion with Socrates and suggests that temperance is to know oneself, after the Delphic maxim 'Know thyself' (164d3-5).¹⁰ He explains that a wise man who knows himself, knows (i) what he knows, (ii) what he does not know, and (iii) whether other people do or do not know what they know.¹¹ It is important to note that this analysis does not speak of knowing *that* one knows. Socrates suggests that each type of knowledge, e.g., medicine, has a proper object (healthy things) and a particular benefit for us (health). Socrates asks first what the object of temperance is (165c4-e2). Critias refuses to accept the parallel with other types of knowledge and claims a special position for temperance (165e3-166c6). Whereas other kinds of knowledge are directed at something else as their object, but *not* at themselves, temperance is *not* directed at any such object but only at itself and all other instances of knowledge as such (166c2-3). In addition, he admits that temperance is knowledge of *both* (i) instances of knowledge *and* of (ii) instances of its opposite, ignorance.¹²

Socrates proceeds to show the absurdity of Critias' position by applying the structure of Critias' 'knowledge of knowledge' to other domains like sight, hearing, and the other senses in general; to desire, wish, love, fear, and opinion

⁸ Recently, Denyer (2001), 14-26 has defended the authenticity of the dialogue against doubts first raised by Friedrich Schleiermacher in 1836.

⁹ Cf. *Alc.* 106c-112e, 128d-129b.

¹⁰ *Charm.* 164d4: Τὸ γινώσκειν ἑαυτόν. Also in *Alc.* 124a-b the Delphic maxim is offered to Alcibiades as the aim he has to achieve.

¹¹ Or: what they believe they know, cf. *Charm.* 167a1-7.

¹² 166c2-3: ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ... καὶ ἀνεπιστημωσύνης.

(167c4-168a11). These are all activities of the soul, both rational and non-rational, which have a proper object but are now supposed to be directed at themselves and their likes, e.g., sights, hearings, desires, wishes etc. Thus they all exhibit the 'x of x' structure. Critias admits that it would be absurd to hold that there exists a type of sight (ὄψις) that is *not* directed towards its usual object (i.e. colour), but is concerned *only* with itself, its opposite (μὴ ὄψις), and other instances of its kind.¹³ Hence a special type of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) which is *not* directed towards any piece of knowledge (μάθημα) but *only* to itself, its opposite and other instances of knowledge does not exist — exit Critias' definition of temperance.

Socrates then turns to the benefit of temperance on Critias' account. He claims that even when the existence of knowledge of knowledge is granted for the sake of argument (169d2-4), the separation of knowledge from all objects of knowledge reveals a further problem. If each object of knowledge is studied by a specialized discipline but not by temperance, the latter could never judge whether other knowers know what they (claim to) know — contrary to the third part (iii) of the proposed definition. Thereby temperance forfeits its benefit for humanity: to know which people are really knowledgeable about which topics, so that each can be assigned the tasks they know best. Knowledge of knowledge without the latter's content is useless. Exit Critias' definition once more.

In short, Plato's discussion of definitions of temperance in the *Charmides* explores an analysis of 'knowledge of knowledge' as one of a set of instances of 'x of x', where x is an activity of the soul directed at itself, including perception. The analysis distinguishes several objects of this knowledge: knowing what one knows, knowing what one does not know, and knowing whether other people know what they (claim to) know. By excluding the usual object of each of these activities from this particular kind of knowledge as directed *only* at itself Socrates generates absurdities and concludes, with Critias, that knowledge of knowledge thus conceived is impossible and useless. This discussion defines the context for Aristotle's discussion of perceiving that we see and hear in *De anima*.

3. ARISTOTLE

The famous chapter III 2 of the *De anima* has always seemed the obvious starting point for modern interpretations of Aristotle's views of 'awareness', 'consciousness' and 'self-reflexivity'.¹⁴ The passage deserves to be quoted in full:

¹³ Cf. *Charm.* 167b10-c2. The separate mention of hearing suggests that the claim about perception in general should not be read as the first instance of Aristotle's unitary power of perception but as the claim that none of the types of sense separately have one instance that contemplates itself and the other senses.

¹⁴ See e.g. Kahn (1966); Modrak (1981); Caston (2002), 760-776; Sisko (2004); Caston (2004); Gregorić (2007), 174-192. See the contribution of Annick Stevens to this volume, p. 35-48. My interpretation is different from each of these authors in several respects.

[1] Since we sense that we are seeing and hearing, it must be either [a] by sight that one senses that one sees, or [b] by some [sense] other [than sight]. But [that other sense must sense] both sight and its object, viz. colour: so that either [*contra* **b**₁] there will be two senses both sensing the same [object], or [a] that [sense] must [sense] itself. Further, even if [b] the sense which senses sight were different from sight, we must either [*contra* **b**₂] fall into an infinite regress, or [*contra* **b**₃] there will be a sense which is concerned with itself. If so, we ought to do this in the first case [a].

[2] This presents a difficulty: if to sense by sight is just to see, and what is seen is colour or what possesses colour, then if someone is to see that which sees, the latter will also possess colour. [3] It is clear therefore that 'to sense by sight' is not a single thing; for [3a] even when we are not seeing, it is by sight that we discriminate both the darkness and the light, though not in the same way. Further, [3b] in a way even that which sees is coloured; for in each case the sense-organ is capable of receiving the sensed object without its matter. That is why even when the sensed objects are gone the sensings and imaginings continue to exist in the sense-organs. (*RevOT* modified)¹⁵

From *DA* III 1 onwards Aristotle is making room for a concept of perception which allows the five senses to be sufficient for all perceptual phenomena.¹⁶ At the start of chapter III 2 Aristotle continues this discussion by addressing our awareness of the fact that we are seeing, or hearing. J.A. Smith, the translator of the *Revised Oxford Translation*, chose 'we are aware' as his rendering of the Greek *αἰσθανόμεθα*, for which the more literal translation would be 'we perceive' or 'we sense'. I have opted for the latter to stay as closely as possible to the Greek idiom which gives rise to Aristotle's discussion in the first place. For only when we realize that the verb used for this 'awareness' is the same as the verb for 'perceiving with the senses' does the passage start to make sense. By opting for 'we are aware'

