The opening lines of Alexander’s *De anima* are bound to excite the modern reader. They enjoin us to satisfy the Delphic maxim ‘Know Thyself’ by studying psychology — this, they argue, will enable us to find fulfillment in a life lived according to nature. But any hope of discovering the nature of the self or consciousness soon dissipates. Alexander explains that what we need for fulfillment is to know what sort of things we are, namely, human beings; and we are human in virtue of our souls. By learning about the soul, we learn what makes us human and so what fulfillment requires (1.2–2.4). We are far from the understanding of the Delphic maxim in the *First Alcibiades*, as a quest to know our individual selves (130ce). We are closer to Socrates’ understanding of it in the *Phaedrus*, as an attempt to find out the sort of thing he is, whether a monster like Typhon or one that has a share in the divine (229e–230a); and closer still to a Peripatetic tradition, attributed to Antiochus of Ascalon, though presumably older, which spells it out in terms of nature and function as human beings. There is a still older, more traditional understanding of the maxim as well.

1. It is a special pleasure to dedicate this essay to Bob Sharples, who first excited my interest in Alexander and patiently read through half of the *De anima* with me when I was just starting graduate school. Since then I have learned immensely from his work and his example. To my mind, he has done more of lasting value for Alexander and the Peripatetic tradition generally, than any other individual.

2. Cicero *Fin.* 5.44; cf. 5.26–7, 34. 41; 4.25–6; also Aug. *CD* 19.3.
One of Alexander’s concerns, evident even in the very first line, is undoubtedly our mortality, when he says that our soul belongs to a body which “comes to be and perishes” (περὶ ψυχῆς εἰπεῖν τῆς ἐν γενέσει τε καὶ φθορᾶ σώματος, 1.2–3). That limitation, he believes, is something Aristotelian psychology helps us to accept, while at the same time allowing us to marvel, in Alexander’s words, at the “extraordinary magnificence of nature” (τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἀμήχανόν τε καὶ περιττὸν, 2.12–25 at l. 12). This traditional understanding of the maxim is thus supported by Aristotelian science, by developing our appreciation of our mind’s place in the world.

Does Alexander have anything of interest to say about consciousness? I believe he does, though there is little about 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 treatment in De anima 3.2 of perceiving that we perceive. Part of the interest of this passage is how Alexander develops what has become the mainstream reading of Aristotle’s discussion. But he also makes a stronger and more interesting claim, about how this higher-order awareness follows from Aristotle’s other doctrines about perception. This 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), while at the same time developing 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 actual commentary on the De anima or perhaps a later rethinking of the passage. I will speak of its author as ‘Alexander’ for convenience, since it could conceivably come from
someone else within his own circle, although in this case I fully expect that ‘Alexander’ is just Alexander.

The first point to note is the title and opening line of the *quaestio*, which frames the discussion as one concerned with how *sunaisthēsis* comes about. Although the term *sunaisthēsis* and its cognate *sunaisthanesthai* do occur in Aristotle, they do not appear in *DA* 3.2; and where they do occur, they are not used in this sense (though the passages are relevant to the topic).³ The terms are often translated as ‘consciousness’ or even ‘self-awareness’ in post-Aristotelian philosophers,⁴ including the Stoics⁵ and Alexander.⁶ I would argue, however, that in Alexander at least the term does not mean either of these things, even if in our present passage it should turn out that he is referring to consciousness or self-awareness. The distinction is important, and not just methodologically. In approaching Alexander’s remarks, we should of course keep open the question initially of whether he in fact has consciousness in view and if he does, in precisely what sense. But there is also a question, more substantively, of just what he is claiming when he describes the activity in question 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 use of *sunaisthēsis* is for

1. being aware of something while perceiving something else.

³ EN 9.9, 1170b4, 10; EE 7.12, 1244b25; cf. *HA* 4.8, 534b18. On the notion of consciousness in these passages, see Kosman 2004, Flakne.

⁴ For a defense of this translation of the term based on a broad survey of texts in late antiquity, see R. Sorabji, “Neoplatonist Terminology drawn from the Stoics,” *Philosophy of the Commentators 200–600 AD*, volume I, section 4(d), 159–61.


⁶ Sharples uses ‘self-awareness’ in his translation of *Quaest.* 3.7; see also Sorabji (cited in last note).
The most common cases involve cross-modal awareness an object, as for example when we perceive the hard, round surface of the brass sphere at the same time that we see its burnished golden color, or feel two crossed fingers that appear to sight as one. But Alexander also uses it for the perception we have, while listening, of the distance of a sound, or of the resistance we feel when we make contact with an object. His only other uses of the term are for

1. the mutual sensitivity of one part of the body for another
2. the way in which self-evident principles are known to us, ‘from our own awareness’ (ἐκ τε τῆς ἰδίας συναισθήσεως), taken globally.

