

Aristotle on Sense Perception

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The debate between Literalism and Spiritualism is long-standing. R. Sorabji insisted that in perceiving a red thing a sense organ becomes literally red. M.F. Burnyeat criticized this insistence for the reason that it is ridiculous for an eye to become red in perception. And he insisted that in perception there is no alteration both in a sense organ and in a medium, and that a faculty of perception directly receives sensible forms and registers, or is aware of them.

In this paper I criticize the thesis of Burnyeat, and interpret Aristotle's theory of perception from the point of view of Hylomorphism. The weakest part of his thesis is on the physical connection in a process of perception. Burnyeat considers this connection as the quasi-alteration. As for seeing, for example, the transparent (air, eye-jelly) is only a static material condition through which the color acts on the sensitive faculty, because the transparent essentially does not have any color. But in *De Sensu* 3, Aristotle asserts that the transparent is a nature which takes on color, so air and water are colored.

On the other hand, Burnyeat's analysis of *De Anima* II 5 is prominent. According to him, the transition from sensitive capacity to its *energeia* is an extraordinary alteration, and in this transition a sensitive faculty does not lose its character. Then is a sensitive faculty preserved actually, when it is acted on by sensible forms and becomes one of them? I certainly think so, because the material composition of sensory organ, in which the sensitive faculty resides, is preserved.

When sense perception occurs, the activity of sensitive faculty is one with the alteration of sensory organ. But they are distinct in essence. In *GA* VI, Aristotle states that the color of eye is determined by the proportion of the wet and the transparent which constitute the eye, and that the change of this part is a seeing. Interpreting this text, T. K. Johansen considers the transparent as a form and the wet as a matter. But we should consider that both are the matter of eye and in this material composition resides a faculty of sight. This faculty uses the eye as instrument for seeing.

A sensory organ and a sensitive faculty are acted on differently by the same sensible form. The former is acted on physically and the latter discriminates the differences of its specific sensible forms. And by this discrimination sensible forms appear in our perceptual world.