¹⁵ *DA* III 2, 425b12-25: Ἐπεὶ δ' αἰσθανόμεθα ὅτι ὁρώμεν καὶ ἀκούομεν, ἀνάγκη ἢ τῇ ὄψει αἰσθάνεσθαι ὅτι ὁρᾷ, ἢ ἐτέρα. ἀλλ' ἢ αὐτὴ ἔσται τῆς ὄψεως καὶ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου χρώματος, ὥστε ἢ δύο τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔσονται ἢ αὐτὴ αὐτῆς. ἔτι δ' εἰ καὶ ἐτέρα εἴη ἢ τῆς ὄψεως αἰσθησις, ἢ εἰς ἄπειρον εἰσιν ἢ αὐτὴ τις ἔσται αὐτῆς ὥστ' ἐπὶ τῆς πρώτης τοῦτο ποιητέον. ἔχει δ' ἀπορίαν· εἰ γὰρ τὸ τῇ ὄψει αἰσθάνεσθαι ἔστιν ὁρᾶν, ὁρᾶται δὲ χρῶμα ἢ τὸ ἔχον, εἰ ὄνεται τις τὸ ὁρᾶν [with most mss. and editions; Stevens in this volume prefers τὸ ὁρᾶν], καὶ χρῶμα ἔξει τὸ ὁρᾶν πρῶτον. φανερόν τοίνυν ὅτι οὐχ ἔν τῇ ὄψει αἰσθάνεσθαι· καὶ γὰρ ὅταν μὴ ὁρώμεν, τῇ ὄψει κρίνομεν καὶ τὸ σκότος καὶ τὸ φῶς, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὡσαύτως. ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὸ ὁρᾶν ἔστιν ὡς κεχρωμάτισται· τὸ γὰρ αἰσθητήριον δεκτικὸν τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης ἑκαστον· διὸ καὶ ἀπελθόντων τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἔνεισιν αἰσθήσεις καὶ φαντασίαι ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητηρίοις.

¹⁶ For this interpretation of *DA* III 1 see Maudlin (1986); Johansen (2006), 236.

the Oxford translation hides the puzzling tautology of the Greek, and immediately suggests a larger measure of reflexivity than the text allows for.

Aristotle addresses two different issues. The first issue is the identification of the sense by which we sense that we see or hear. For no apparent reason Aristotle claims that the object of this sensing has to be both the act of sight and the object seen. Here we recognize the conclusion suggested by Plato's argument in the *Charmides*. Because Aristotle chooses the verb 'sensing' (αἰσθάνεσθαι) for this activity he rules out from the start that this activity is exercised by something beyond the perceptual capacity, for instance intellect or the soul.¹⁷ Here the use of αἰσθάνεσθαι carries a lot of weight.

For the sensing of sight, then, Aristotle explores the options [1a] that sight itself does the job, and [1b] that there another sense is involved. The second option [1b] is ruled out for two reasons. The first reason [*contra* b₁] follows from the claim that 'sensing sight' covers *both* the act of sight *and* its proper object. If so, the same object would be sensed *both* by sight *and* by the other sense. Within the economy of Aristotle's explanation of perception such reduplication is objectionable. The same object cannot be the proper object of two senses at the same time. Note that this argument would not work if the object that Aristotle envisages were the sensed-object-as-it-resides-in-the-soul, or the sensed-object-as-it-resides-in-the-sense-organ. For such 'representations' of the sensed object (if any) would be different from the sensed object in the outside world, and could (or perhaps even *should*) be the object of a different kind of sensing. At this junction of the argument, then, there is still no indication that Aristotle is working towards some kind of reflexivity of the soul towards its own functioning, let alone making way for a 'mental act' that notices the functioning of sight.¹⁸ Sensing sight by definition includes sensing whatever was supposed to be the proper object of sight, and sight alone, in the outside world. For this reason it is to be denied that this function is performed by another sense. It follows that it is unlikely that the forms received in the sense organs have anything to do with the explanation of sensing that we see and hear.

The second reason to reject that a different sense senses sight is presented as an *a fortiori* argument. Even if the previous argument is ignored, and the existence of a different sense allowed, this option [1b] will face the threat of an infinite regress [*contra* b₂]. For, we must assume, there is no reason not to posit a further sense which senses the second sense sensing the first, etcetera. Moreover, as we shall see, according to Aristotle each act of seeing is accompanied by sensing that one sees; if the different sense is accompanied in the same way by the sensing of *its*

¹⁷ Cf. Epicharmus DK B12; Plato *Theaet.* 184b-185e.

¹⁸ Unlike Caston (2002) and Johansen (2006) I prefer to refrain from such modern vocabulary which tends to prejudge some of the issues involved here.

sensing, a regress is inevitable. This regress can only be avoided by positing a first sense of the series [*contra* **b**₃]. Since a choice for any member of the series would be arbitrary, it is best to identify the original sense — here, sight — as the sense that senses its seeing together with its proper object [**1b**].

With option [**1b**] set aside, the only solution that remains is that sight senses its own seeing together with the proper object it was seeing all along. Although this solution avoids duplication and regress, it does not sit comfortably in the theory of sense perception that Aristotle has established earlier in the *De anima*. According to Aristotle's own explanation of sight in *De anima* II 7 seeing involves colour or coloured things as its proper objects. But surely sight is not itself coloured? Of course not! Taking as *given* both that sight has to sense itself, and that sight itself is not coloured, Aristotle immediately *infers* that 'to sense by sight' cannot be a single thing. *Because* the outcome of the previous discussion was that sight senses itself, there must be a kind of 'sensing by sight' which is different from seeing coloured things. Aristotle reassures us that this widening of the concept 'seeing by sight' should not constitute a problem. Such a differentiation was already called for, since we also say [**3**] that sight discriminates the darkness and the light when it is not seeing in the straightforward way. Darkness is absence of light which is not visible, nor is light. Light, for Aristotle, is the transparency of air or water which is not itself coloured. Transparency is a necessary prerequisite for colours to reach our eyes, and even the transparent medium may only be called 'coloured' in the sense that it transmits to our sense organs colours (or rather the power to induce in our eyes the perception of colour) that belong to other things.¹⁹ Strong light blinds the eye, and although it obstructs proper seeing and can even harm our eyes, it is still the sense of sight that recognizes this strong light.²⁰ 'To sense by sight', therefore, is more than perceiving colours for other reasons already.