In none of these case is awareness of the self or of mental states specifically at issue. In the most common case, there is only

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

b. the accompanying perception of something else.

As the various examples show, moreover, the object in (b) need not be part of our mental activity at all, but may be a feature of the external world.

The present case follows this general pattern. Whenever we perceive something, we

7. In Metaph. 321.28–30; In Sens. 36.11–19; 163.11–16.
8. DA 50.18–20.
9. Mant. 130.22–24. This last case is somewhat complicated, as it involves consequences of an opponent’s theory which are not in fact confirmed by 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 do not.
also perceive that we perceive — this second, higher-order perception accompanies the first. Alexander explicitly states that this kind of perception accompanies every act of perceiving and explains the sense in which we are aware “of ourselves”:

When we perceive, we perceive ourselves,\(^\text{13}\) because anyone perceiving has, in addition to the awareness of the thing he is perceiving, an accompanying perception that he perceives.\(^\text{14}\)

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 perception, since in his view nonhuman animals lack concepts entirely and yet perceive.\(^\text{15}\)

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 a \textit{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,\(^\text{16}\) but of ourselves \textit{doing} it.

Elsewhere Alexander adds that while we perceive, we are aware \textit{continuously} of our per-

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\(^{13}\) I accept Bruns’ correction of the mss’ αὑτῶν to αὑτῶν at 91.29 since the referent here can only be the subject of the sentence.

\(^{14}\) Quaest. 3.7, 91.29–31: αἰσθανόμεθα δὲ αὑτῶν αἰσθανόμενοι. παντὶ γὰρ αἰσθανομένῳ τινὸς πρὸς τῇ ἀντιλήψει τούτου οὗ αἰσθάνεται, γίνεται συναισθήσις τῆς καὶ τοῦ ὅτι αἰσθάνεται. For a parallel, see also his \textit{DA} 65.3.

\(^{15}\) [REFERENCES] Although this \textit{quaestio} 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 τῶν αἰσθανομένων, 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).

\(^{16}\) As Bob Sharples translation of 90.30–31 might suggest.
ceiving 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 during 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 of
himself existing and perceiving.17

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

Later in Quaestio 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 partic-
ular 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:

... so the [sense] that perceives the seeing will at the same time be a
[sense] that perceives the colors as well. For the [sense] that perceives
the occurrent activity concerning perceptibles would also perceive the
things the visual activity concerns, namely, colors. For seeing is noth-
ing but engaging with sight in activity concerning objects that can be

17. In Sens. 148.5–10: εἰ γὰρ εἰς τωιοῦτον, δήλον ὅσ ἐν ἔκεινῳ τῷ χρόνῳ λήσεται τις αὐτῶν καὶ ὅτι αἰσθάνεται καὶ ὅτι ἔστι, καὶ οὐκ αἰσθήσεται διὸς ἑαυτοῦ ὅστε ἐν ὧ χρόνῳ αἰσθάνεται τις ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθημένου, καὶ οὐκ αἰσθήσεται ὅστε ἑαυτοῦ ὅστε αἰσθημένου; ὅ ἐδώκοντον πᾶς γὰρ, ὅτε αἰσθάνεται, ἑαυτοῦ διὸς τε καὶ αἰσθημένου συνασθάνεται.
seen, so that the perception of seeing is a perception of the occurrent activity concerning objects that can be seen due to visual sense. It is not possible to have a perception of the activity concerning certain specific things, without our perceiving those very things, which the occurrent activity concerns.\textsuperscript{18}

Alexander assumes, additionally, that the second-order perception is not of first-order objects like colors “accidentally” or \textit{extrinsically} (\textit{katà συμβεβηκός}). On the contrary, the colors must be perceived intrinsically (\textit{kαθ᾿ αὑτά}). Otherwise, his reconstruction of Aristotle’s \textit{reductio} will not work. If these colors were only extrinsically perceptible to a second sense—as indeed they are to the other four senses (3.1, 425a30–b2)—there would be no contradiction in supposing that there were two senses with color as an object, as he alleges.\textsuperscript{19}

The argument Alexander offers, though, gives us no further reason to accept this claim. The key part of the inference (92.6–8) runs as follows:

1. Seeing is “nothing other than” (\textit{οὐ … ἄλλο τι ἦ}) engaging in activity directed at visible objects with sight.

2. Therefore (\textit{ὡςθ’}), we must perceive an activity directed at visible objects.

\textsuperscript{18.} \textit{Quaest.} 3.7, 92.3–10: \ldots ἐστιν ἣ τοῦ ὁρῶν 

\textit{αἰσθανομένη} ἀρα καὶ χρωμάτων αἰσθανομένη. ἡ γὰρ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῆς περὶ τὰ 