Furthermore, Aristotle adds, there is an oblique way in which 'that which sees' is coloured after all. I take this remark to support the argument that the phrase 'to sense by sight' signifies more than one thing. It is not a second solution to the aporia offering a different, more serious explanation of awareness, as all modern interpreters have it. The continuation with 'further' (ἐτι δὲ καί) does not suggest that the previous argument is to be replaced by this one, but rather suggests a further development of it.

On my interpretation Aristotle's argument goes like this: it is more likely that 'to sense by sight' signifies more than one thing, when it can be shown that its correlative 'coloured' signifies more than one thing, too. For taking 'that which

¹⁹ Cf. *DA* II 7, 418a31-419a7.

²⁰ Cf. *DA* II 12, 424a28-32; III 2, 426a30-b3.

sees' to refer to the sense organ,²¹ there is a way in which *that* is coloured, viz., in so far as it is capable of receiving the perceived object, i.e., the colour that is being perceived. However, these forms or images are only obliquely covered by the formulation that 'sight receives colour': it is only 'in a way' that the sense organ is coloured.²²

This remark, in its turn, is supported by the familiar observation that images of perceived objects linger on in the sense organ even when the objects are no longer there. In order to explain this familiar observation Aristotle has to allow for something to remain in the sense organ. Although it is tempting to explain this line by referring to the *forms* which are received in the sense organs without matter (*DA* II 12, 424a17-19), in *De somno et vigilia* 459a23-b23 Aristotle explains such phenomena with reference to the *motions* in the sense organs caused by perception. Such motions, it seems to me, can hardly serve as representational objects for an alleged inner sense.

Hence, I see no reason to regard *this* activity of sight, viz., seeing the motions that linger on for a while in the sense organ, as in some way a *reflexive* activity that is involved in sensing that we see. It may be that these motions are *internal* to the sense organ, but we are not dealing with the sense organ turning towards itself but rather with the faculty of sight (ὄψις) being affected by these lingering motions. This is a further extension of 'sensing by sight' which is not prompted by the original problem of sensing that we see or hear.²³

Aristotle directs us to the discrimination of darkness and light, and to the sensation of lingering images in the sense organ, only to support the claim that his theory of sensation (αἴσθησις) allows for the observation that we 'sense' (αἰσθανόμεθα) that we see and hear by the same senses that do the seeing and hearing. For 'sensation by sight' covers more than straightforward perception of colours. Hence, if 'sensing by sight' covers more than the plain act of sight concerned only with its particular proper object anyway, it is easier to add yet a further extension, viz., that sight is capable of 'sensing' itself. 'Sensing itself' implies sensing the act of sight, including the particular colour (or coloured thing) which

²¹ Rather than to the activity of seeing (Caston) or the faculty of sight (Johansen), cf. Johansen 245-6, 252-3.

²² Hence I pass over the discussion between Burnyeat (1995), (2001b) and Sorabji (1992), (2001) about the coloration of the sense organ which Caston (2002) and (2004) adduces in this context as an ancient prefiguration of the modern *qualia* debate. I do not believe that for Aristotle lingering images or received forms play a role in the explanation of consciousness. Contrast Alexander of Aphrodisias who explains 'self-awareness' (his term is συναίσθησις) with reference to a kind of sight of the forms received in the sense organ, which, to the ears of late Platonists, would already make this awareness the first step of the return (ἐπιστροφή) to the intelligible realm. Cf. *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.9-15.

²³ Cf. the discussion between Johansen (2006), 254, 267-8 and Kosman (2006), 282.

is the object of that act. On this interpretation there is no indication that ‘sensing itself’ in any way relies on lingering images in the sense organ, nor on straightforward colouration of the eyes (or eye jelly). Nor can there be any faculty other than sight itself to do the sensing, on pain of an infinite regress.

The remainder of *DA* III 2 consists of three sections which Aristotle has not explicitly connected in any way to the passage discussed above. Yet they contain information that Aristotle will explicitly apply as part of his solution to the parallel case of thinking, so a brief indication of their content seems justified.²⁴

In the first section (III 2, 425b26-426a26) Aristotle develops his well-known view that in a given case of actual perception the actuality of the capacity of sight coincides with the actuality of the sensible, even though the two actualities differ in being. The single actuality resides in the receiving part, i.e., in the sense organ (ἐν τῷ αἰσθητικῷ). Aristotle stresses that his predecessors did not sufficiently distinguish between the potential and actual meaning of ‘perception’ and ‘perceptible’.²⁵

In the second section (III 2, 426a27-b7) Aristotle notes that hearing, taste and sight are λόγοι, or values on ranges between opposites such as high and low pitch, bitter and sweet, shining and dark. When the incoming sounds, tastes or colours are beyond certain limits the sense organ is damaged and perception fails.

In the third section (426b8-427a16) Aristotle notes that we can discriminate and compare perceptions by various senses, and must do so by a single capacity closely linked to the individual sensations. The unity that ‘pronounces’ such judgments resembles the unity of thought and the mathematical point. This unity in which various sensations coincide is described as numerically and locally undivided, but divided in being. This concludes, as Aristotle says at the end of *DA* III 2, the discussion of the ‘principle by which we say that the living being is perceptual’ (427a13-16).

It is this last section with its discrimination and combination of information from various senses which most of all seems to demand the presence of a *different* perceptual capacity, the common sense. However, given Aristotle’s emphasis on the fact that its acts are unitary but diverse in being, even this passage allows for a different conclusion. In line with the argument from *DA* III 1 onwards, Aristotle stretches the notion of perception beyond direct perception of the special sensibles of each sense to include seeing that we see and hear and the discrimination and comparison of various sensations. But in each particular case the actuality

²⁴ Contrary to Caston (2002) 762, I believe even 425b21-22 allows for an activity reading: ‘when we are not seeing [colour], we can discriminate darkness by [active] sight’. See *De somno et vigilia* 455a17-18 quoted below, where (actual) discrimination is explicitly mentioned next to the capacity to discriminate.

²⁵ For the distinction see *DA* II 5, with Burnyeat (2002).

resides in the sense organs, even if the awareness and discrimination constitute different functions performed by the sensitive soul.²⁶

At this point one customarily adduces *De somno et vigilia* 2, 455a12-26, which appears flatly to contradict *DA* III 2 by assigning the function of seeing that one sees to the common sense:

(1) Since every sense has something special and something common — for instance, seeing is special to the sense of sight and hearing to the sense of hearing and likewise for each one of the senses — there is also some common power which accompanies all of them²⁷ by which one also senses (*αἰσθάνεται*) that one is seeing and hearing;

for (2) certainly *it is not by sight* [strictly speaking] that one sees that one sees [but it is by something that *accompanies* sight]

and (3) certainly one does not discriminate²⁸ and is not capable of discriminating that sweet things are different from white things either by taste or by sight or by both, but by some common part of all the sense organs; for there is a single perceptual capacity, and the controlling sense organ is one, but the being of the perception is different for each genus [of special perceptible], e.g. for sound and colour; and this is present most of all together with the sense organ of touch, for the latter can exist separately from the other sense organs, but the others are inseparable from it (these things have been treated in the studies on the soul); hence it is clear that waking and sleep are affections of that sense organ.²⁹

²⁶ This interpretation is in line with Gregorić (2007), 193-199, who argues convincingly that the common sense is not responsible for the perception of the common sensibles.

²⁷ Rather than 'which *belongs to* all of [the five senses]', e.g. Johansen (2006), 271.

²⁸ Gregorić (2007), 166 welcomes an emendation suggested by David Sedley who, Gregorić reports, proposed *ἀκούει* instead of *κρίνει* (probably with *δή* excised). Gregorić also proposes to excise *κρίνει* altogether.

²⁹ *De somno et vigilia* 2, 455a12-26: 'Ἐπεὶ δ' ὑπάρχει καθ' ἐκάστην αἴσθησιν τὸ μὲν τι ἴδιον, τὸ δὲ τι κοινόν, ἴδιον μὲν οἷον τῇ ὄψει τὸ ὁρᾶν, τῇ δ' ἀκοῇ τὸ ἀκούειν, καὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις ἐκάστη κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, ἔστι δὲ τις καὶ κοινὴ δύναμις ἀκολουθοῦσα πάσαις, 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 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), τοῦτο δ' ἅμα τῷ ἁπτικῷ μάλιστα ὑπάρχει (τοῦτο μὲν γὰρ χωρίζεται τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθητηρίων, τὰ δ' ἄλλα τούτου ἀχώριστα, εἴρηται δὲ περὶ αὐτῶν ἐν τοῖς Περὶ ψυχῆς θεωρήμασιν), φανερόν τοίνυν ὅτι τούτου ἔστι πάθος ἢ ἐργήγορσις καὶ ὁ ὕπνος. Transl. Gregorić (2007), 164-5, modified.

However, as my additions between brackets suggest, it is possible to read (2) as supporting my interpretation that sight *strictly speaking*, i.e., in its ordinary mode of seeing colours, is not responsible for seeing that we see, in agreement with the whole of *DA* III 1-2 — nevertheless sight *is* responsible when taken in its extended sense. On this reading paragraph (2) has the function of highlighting that this common power is something that *accompanies* the senses.³⁰ Paragraph (3) suggests that at least the discrimination of different sensibles requires ‘some common part of all the sense organs’. Indeed, *all* perceptibles are discriminated one from the other without exception, so there must be a single capacity that accompanies *all of them*, as Aristotle claims in paragraph (1). This commonness, I take it, is then supported by referring to the presence of a single perceptual capacity, and a single controlling organ. In other words, it is hardly a surprise that all sense organs have something in common, because they also relate to a single perceptual capacity and a single controlling organ, *sc.*, the heart (though to each of these in different ways). This is not to say that the heart, or the common power mentioned in paragraph (1), is all of a sudden responsible for discrimination. Rather, Aristotle is working towards the explanation of sleep and waking at the end of this passage, by a single organ that controls the senses. His mention of awareness and discrimination here serves to introduce the common significance of such a sense organ which affects all senses at once — even though this is unlike the role of anything ‘common’ in awareness and discrimination. For instance, the single perceptual capacity is differentiated depending on the perceptible it is concerned with in acts of perception that occur in different sense organs.

Where, then, does sensing that we see and hear reside? Aristotle speaks of a common power *in all senses*, states that discrimination requires ‘some common part of *all sense organs*’, and specifies that for each kind of perceptible the being of the perceptual capacity is different. We should note that in general *De somno et vigilia* discusses a common *capacity*, which leaves open the possibility that the functions that accompany all senses will occur *in actuality* in each sense organ each time when this common capacity is actualised, in different modes of being.³¹ Awareness of seeing and hearing, too, as we have seen, has relevance only with regard to *actual* instances of perception, and could therefore occur in each of the

³⁰ The notion of accompaniment seems difficult to square with either the modern type/token and first/second order of awareness distinctions as deployed by Johansen (2006) 258-260. I believe that the debate over the so-called ‘activity’ *versus* ‘capacity’ reading of our chapter may be less relevant, too. For this debate see Caston (2002), 768-775, criticised by Johansen (2006), 240-1, who is followed by Gregorić (2007), 178 n. 4, 189 n. 25. If awareness *accompanies* each act of perception, this can be described as both a capacity of perception (as the term $\delta\psi\iota\varsigma$ instead of $\delta\rho\alpha\sigma\iota\varsigma$ suggests), and an activity that occurs in the act of perception, residing in numerically the same activity of sensation which is located in the sense organ, while different in being from the activities of both the sense and the sensible.