αἰσθήτα γινομένης αἰσθανομένης αἰσθάνονται <ἅν> καὶ τοῦτον, περὶ ἃ ἡ ἐνέργεια ἢ κατὰ τὸ ὁρῶν, ἢ στὶ δὲ 

ταῦτα τὰ χρώματα. οὐ γὰρ ἢ στὶ τὸ ὁρῶν ἀλλὰ τι ἢ ἐνέργειν τῇ ὑφει περὶ τὰ ὁρατά, ὡςθ’ ἢ τοῦ ὁρῶν αἰσθήσεως αἰσθήσθαι— 

σῶς ἢ στὶ τῆς γινομένης περὶ τὰ ὁρατά ἐνεργείας ὑπὸ τῆς ὁρατικῆς αἰσθήσεως. οὐχ οὗ τε δὲ αἰσθάθαι ἡς περὶ τὰ 

ταῦτα ἐνεργείας μὴ καὶ τῶν ἀλλοτρίων ἐνεργείων, περὶ ἃ ἡ ἐνέργεια γίνεται.

\textsuperscript{19.} As Alexander understands it (see below, p. XXX), Aristotle begins from an initial dilemma about the number of \textit{capacities} involved in this sort of higher-order perception, such as when we perceive that we see. If it occurred through some capacity other than sight, then there would be \textit{two} different types of perceptual capacity that perceive color. This, Alexander thinks, produces an absurdity (\textit{_argvos}), since, according to Aristotle, colors are intrinsically perceptible to sight \textit{exclusively} (τὰ ὅπα 92.12–13). But there is no contradiction if colors are \textit{not intrinsically} perceptible to this second sense, but extrinsically, as they are to the other senses.
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. But this will not get us to his conclusion, that we cannot perceive an activity directed at specific objects (περὶ τὰδε τῶνα) without thereby perceiving those very objects (τῶνδε). Imagine that the activity of seeing were itself intrinsically perceptible (something which has not been ruled out thus far), and we perceived it as something which is directed at first-objects. It still does not follow that we would perceive the first-order objects thereby. Even if we took into account Aristotle’s doctrine that the activity of perception is “one and the same” as the activity of the first-order object—a doctrine that Alexander discusses at the end of Quaestio 3.7 (see below, §4)—it would at most follow that we perceive the first-order objects extrinsically, since these two activities differ “in being.” When Alexander assumes, then, that the first-order objects are perceived intrinsically in the higher-order perception, he is making an independent assumption about the character of the awareness involved in perceiving that we perceive. It is not something that flows from the rest of the theory.

So Alexander not only thinks that whenever we perceive with any of the five senses, he also thinks that this accompanying perception is of a very specific kind: it is a continuous awareness of ourselves perceiving which includes an awareness of the first-order perceptible objects intrinsically as such.

2. A moderate capacity reading

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Quaestio</em> 3.7</th>
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<td>92.31–93.22</td>
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To many ears, the details of Alexander’s interpretation will sound unexceptionable, or at any rate familiar. For Alexander is the first, to my knowledge, to articulate the reading most popular today, at least in broad outlines, something I have elsewhere labelled a *moderate capacity* reading.

The issue turns on a systematic ambiguity that infects most, if not all, of Aristotle’s formulations in the opening of *DA* 3.2.20 The most central word in the passage, *aisthêsis* or ‘perception’, can be used for both

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{a. } & \text{ the activity of perceiving} \\
\text{b. } & \text{ the power or capacity that makes this possible.}
\end{align*} \]

The character and force of Aristotle’s arguments look very different depending on which sense one takes to be in play. Most modern readers have overlooked the ambiguity and as-

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20. I am here summarizing some of the arguments put forward in my 2002, 761–63.
sumed, like Alexander, that the arguments straightforwardly concern capacities or powers. But the ambiguity itself can hardly be doubted. Aristotle explicitly distinguishes these two senses later in the very same chapter and extends them to terms used for each of the senses and their objects (426a6–9). He criticizes his predecessors for not having noticed the difference and taken it into account (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 his psychology. His treatment of perception in general in DA 2.5 rests crucially on it (417a9–b16), as does his conception of the soul as a first actuality in DA 2.1 (412b17–413a3; cf. 412a22–b6; 2.2, 413b11–13). In this last passage, he actually appeals to the example of the senses as a clearer case of the distinction he wishes to make.