³¹ Cf. *De sensu* 7, 449a2-20.

senses as something that accompanies the act of (e.g.) sight or hearing. It is no accident that in *DA* III 2, 425b26-426a26 Aristotle specifies that the single act of perception resides in the sense organ, and in 426a27-b7 that acts of sight, hearing etc. are λόγοι on a limited range. These λόγοι exist in the sense organs, too.³² Finally, if we were to shift awareness to a common sense located in the heart, would not the argument be open to the charge of infinite regress we have analysed above? Why stop at the common sense? Or why assume that awareness is implicit in the activity of the common sense rather than in the activity of each of the senses?³³

Awareness of non-seeing and non-hearing, e.g. when 'seeing' darkness and strong light neither of which are visible strictly speaking, is covered by this interpretation: the sense organ *tries* to see, in different ways, and notices its failing. Gregorić, in correspondence, objects that Aristotle's theory of dreams in *De somno et vigilia* is built on the premiss that in sleep we are *not* aware that our senses are *inactive*; because this awareness fails us, we are deceived into thinking that we actually see or hear people or horses that appear to us in dreams', and objects that my theory does not allow of awareness of this inactivity of the senses. I agree with his account of *De somno et vigilia*, but it seems only to support my reading that such awareness rests with the individual senses: if the controlling sense organ switches them off causing sleep, they can no longer provide us with awareness that we are not actually seeing and hearing anything while we are dreaming, and the single sense organ is affected in different ways.

That awareness is always closely related to the actuality that resides in the sense organs, is confirmed when we see that Aristotle is content, in *Physics* VII.2, with a minimal kind of awareness, i.e., the awareness that makes the difference between animate and inanimate life:

Thus we say that a thing is altered by becoming hot or sweet or thick or dry or white; 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. For in a way even the senses undergo alteration, since actual perception is a motion through the body in the course of which the sense is affected in a certain way.

³² Cf. *DA* II 11, 424a2-15; II 12, 424a25-28. See e.g. Ward (1988), Bradshaw (1997).

³³ Cf. Johansen (2006), 272; *pace* Gregorić (2007), 179, who argues that the activity of the individual senses and of the activity of the common sense are different, whereby the former suggests the possibility of infinite regress, the latter does not because it would be useless. But precisely because it is a different activity in a different location, it invites the same kind of regress as envisaged in *DA* III 2. My interpretation aims at staying closer to Aristotle's answer to the regress argument by emphasizing that the activity of awareness is a different aspect of the same activity that is the act of perception.

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: moreover the inanimate does not notice (*λανθάνει*) that it is being affected, whereas the animate does notice (*οὐ λανθάνει*), though there is nothing to prevent that also the animate does not notice [it] when the alteration does not concern the senses.³⁴

Actual perception implies an alteration (*ἀλλοίωσις*), an affection (*πάθος*) of the senses. Animate beings, in contrast to inanimate ones, *notice* that such alterations occur in their senses (unless such alterations do not concern the senses so that they escape notice anyway). This is the threshold experience that differentiates the living from the non-living, or animals from plants.³⁵ Indeed, according to Aristotle no sensation can possibly escape our notice in this sense.³⁶ This sober notion of perceptual awareness does not require a separate reflexive act of sight upon itself,³⁷ nor does it need the common sense as a separate sense located in the heart.

So how did Aristotle face the *Charmides* challenge with respect to sensation? He endorses Plato's view that acts of sensation are always directed at a particular object. He stretches the notion of perception to make room for an entire set of perceptual activities beyond straightforward sensation. One of these is sensing that we see and hear, which *accompanies* all acts of sensation. I have argued that we may construe this as an activity of perception that each sense shares with all others, an activity that coincides numerically with straightforward sensation, while being different from it in being. Thus, in perception instances of 'x of x' do not give rise to separate acts by a different sense, or to an infinite regress. 'Sensing

³⁴ *Phys.* VII 2, 244b6-245a2: Ταῦτα γὰρ ἐστὶ πάθη τῆς ὑποκειμένης ποιότητος· ἡ γὰρ θερμαινόμενον ἢ γλυκαινόμενον ἢ πυκνούμενον ἢ ξηραίνόμενον ἢ λευκαινόμενον ἀλλοιοῦσθαί φαμεν, ὁμοίως τὸ τε ἄψυχον καὶ τὸ ἐμψυχον λέγοντες, καὶ πάλιν τῶν ἐμψύχων τὰ τε μὴ αἰσθητικὰ τῶν μερῶν καὶ αὐτὰς τὰς αἰσθήσεις. ἀλλοιοῦνται γὰρ πῶς καὶ αἱ αἰσθήσεις· ἡ γὰρ αἴσθησις ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν κίνησις ἐστὶ διὰ τοῦ σώματος, πασχούσης τι τῆς αἰσθήσεως. καθ' ὅσα μὲν οὖν τὸ ἄψυχον ἀλλοιοῦται, καὶ τὸ ἐμψυχον, καθ' ὅσα δὲ τὸ ἐμψυχον, οὐ κατὰ ταῦτα πάντα τὸ ἄψυχον (οὐ γὰρ ἀλλοιοῦται κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις). καὶ τὸ μὲν λανθάνει, τὸ δ' οὐ λανθάνει πάσχον. οὐδὲν δὲ καλύει καὶ τὸ ἐμψυχον λανθάνειν, ὅταν μὴ κατὰ τὰς αἰσθήσεις γίγνηται ἢ ἀλλοίωσις. Transl. *RevOT* modified.

³⁵ Cf. *DA* II 12, 424a32-424b2: despite their soul, plants do not perceive because they have no mean (*μεσότης*) of their own and cannot receive forms; consequently, they are merely affected (by, e.g., heat) along with their matter.

³⁶ Cf. *Sens.* 2, 437a27-8; 7, 448a26-30; *EN* IX 9, 1170a16-19. As Aristotle affirms in the latter passage, to notice that we perceive and think is to notice that we are; for a human being to be means to exercise its soul capacities to the full. For this aspect of awareness and its ethical consequences, see *EN* IX 9 to which I hope to return on another occasion; cf. Annick Stevens in this volume. For a different interpretation see Johansen (2006), 263-266.

³⁷ Cf. *Metaph.* Γ 5, 1010b35-37.

that we see and hear' are instances of the general fact that living beings *notice it* when their senses are qualitatively altered in a way specific to sense organs. Thus 'sensing that we see' never loses touch with the perceived object. This part of Socrates' argument against Critias fails after all.

If this is Aristotle's account of sensing that we perceive, is there a compatible account of sensing that we think? We need this to get closer to the Platonic interest in having *knowledge* about ourselves. Does Aristotle apply the same solution of 'x of x' phrases to cases of thinking?

At *De anima* III 4, 429b26 Aristotle explicitly raises the question whether the mind (νοῦς) is itself an object of thought. This problem is the second of two problems that Aristotle raises concerning the mind, because they seem to defeat the parallel between perception and thought which he has been pursuing in his treatment of thinking. The first problem concerns affection (πάσχειν). If the mind is altogether separate and without affection as Anaxagoras believed, how can it be affected in any way when receiving its objects — on the assumption that thinking is being affected like perceiving is (cf. 429b22-26). To cut an intricate argument short, the answer is that 'affection' here reduces to the transition from potentiality to actuality as experienced by the mind when it starts thinking about its objects. The mind is in a sense the knowables potentially, but never in actuality, before it thinks (429b29-430a2).

The second runs as follows:

... and furthermore, [one could raise the problem] whether [the mind] is itself also knowable. For either 'mind' applies to the other things, if it is not knowable itself in virtue of something else (κατ' ἄλλο) and the knowable is a single thing; or it will have something mixed which makes it knowable in the same way as the other things. (...)

And it is itself knowable in the same way as the other things. For in the case of things without matter that which thinks (το νοοῦν) and the thing thought (τὸ νοούμενον) are the same: theoretical knowledge and that which is known in that way are the same. We must look into the fact that it does not always think. But in things that have matter each of the knowables is potentially. So that 'mind' does not apply to them (for without matter the mind of such things is potentially), but 'knowable' applies to it.³⁸

³⁸ DA III 4, 429b26-29; 430a2-9: "Ἐτι δ' εἰ νοητὸς καὶ αὐτός; ἢ γὰρ τοῖς ἄλλοις νοῦς ὑπάρξει, εἰ μὴ κατ' ἄλλο αὐτὸς νοητὸς, ἐν δὲ τι τὸ νοητὸν εἶδει, ἢ μεμιγμένον τι ἔξει, ὃ ποιεῖ νοητὸν αὐτὸν ὥσπερ τὰλλα. 430a2-9: καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ νοητὸς ἐστὶν ὥσπερ τὰ νοητά. ἐπὶ μὲν γὰρ τῶν ἀνευ ὕλης τὸ αὐτό ἐστι τὸ νοοῦν καὶ τὸ νοούμενον· ἢ γὰρ ἐπιστήμη ἢ θεωρητικὴ καὶ τὸ οὕτως ἐπιστητὸν τὸ αὐτό ἐστὶν (τοῦ δὲ μὴ αἰεὶ νοεῖν τὸ αἴτιον ἐπισκεπτέον)· ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἔχουσιν ὕλην δυνάμει ἕκαστον ἐστὶ τῶν νοητῶν. ὥστ' ἐκείνοις μὲν οὐχ ὑπάρξει νοῦς (ἀνευ γὰρ ὕλης δύνاميς ὁ νοῦς τῶν τοιούτων), ἐκείνῳ δὲ τὸ νοητὸν ὑπάρξει.

At first sight the question whether the mind is itself knowable (νοητὸς καὶ αὐτός) seems to be a different question from the one we dealt with above, viz., whether sight senses itself, or whether another sense does. However, when we take the whole argument into consideration, Aristotle's treatment of the question whether the mind is itself an object of thought (νοητόν) bears a number of similarities to the question what it is that senses that sight is seeing. Let us see how the similarities may help clarify the dense text quoted above. In both cases:

1. the choice is between the faculty itself, or some 'outside' observer — in the case of sight, one of the other senses; in the case of the mind, another mind.
2. difficulties are raised for the 'outside' observer — in the case of sight, sensing the same object twice, the threat of a regress, and the need for colour. In the case of mind the unwelcome consequence that 'the other things' will have mind.

Here we run up against the limits of the parallel between our two cases: whereas 'sensing' suggested one of the four other senses, there is no plurality of noetic capacities to choose from. Hence, I suggest, Aristotle resorts to the objects that are being thought as the only candidates. Since mind has been shown to have *everything* as its object,³⁹ the consequence of this argument would seem to be that in order for mind itself to be an object of thought, everything must have a mind (or perhaps rather: 'mind' must apply to everything else, in so far as it thinks the mind as its object). As it stands (without Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality) that result is surely baffling.

3. part of the puzzle hinges on the question whether one of the concepts involved is 'a single thing in kind' or allows for differentiation — 'seeing' or 'sensing by sight' causes problems unless it is allowed that the single act of sight combines the actualities of more than one perceptual capacity. Similarly, in thinking the baffling result only obtains when the mind is (i) *not* itself knowable in virtue of something else (κατ' ἄλλο), and (ii) 'knowable' is something one in kind.