Now, in point of fact, no reading of DA 3.2 can get by with just one of these two senses: there are indisputable cases of each where the term is used unambiguously. But the question remains whether one of the two senses is predominant, either in the framing of the question or the details of the argumentation, or both. Following Brentano, I have argued elsewhere (2002) that the arguments make the best sense if construed in terms of the activity of perception: that is, as concerned with whether perceiving that we perceive is a second activity, distinct from the original first-order perception, or whether instead there is just a single activity with (at least) two aspects, one higher-order and one lower-order. What Aristotle then opposes is the suggestion that when we perceive that we see, we have two activities of perception, both directed toward the same first-order objects; and later, in his regress argument, he objects that if a second activity is needed, infinitely many would be required.

21. At DA 3.2, 425b20–21, Aristotle uses ὀψις to refer to the capacity of sight, but uses ἀισθήσεις at 425b25 to refer to the activity of seeing.
Most interpreters, in contrast, have taken the passage to be concerned with the *power* or *capacity* of perception: whether a distinct *sense* is involved in perceiving that we see, for example, or whether the sense of sight on its own is sufficient. So understood, Aristotle’s first argument rejects the idea that there might be two different senses that perceive color, for example; his second argument concludes that if there need to be two such senses, there would have to be infinitely many. It is difficult to make sense of Aristotle’s actual words, though, 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 color 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.\(^2^2\)

So construed, Aristotle asks whether there is a second sense which perceives the *capacity* of sight (*τῆς ὄψεως, b14*) or whether the same *sense* perceives *itself* (*αὐτὴ αὐτῆς, b15*). But it is implausible to think that when we perceive that we see, what we perceive is our *capacity* of sight, rather than the activity of seeing. No one, to my knowledge, has defended an extreme capacity reading of this sort.

For this reason, most commentators temporize, by switching repeatedly between the two senses, even within a single sentence. On this more moderate reading, Aristotle argues that it is *by sight* (*τῆς ὄψεως, b14*) that we have a perception of *seeing* (*τῆς ὄψεως, b14*): the way in

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which a sense will “itself be of itself” (αὐτὴ αὐτῆς, b15) is that the sense will perceive 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 and why we should be tied to a capacity reading in the first place. But 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 both that we see things seen and perceive ourselves; or do we perceive visible objects by sight, but perceiving seeing itself with some other [sense]?  

In this sentence, he clearly distinguishes between the perceptual power through which (δι’ ἧς) we perceive an object and the awareness (ἡ ἀντίληψις) that takes place through it, and asks whether the same sense is responsible (διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰσθήσεως) for the accompanying, higher-order perception. He consistently distinguishes between sight (ὄψις) and seeing (ὁρᾶν), 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

23. Quaest. 3.7, 91.31–34: αὐτὴ δὴ ἡ συναίσθησις πότερον ἡμῖν διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς αἰσθήσεως γίνεται, δι’ ἧς καὶ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἢ ἀντίληψις, ὡς τῇ ὁρᾶν ἡμᾶς ὁρῶν τε τὰ ὁρόμενα καὶ αἰσθάνομαι ἑαυτῶν ὁρῶντων, ἢ τῇ μὲν ὁρᾶν τῶν ὁρατῶν αἰσθανόμεθα, ἀλλὰ δὲ τυλίκην αὐτοῦ τοῦ ὁρᾶν; I accept Bruns’ emendation αὐτοῦ at 91.34 for the mss’ οὐ τῇ, which makes little sense. Bruns rightly refers to the parallel at 92.21.
him alternating between “perception” understood as an activity and perception 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 visual sense (τῆς ὁρατικῆς αἰσθήσεως).²⁴

The first two uses plainly refer to the act of perceiving, the last one explicitly to the capacity. He then quickly reverts to the more regimented use of these terms he has used 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 αἰσθησεων αἰσθανόμενα, 92.10–12).

The same sort of vacillation in meaning occurs in the regress 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 immediately 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] (κακεῖνη) in turn, which produces the accompanying perception by perceiving it [sc. the seeing], will have some still another sense (ἄλλην τινὰ) that perceives [it]; and this will continue to infinity, which is completely absurd. The remaining alternative

²⁴. For the Greek text, see n. XXX above.
is that we perceive perceptibles and our activities concerning them by the same [sense].\textsuperscript{25}

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 he fails to recognize is that blocking this regress does not block the other: we might still have 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 on 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 regress argument tacitly assumes this and Alexander nowhere questions it. But then he is committed to a regress of activities too, even though there is only a single capacity, and this is surely just as 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 doing anything further.