The alternative view which Aristotle adds, 'or it will have something mixed which makes it knowable in the same way as the other things', saves (ii) to the expense of (i). If mind had a mixed character,⁴⁰ that would make it possible for it to be 'know-

³⁹ DA III 4, 429a18-24: 'It is necessary for the mind to be unmixed (ἀμιγῆ) since it thinks everything, as Anaxagoras says, in order to prevail, i.e. in order to know. For something alien that appears alongside obstructs and refracts. Therefore its only nature is nothing but this, that it is potentially. So the so-called mind of the soul (I call mind that by which the soul reasons and supposes) is none of the beings in actuality before thinking'.

⁴⁰ As opposed to Anaxagoras' ἀμιγῆ (405a17) or μηθὲν μηθὲν ἐχει κοινόν (429b23-4). Cf DA III 5, 430a18; *Metaph.* A 8, 989b15; *Phys.* VIII 5, 256b25-27.

able' in the same sense as everything else. What does Aristotle mean by a mixed character? The notion of *κατ' ἄλλο* points to a useful parallel in *GC* I.8 which states in the more general vocabulary of motion what applies in our cases, too:

Again, what is the mover (*τὸ κινεῖν*)? For if it is something else, it is passive. But if everything is itself mover, it will either be divided, in one respect (*κατ' ἄλλο*) mover, in another (*κατ' ἄλλο*) moved, or opposites will belong to it in the same respect (*κατὰ ταὐτό*), and matter will not only be one in number but also one potentially.⁴¹

Applied to our passage, this would mean that if the knowable were mixed, i.e., divided into a knowing and a knowable part, then the mind would be knowing and knowable at the same time though in different respects; if not, we have a plain contradiction. Aristotle could not tolerate the contradiction, but a mixed character of the mind was also unattractive to him because he had embraced Anaxagoras' notion of an unmixed mind several times in the *De anima*. Therefore Aristotle chose instead to keep the unity of mind at the expense of the unity of 'knowable'. The differentiation of 'knowable' is possible by means of Aristotle's distinction between potentiality and actuality — which recalls *DA* III 2, 425b26-426a26.

As it happens, the answer to the first aporia (*DA* III 4, 429b29-430a2) has just revealed that the mind is in a way *potentially* the objects of thought until it thinks. In the answer to the second aporia, Aristotle adds that each of the objects of thought exists only *potentially* when it is in the things that have matter. This implies that it is only when the mind thinks its objects that the objects of thought come to exist *actually* as objects of thought in the mind, and the mind is *actually* the objects of thought. Now Aristotle can have it both ways. He removes the awkward result that everything is mind by pointing out that *before* mind thinks, mind does not belong to the objects of thought because these exist in mere potentiality. At the same time there is a way in which mind is itself knowable: *while* mind thinks, an identity is achieved between that which knows and that which is known, at least in the domain of things without matter, such as the objects of true knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*). Because in those cases there is no longer any distinction between mind and its objects, mind is literally itself knowable 'in the same way as the knowables' from which it can no longer be distinguished.⁴²

The issue is not that the mind is aware that it is thinking its objects. The problem concerns the *objects* of thinking, in this case mind itself. The mind can

⁴¹ *GC* I 8, 326b2-6: Ἐτι δὲ τί τὸ κινεῖν; εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἕτερον, παθητικόν· εἰ δ' αὐτὸ αὐτὸ ἕκαστον, ἢ διαιρετὸν ἔσται, κατ' ἄλλο μὲν κινεῖν κατ' ἄλλο δὲ κινούμενον, ἢ κατὰ ταὐτὸ τάναντία ὑπάρξει, καὶ ἢ ὕλη οὐ μόνον ἀριθμῶ ἔσται μία ἀλλὰ καὶ δυνάμει. Transl. *RevOT*.

⁴² One question remains: if this is so, why does mind not always think? I leave that problem and its solution for another occasion.

only be an object of thought *during* an act of thought in which it has become completely indistinguishable from its objects, and as much an object of thought as a thinking mind.

So in *DA* III 4 we learn that the mind is affected in a special way by an object of thought; there is a single actuality constituting the actuality of both mind and its object which thus become one. Thinking, too, signifies more than one thing in other ways: the mind can focus on composites as such, or pick out essences or indivisibles; in the same way it distinguishes mathematical objects from the composites they exist in.⁴³ There is no need to have recourse to a different capacity for each case: each time it is the same capacity which is active in a different mode of being. In sum: both the structure of the 'x of x' problem and the ingredients of the solution are the same for perception and thought.

However, it is precisely this solution which becomes the problem in Aristotle's famous section on the highest principle as a thinking intellect in *Metaphysics* Λ 9.⁴⁴ The problem is what the divine intellect thinks in its eternal act of thought. Since this divine thinking can only be the most precious and best of things if it thinks itself, Aristotle is forced to conclude:

Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and its thinking is a thinking about thinking.

But evidently knowledge and perception and opinion and deliberation have always something else as their object, and themselves only by the way (*ἐν παρέργῳ*).⁴⁵

The argument of *Metaph.* Λ 9 leads Aristotle to the conclusion that divine thinking has itself as its object. Aristotle now has to raise the objection that usually knowledge, and perception, opinion and deliberation, have *something else* as their object, and themselves only as a side-effect. This description nicely captures what Aristotle identified as the awareness that *accompanies* acts of sight in *De somno et vigilia* (quoted above). We saw that in instances of perception and thinking the puzzling 'x of x' phrases were solved by insisting on the fact that each act of perception is directed at something else as its object, while at the same time the sense organ, in virtue of a different capacity that is actualized at the same time in nu-

⁴³ Cf. *DA* III 6.

⁴⁴ For a more detailed interpretation of this chapter Brunschwig (2000) and Kosman (2000) are indispensable. I cannot do justice to their subtlety within the confines of this paper.

⁴⁵ *Metaph.* Λ 9, 1074b33-35: Αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις. φαίνεται δ' αἰ ἄλλου ἢ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἡ αἰσθησις καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ διάνοια, αὐτῆς δ' ἐν παρέργῳ. Transl. *RevOT*.

merically the same act, harbours a further activity by which it is *noticed* that this activity, directed at this object, occurs.