The broader context of Aristotle’s \textit{De anima} might explain why Alexander focuses on capacities. In the first chapters of \textit{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 noth-

\textsuperscript{25} Quaest. 3.7, 92.15–20: καὶ γὰρ τῆς τοῦ ὁρᾶν ἀισθήσεως πάλιν ἔσται συναίσθησις ἡμῶν δι’ ἄλλης τινὸς αἰσθήσεως, κἀκεῖνη πάλιν, οὔ μεν αἰσθανουμένη ποιεῖ τὴν συναίσθησιν, ἄλλην τινὰ ἕξει τὴν αἰσθανομένην, καὶ τούτ’ εἰς ἀπειρόν, ἀποσωστέαν δὲ τούτῳ. καταλείπεται τὸ τῇ αὑτῇ τῶν τε αἰσθητῶν αἰσθάνεσθαι ἡμᾶς καὶ τῆς περὶ τὰ αἰσθητά ἑαυτῶν ἐνέργειας.
ing more is required, either for perceiving common perceptibles, perceiving perceptibles extrinsic to a given sense or to all senses, or discriminating between cross-modal perceptibles. So, too, with perceiving that we perceive on this reading: it is something we can do with the perceptual power itself whose activity is perceived.

What context does not explain is why Alexander fails to consider the conflict between this claim and the 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 by sight that one sees that one sees; and it is certainly not by taste or sight or both together that one discerns, or is even capable of discerning, that sweet things are different from pale ones, but rather by a certain part common to all the sense organs. For while there is a single sense and a single principal sense organ, its being is different for the perception of each genus [of perceptible], such as sound and colour.26

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 defi-

nitely 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.\(^{27}\)

Neither Aristotle nor Alexander address 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 or the other is discarded in favor of the other view at some later stage.\(^{28}\) But it is also possible, at least in Aristotle’s case, that both views should be understood as compatible. On this reading, the common sense is not a *distinct sense* from the individual senses and so vulnerable to the arguments in *De anima* 3.2. It is rather a power we have as a *consequence* of having other senses and so is possessed in common with all of them (*καὶ κοινὴ δύναμις ἀκολουθοῦσα πάσως, 455a16*).

Some of the 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 center of a circle is shared by all of the radii extending to its periphery (63.6–64.11): it is “one and the same power constituted from the en-

27. Alex. *DA* 65.2–10: τῇ κοινῇ δὲ αἰσθήσει ταύτῃ καὶ ὁρώντων αὐτῶν αἰσθηνόμεθα καὶ ἀκουόντων καὶ καθ’ ἑκάστην αἰσθήσθαι αἰσθηνομένους. ὥσπερ ἦρον αἰσθάνεται αὐτῶν ὁρῶντος καὶ ἀκούοντος. οὐ γὰρ ἄλλῃ τινὶ δυνα‐

28. In Aristotle’s case, some have argued that *De somno* expresses his mature view (Block 1961; Block 1964, esp. p. 63), while others find this in the *De anima* (Törstrik 1862, pp. 166–67, note *).
tire perceptual system and all its parts” (ἡ δύναμις ἡ αὐτή καὶ μία οὖσα ἐκ παντός τε τοῦ αἰσθητήριου καὶ ἕκαστον τῶν μερῶν αὐτοῦ, 64.9–10). He does emphasize the difference between the peripheral organs belonging to the individual senses and the “ultimate” central organ belonging to the common sense (τὸ ἐσχατὸν αἰσθητήριον, 63.15; 64.8; 64.18; 96.31; 97.5, 10; In Sens. 168.3). But he might think that all perception takes place, strictly speaking, in the ultimate sense organ, where the only difference relevant here is whether it is perceived in virtue of the generic power of perception, common to all the senses, or solely in virtue of one of its specific modalities.

This proposal certainly fits his claim in the 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 Quaestio 3.7 expressly denies this. In laying out the dilemma’s two horns, he states the alternative he ultimately prefers in the specific case of sight as follows: “it is by sight both that we see things seen and perceive ourselves” (ὡς τῇ ὄψει ἡμᾶς ὁρᾶν τε τὰ ὁρόμενα καὶ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἑαυτῶν ὁρώντων, Quaest. 3.7, 91.32–33) and “due to the visual sense” (ὑπὸ 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 about whether seeing itself is colored, on the supposition that everything visible is colored, a worry he then attempts to solve by exploring the solutions in Aristotle (92.23–31). Alexander’s response in his De anima is much sharper and cleaner: we do not see that we see precisely because seeing is not colored, full stop, without engaging either of Aristotle’s suggested solutions (DA 65.6–
8). Rather, we perceive that we see in virtue of the generic power alone (65.8–10). Alexander seems to regard these as two approaches as opposed.

One could try to defend the Quaestio discussion by arguing that it is simply a draft for Alexander’s 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. But this cannot avoid the issue entirely. Given that Alexander is aware of the discrepancy in Aristotle’s expressed views, and prefers one of them over the other, why doesn’t he mention or address the difference explicitly in the Quaestio? The two treatments can be defended on lawyerly grounds. But philosophically a certain amount of candor is wanting.