In *Metaphysics* Λ 9 Aristotle finds himself with an instance of an ‘*x* of *x*’ activity (divine thinking thinking itself) he himself created. This time, however, he cannot solve the problem by insisting on the object of thought without jeopardizing the supremacy of divine thinking, or so it seems. Here is his way out:

We answer that in some cases the knowledge is the object. In the productive sciences (if we abstract from the matter) the substance in the sense of essence, and in the theoretical sciences the formula or the act of thinking, *is* the object. As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, they will be the same, i.e. the thinking will be one with the object of its thought.⁴⁶

The similarity with the ‘*x* of *x*’ problem turns out to be only superficial: in thinking immaterial objects — which applies to divine thinking, if anything — the object simply *is* the thinking. We recognize the solution to a similar problem in human thinking addressed in *DA* III 4. But if in *divine* thinking the object is the thinking, a final question crops up:

A further question is left — whether the object of the thought is composite; for if it were, thought would change in passing from part to part of the whole. We answer that everything which has not matter is indivisible. As human thought, or rather the thought of composite objects, is in a certain period of time (for it does not possess the good at this moment or that, but its best, being something *different* from it, is attained only in a whole period of time), so throughout eternity is the thinking which has *itself* for its object.⁴⁷

Composition has to be rejected to exclude change from the divine intellect. Fortunately division does not apply to immaterial entities. Human thinking may then serve as the model for the divine: as human thinking attains its best only over a limited period of time, because it is itself different from the good, so divine

⁴⁶ *Metaph.* Λ 9, 1074b38-1075a5: “Ἡ ἐπ’ ἐνίων ἢ ἐπιστήμη τὸ πρᾶγμα, ἐπὶ μὲν τῶν ποιητικῶν ἀνευ ὕλης ἢ οὐσίας καὶ τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι, ἐπὶ δὲ τῶν θεωρητικῶν ὁ λόγος τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ ἡ νόησις; οὐχ ἑτέρου οὖν ὄντος τοῦ νοουμένου καὶ τοῦ νοῦ, ὅσα μὴ ὕλην ἔχει, τὸ αὐτὸ ἔσται, καὶ ἡ νόησις τῷ νοουμένῳ μία. Transl. RevOT.

⁴⁷ *Metaph.* Λ 9, 1075a5-10: “Ἐτι δὴ λείπεται ἀπορία, εἰ σύνθετον τὸ νοούμενον· μεταβάλλοι γὰρ ἂν ἐν τοῖς μέρεσι τοῦ ὅλου. ἢ ἀδιαίρετον πᾶν τὸ μὴ ἔχον ὕλην — ὥσπερ ὁ ἀνθρώπινος νοῦς ἢ ὁ γε τῶν συνθέτων ἔχει ἐν τινι χρόνῳ (οὐ γὰρ ἔχει τὸ εὖ ἐν τῷ δι᾽ ἢ ἐν τῷ δι, ἀλλ’ ἐν ὅλῳ τινὶ τὸ ἀριστον, ὃν ἄλλο τι) — οὕτως δ’ ἔχει αὐτὴ αὐτῆς ἢ νόησις τὸν ἅπαντα αἰῶνα. Transl. RevOT.

thinking is always at its best because it has the best possible thing, i.e., itself, for its object.

It turns out that even the notorious case of thinking of thinking is *not* self-reflexive in a more robust sense than any 'x of x' activity is, despite the interest in this passage as Aristotle's confirmation of the Delphic maxim. Divine thinking of thinking is feasible because in this exceptional case the thinking is simply the direct object of the activity — *accompanied*, I presume, by the awareness that attaches to every activity of the kind.

In the end, then, 'knowledge of knowledge' turns out to be a perfectly coherent notion, which can be rescued from Socrates' argument in the *Charmides* without sacrificing the phenomenal awareness of perception and thought. This should not be surprising: Aristotle recognizes the ethical importance of self-knowledge and self-assessment. In his ethical writings we recognize the same care for the soul that Socrates voiced in the *First Alcibiades* and *Charmides*. Aristotle, too, advises us on how to achieve a whole range of virtues, and how to maintain them throughout our life in order to be truly happy — from the more mundane civic virtues up to the highest intellectual virtues of knowledge and wisdom. Moreover, in his famous books on friendship (*EN* VIII-IX), Aristotle gives full thrust to the dialogue between souls which is perhaps the only way for us mortals to keep the care for our soul at appropriately high levels. Indeed, it is only in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that we find 'we perceive that we perceive' (αἰσθανόμεθα ὅτι αἰσθανόμεθα) hand in hand with 'we think that we think' (νοοῦμεν ὅτι νοοῦμεν)⁴⁸ — not in the *De anima*, which deals with soul as the cause of life in both animals and human beings. It is only fitting that Aristotle, by drawing attention to the ethical purposes of awareness, would thereby acknowledge Socrates' insistence in the *Charmides* that knowledge of knowledge must have a benefit for mankind. Surely, Aristotle's awareness is capable of serving such purposes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

To late ancient Platonists, on the contrary, matters would look rather less satisfactory. In their curriculum they would encounter Aristotle's ethics before the *De anima*, so that a detailed discussion of self-knowledge in this work on the soul would be greatly missed in the author who contributed so much to 'the clear and unadulterated knowledge of ourselves determined in scientific terms and securely established by causal reasoning'.⁴⁹ Fortunately, passages such as we have discussed provided ample occasion for elaboration on issues that Aristotle did not address in the *De anima*. As so often, the authoritative but rather creative interpretation by Alexander of Aphrodisias served them well. However, the full story of self-aware-

⁴⁸ Cf. *EN* IX 9, 1170a13-b19, esp. a29-32.

⁴⁹ So Proclus as quoted above, p. 49.

ness and self-knowledge in later ancient philosophy is yet to be written. If we come to realise that some of our modern enthusiasm for Aristotle has more in common with late ancient constructions of Peripatetic thought than with Aristotle himself, we shall also learn more about ourselves.