3. How higher-order awareness comes about

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the remainder 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 ἑξῆς, ὅτι γίνεται καὶ πῶς γίνεται, δείκνυσιν, 92.32–33). But 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 ἐστι καὶ μία, τὸ δ’ εἶναι οὐ τὸ αὐτό αὐταῖς, 425b26–27). Why connect these passages?

A natural suggestion, not offered by Alexander, is that this passage is a continuation of Aristotle’s response to the aporia he raises at 425b17. The worry can be stated succinctly: if we can perceive that we perceiving, then our perceiving must itself be perceptible; and if it is
by the same faculty used for the first-order objects, won’t the perceiving be perceptible in the same way? Aristotle again uses sight as his example. If, as he has been arguing (425b13–17),

1. We perceive that we see by sight

and

2. To perceive by sight is just to see (b18)

3. Anything we see is either a color or has a color (b18–19)

then one might worry that

4. “What sees” (τὸ ὁρῶν) — or, with Alexander, our seeing (τὸ ὁρᾶν)29 — will itself be colored (b19–20)

which seems bizarre. Aristotle’s first response is to challenge premise (2), since we perceive darkness by sight, but do not see darkness, at least not in the same way (b20–22). He does not develop the suggestion further, nor does Alexander. But the accompanying perception cannot consist simply in noticing that the “lights are on,” so to speak, if it includes an awareness of the first-order objects perceived on each occasion, as Alexander argues. Aristotle’s second response is entirely different: instead of questioning the premises, he reconsiders the conclusion to see whether “what sees” might in some sense be colored after all. What sees, Aristotle says with laconic brevity, is

in a way colored, because each sense organ is able to receive the perceptible object without the matter.30

The subsequent passage could be seen as a further explanation of this cryptic remark. If our

29. This is how Alexander glosses the argument at 92.22–23: “then seeing, if it is something that can be seen, is colored” (καὶ τὸ ὁρᾶν, εἰ ἕστιν ὁρατόν τι, κεχρωσμένον).

seeing is one and the same as the activity of color, one might think, then seeing is in a way colored and so something visible, something that can be seen, thus dissolving the aпорia. It's not a bug, but a feature of the view. The activity of seeing would not be intrinsically colored, since it is only extrinsically the same as the activity of the colored object—they differ “in being” (425b27, 426a16–17). But one might think that being extrinsically colored is sufficient to make seeing itself something that can be seen, at least extrinsically, just as Aristotle thinks the sea or any other large body of water is.31

Alexander’s strategy is bolder. It is not simply that our seeing can in a way be seen. It must be seen, on every occasion. Initially, he merely 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 (εξ ἀνάγκης ἕπεται,):

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 as well at the same time.32

This claim goes far beyond what Aristotle claims in De anima 3.2. At no point does Aristotle offer either argument or evidence for his claim that we perceive that we perceive (425b12). He simply asserts that we do and then argues from this to the conclusion that it occurs by means of the same power or even the same activity involved in the first-order activity. Alexander re-


32. Quaest. 3.7, 93.20–22: διὸ εξ ἀνάγκης ἕπεται παντὶ τῷ αἰσθανομένῳ συναισθάνεσθαι καὶ ἑαυτοῦ αἰσθητομένῳ τῷ ἑπεσθαι τῇ αἰσθήσει αἰσθητομένη τυνὸς τῶν ἁπαθήτων ἡμῶν ὅταν ἡμι καὶ ἑαυτῆς αἰσθάνεσθαι.
verses the order here, arguing from Aristotle’s account of first-order perception to establish that higher-order perception must occur.

What is his argument specifically? 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 that arises from the perceptible object and the modification that occurs due to it necessarily produces perception as an activity, once it has occurred in perception taken as a power.\(^{33}\)

Alexander’s language here suggests, at least at first glance, that the change and modification in the sense is distinct from perceiving, which is produced as a subsequent effect. But if perception is analogous to the other cases, as Alexander clearly intends, then the change and modification “produce” (ποιεῖν) perceiving in the sense that they constitute it: the occurrence of these changes in a perceptual power is what makes perceiving happen—perceiving occurs in virtue of such changes.

 Perception does differ 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 simultaneous with the perception of perceptible

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\(^{33}\) Quaest. 3.7, 93.4–6: ἀνάγκη καὶ τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ κίνησιν καὶ τὸ γενόμενον ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ πάθος ἐν τῇ κατὰ δύναμιν αἰσθήσει γενόμενον ποιεῖν τὴν κατ’ ἐνέργειαν αἴσθησιν.
objects we also have an accompanying perception in virtue of the same 

sense.\(^{34}\)

But he does not make explicit how this two doctrines are related. His subsequent remarks, moreover, do not invoke the way in which the form is received at all, but simply the fact that it is received and that the sense *possesses* the form of the object as a result:

For by *taking* (λαμβάνειν) the form from external perceptible objects there is an awareness of them, whereas by perception *having* (ἔχειν) the form in itself the accompanying perception also in a way perceives [the perception] for this reason. For if seeing occurs in virtue of taking the form of the perceptible (and a similar argument applies to the other senses), by taking the form it sees and at the same time comes to see itself seeing.\(^{35}\)

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 objects from which we receive the form; by having the form, we are supposed to become aware of the active presence of the form in the perceiver and thus of the perceptual power in activity.

The comparison with causal cases more broadly does not help. By receiving warmth

\(^{34}\) *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.11–12: γένοιτο ἂν ἡμῖν εὐλόγως ἀμα τῇ αἰσθήσει τῶν αἰσθητῶν καὶ συναίσθησις τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθι κατὰ τὴν αὐτὴν αἰσθήσιν.

\(^{35}\) *Quaest.* 3.7, 93.12–18: τῷ μὲν γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἔξωθεν ὄντων λαμβάνειν τὸ εἴδους ἐκείνων ἀντίληψις, τῷ δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῇ τὴν αἴσθησιν τὸ εἴδους ἔχειν τῶν αἰσθητῶν καὶ διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ταύτης πως αἰσθάνεσθι· ἡ συναίσθησις. εἰ γὰρ τὸ ὄραν κατὰ τὴν τοῦ εἴδους τοῦ αἰσθήσεως λήψις γίνεται, ὅμως δὲ ὁ λόγος καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθήσεων, λα-βοῦσα τὸ εἴδους ὅρα καὶ αὐτὴν ἀμα ὀρώσαν ὀρώσα γίνεται. Note that Alexander here that the seeing sees itself: see discussion above, p. XXX.
from the fire, the water in the kettle is warmed and now has warmth in itself as a result. Is it the case that by having this warmth in it, the water is further warmed, so that it becomes still warmer? Plainly not. If it did, warming a kettle (or indeed any other material alteration) would be like a Toyota—there would be no stopping it. One could hold, of course, that the water is warmed by having warmth in it, in the sense that conserves the warmth it has received, until an opposing factor intervenes. But this is not the result we sought: in the case of perception, it would amount to nothing more than the persistence of the original perception, until other circumstances intervene (a new object of perception, various kinds of occlusion). In particular, there is nothing to suggest or explain the crucial shift in object. Finally, if having a form is sufficient for perceiving ourselves, why does Aristotle object to the thought we always perceive our own sense organs, since they always possess certain perceptible qualities themselves (DA 2.5, 417a2–9; cf. Sens. 2, 437a26–29).

One thought might be that what makes the difference in the case of perception is precisely the fact that form is received without the matter. But it is unclear how it would accomplish this, especially given Alexander’s understanding of the doctrine. We might nonetheless think that the sort of reflexivity we encounter here is peculiar to intentional states (or some subset of them), and that it turns on what such states are directed at. This broader strategy is suggested, at any rate, by Ariyeh Kosman’s related 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. (Kosman 1975, 514; emphasis mine)

The idea seems to be that perception is ordinarily directed at the activity of the perceptible object and thereby is directed at itself, since the activities are one and the same. The same-
ness of activities is something that holds for agent-patient interactions generally. The peculiar result we obtain here is due to the fact that it is an intentional state which is directed at one of these activities as an object.

Alexander should resist this inference, though. For us, it is a matter of substitution into an intentional context: if I perceive something as $F$, which also happens to be a $G$, it does not follow that I perceive it as a $G$. But for Aristotle and Alexander, it commits the fallacy of accident. Sameness is not identity. Even though the activity of the perceptible object and the perceptual power are the one and the same, their being is different; therefore they are only the same extrinsically. But then it does not follow that what is said of one can be said of the other. So even if the activity of the perceptible object were perceived—a questionable assumption and one Alexander rejects, as we shall see—it does not follow that my perceptual activity would thereby be perceived, despite their being one and the same. This 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:

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 … is also able at this stage to understand itself.37

36. [REFERENCES ON FALLACY OF ACCIDENT]

37. Alexander *DA* 86.14–18: καὶ ἐπεὶ ἐστὶν ὁ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν νοῦς ὁδὴν ἄλλο ἦ τὸ ἐέδοκ τὸ νοούμενον, ὀσπερ καὶ ἐπὶ
Alexander claims earlier in the treatise that perception, as an activity, just is the form of the perceptible that comes to be without the matter in the perceptive power.\textsuperscript{38} But he does not use this doctrine to argue for higher-order perception there or later refer back to it when he does discuss higher-order perception (65.2–10; see above, p. XXX). So his explication of how self-understanding comes about is singular:

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.\textsuperscript{39}

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. This distinction is reminiscent of the one Aristotle draws in \textit{Metaphysics} Α 9 between attitudes such perception or thought being directed at first-order objects and being directed at themselves “on the side” (ἐν παρέργῳ).\textsuperscript{40} Only in God’s case is there an understanding that is directed primarily at itself (1074b33–34).

The second distinction is the more important one for our purposes, though, between

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{38} Alexander \textit{DA} 39.13–14: τὸ γὰρ ἔδοξος τοῦ αἴσθητον χωρὶς τῆς ὑλῆς γενόμενον ἐν τῷ αἰσθητικῷ ἢ κατ’ ἐνέργειάν ἐστιν αἴσθησις.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Alexander \textit{DA} 86.20–23: ὃ γὰρ δύναται νοεῖν, τοῦτο αὐτὸ αὐτὸς νοεῖν γίνεται, καὶ ἐστὶν ὅταν νοῇ προηγουμένως μὲν καὶ καθ’ αὐτῶν νοῶν τὸ νοητὸν εἶδος, κατὰ συμβεβηκός δὲ ἐκατός τὸ συμβεβηκέναι αὐτῷ, ὅταν νοῇ, γίνεται ἐκεῖνο, ὥστε νοεῖ. 
\item \textsuperscript{40} 1074b35–36: φαίνεται δ’ ἀεὶ ἄλλου ἡ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἡ αἴσθησις καὶ ἡ δόξα καὶ ἡ διάνοια, αὐτῆς δ’ ἐν παρέργῳ.
\end{itemize}
what is understood intrinsically (καθ’ αὑτὸν) and what is understood extrinsically (κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς). 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. The understanding becomes the same as its object only extrinsically and for a time. From this, Alexander concludes that the activity of understanding itself can be understood only extrinsically. We understand the act of understanding only because it is extrinsically the same as the first-order object we primarily understand; and so in understanding the activity of understanding, we understand something which literally happens to be the same as the first-order object of understanding at that moment. Compare Alexander’s account of extrinsic perception. Objects which are extrinsically perceptible, like the foam on the crest of an ocean wave (τὸν ἀφρὸν), are not perceptible themselves as such, but only in so far as they are extrinsically the same as things that are intrinsically perceptible.

Human self-understanding is a fairly weak form of higher-order cognition. But Alexander goes on to deny that even this is involved in 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

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

42. Alexander DA 41.6–10: κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς δὲ αἰσθητὰ τῷ συμβεβηκέναι τι αὐτοῖς αἰσθητόν αἰσθητὰ καὶ αὐτὰ καὶ

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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.\footnote{86.28–87.6: ὁ μὲν οὖν νοῦς ὁ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν αὐτὸν νοεῖ. ὃ γὰρ νοεῖ, τοῦτο αὐτὸς γίνεται. τὰ γὰρ εἴδη χωρὶς ὕλης νοεῖ. οὐ γὰρ τόδε, ἀλλὰ τὸ τόδε εἶναι νοεῖ, ὡς προείρηται. οὐκέτι δὲ ὡς ὕλως ἢ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν αἰσθήσεις αὐτής αἰσθάνει, καὶ τὰ εἴδη τῶν αἰσθητῶν λαμβάνοντας, ὅτι οἰσθάνεται μὲν ὡς οἰσθάνεται ὡς ὕλως ἐν ἔναλα εἴδη καὶ αἰσθήσεις ἀλλοις μὲν ἡ αἰσθήσης, ἀλλοις δὲ ὡς νοεῖ κρίνει.
}

In both perception and understanding, the cognitive activity is one and the same as the form of the object, which is received without the matter. But in the case of perception, this form is distinct from the object of perception: what we perceive is a specific concrete object, that is, that form as instantiated in a given quantum of matter. But our perceptual activity is not one and the same as the concrete object, even extrinsically. So we do not perceive our own perceptual activity by perceiving the concrete object. We can understand understanding in this way just 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 itself.

It is striking that in his own De anima, Alexander does not argue that we must perceive that we perceive because of how perceptual activity arises, as he does in his exegesis of Aristotle’s text in Quaestio 3.7. The explanation he offers presumably would apply equally to perception and understanding alike, since both are one and the same as the activity of their object. But he does not offer this explanation for self-understanding in his own De anima, but a different one based on extrinsic cognition and explicitly rejects the analogous move for...
perception. This leaves us with a puzzle. How exactly does he think we perceive that we perceive? 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 this activity is generated, nor can we get any further with the qualification that we achieve it 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 own treatment of the issue in his own De anima, he quietly drops this claim.

Which would not be unreasonable, since Aristotle makes no such claim himself in his De anima. He claims that we do have such higher-order perception, and in other places like Nicomachean Ethics 9.9, he 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.