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Between a work and its commentary, there is always an interval. It may consist of a historical removal, the temporal distance that separates one written thing from the one that later seeks to explain it. But the interval need not be merely chronological in nature. Its presence can also be detected in the blanker regions of a single page: the typographical spaces that divide a major text from the lesser ones that, beneath or beside it, aim to clarify its argument. The border is, in any case, decisive. It belongs to the essence of commentary to come into being at the outermost edges of a work and to move in the areas that at once surround and do not coincide with it. This fact follows from the nature of the form and can be easily ascertained. If an explanation had no relation to that which it aimed to explain, it would obviously be none at all; if, by contrast, it were truly a part of that which it aimed to clarify, it would be equally impossible to distinguish it as such. A commentary always moves in the narrow regions that wind round the work upon which it bears, following and tracing its contours; and no matter how distant or how close to its text it may seem, an exposition never seeks to leap beyond it or to venture within it. As its classical name indicates with a clarity that leaves little room for comment, the *commentum* stays at every point "with" that upon which it comments. In the realm of texts, it is an eternal accompanist, a permanent resident of the shifting space of being "with" (*cum*). It lives nowhere if not in company: were it ever forced to be, so to speak, without its "with," it would not be at all.

For the greater part of its history, philosophy has been a practice of commentary, and it has conceived its most brilliant inventions at the edges of the corpus it has continued to accompany. Late antiquity and the Middle Ages are perhaps the most illustrious cases, periods of the proliferation of glosses, expositions, and paraphrases (to say nothing of annotated editions and indexes) of all kinds. It is a truism that the thinkers of these epochs regularly departed from the theses of the tradition and, more precisely, from those stated *in littera* by the one who was for them the Philosopher par excellence, Aristotle. But such a claim means little as long as it leaves unspecified the role played by the encounter with

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"tradition" in such a setting. The commentators of late antiquity, the *falāsifa* and *filosofim* of classical Arabic culture, and the doctors of the Latin Middle Ages may well all have conjoined their inquiries, in differing ways, to those of the authorities of antiquity. The fact remains: more than once, they received from the classics something other than what had been transmitted to them. It followed from the nature of their craft. Glossators and their kind are incessantly in search of the animating element in their textual objects that bears no name: that dimension that, unsaid, demands in time to be exposed. Thinkers trained as readers, the philosophers of the tradition were no exception. They knew how to find the secret source of incompletion sealed in every work of thought, and how to draw from it the matter of their art.

Consider that most far-reaching of ancient philosophical inventions: the concept of the perception of the fact of perception, the "sense," as Aristotle wrote in the *De Anima*, "that I am seeing and hearing."[1] The Philosopher himself had invoked it more than once.[2] He found himself obliged, for reasons of method, to raise the question of the faculty of the soul to which one might attribute its activity; and if one considers all his treatises together, one must conclude that on the surface, at least, he proposed more than a single answer. At no point, however, did Aristotle dwell at length on the nature of the "sensation of sensing" as a particular variety of *aisthēsis*, distinct or indistinct from others of its kind, or even in its own varieties; and nowhere did he dedicate more attention to it than in the *De Anima*, where his discussion of the matter fills less than a single page. The sensation of sensing is nowhere treated systematically in the classic treatises, which assign to it no technical designation. Strictly speaking, its concept, one must conclude, is not Aristotle's own. It was not the master but his pupils who, in the centuries following the dissemination of the peripatetic doctrine, made of the perception of perceiving a full-fledged philosophical concept. And it was they who gave it a name: *sunaisthēsis*.

The distant origin of the modern "synaesthesia," the Greek term was no neologism at the time the late ancient thinkers bestowed upon it a technical sense in the doctrine of the soul. In the classical varieties of the language, admittedly, the noun appears to have constituted something of a rare expression, but it is not without significance that the verb from which it was drawn, *sunaisthanesthai*, can be found in two passages of Aristotle's own treatises. Formed by the addition of the prefix "with" (*sun-*) to the verb "to sense" or "to perceive" (*aisthanesthai*), the expression in all likelihood designated a "feeling in common," a perception shared by more than one. It is telling that the Stagirite invoked it in his analysis of friendship in the *Eudemian* as well as the *Nichomachean Ethics*.[3] At this point in the

1. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 2, 435 b 12–13.
2. See, most famously, Aristotle, *De Insomniis*, 2, 455 a 13–455 a 26.
3. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, H, 12, 1254 b 24; Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, IX, 9, 1170 b 4. On the sense of *sunaisthanesthai* in these passages, see Antonia Cancrini, *Syneidesis: Il tema semantico della "con-scientia" nella Grecia antica* (Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1970), pp. 18–19; as well as Hans-Robert Schwyzer, "'Bewusst' und 'Unbewusst' bei Plotin," in *Les Sources de Plotin, Fondation Hardt pour l'étude de*

course of the Greek language, the application of the term was to the communal life of many, and its meaning lay far from the one that would be later attributed to it by the commentators.

One of the earliest indications of a shift in the sense of the expression can be found in the medical literature that flourished after the beginning of the Christian era. It has been noted that Galen, for instance, employs *sunaisthēsis* to designate a sensation that is "in common" not because it is shared by many but in that it reaches a single body all at once, while consisting in effect of multiple physiological affections: the physician can characterize pain, for example, as being "felt simultaneously with the perception of the seething of the blood" (*meta sphugmou sunaisthēseōs*).[4] In other medical authors of the period, such as Aretaeus, one finds the nominal and verbal forms of the expression used in a much more general sense: here the word appears to designate the acts of "detection," "registration," and "realization" of any sensation.[5] The word in this broad meaning soon left the terrain of medicine and entered common usage, and it was not long before authors as diverse as Philo Judaeus and Sextus Empiricus could invoke it to refer to the process of "noticing" or "remarking" upon a felt fact.[6]

Sometime close to the beginning of the third century A.D., Alexander of Aphrodisias devoted one of his *Quaestiones* to *sunaisthēsis*, which he defined in a meaning at once wider than that of the Hellenistic physicians and a good deal more precise than that of many of the writers of the time. His point of departure was the dictum of the third book of the Aristotelian *De Anima*: "Since we sense that we are seeing and hearing, necessarily it is either by sight that [one] senses that one sees, or by another sense."[7] The remark with which the commentator opened his discussion of the classical proposition already contained the new term, by which Alexander named an act to which the Philosopher himself had given no name. One must understand, the exegete began by explaining, that in this sentence Aristotle "enquires how *sunaisthēsis* comes about for us when we sense certain things, and by what [it comes about] [*zētei, pōs hē sunaisthēsis hēmin*

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l'antiquité classique, vol. 5 (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), pp. 343–90, esp. pp. 355–66; Pierre Rodrigo, "*Synaisthanesthai*: le point sensible de l'amitié parfaite chez Aristote," *Philosophie* 12 (1986), pp. 35–51; Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia. La Notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique* (1974; Paris: Vrin, 1984), esp. pp. 238–45. On the term *sunaisthēsis*, see also Guido Badalamenti, "Ierocle stoico e il concetto di Università di Firenze ΣΥΝΑΙΣΘΣΙΣ," *Annali del Dipartimento di filosofia* 3 (1987), pp. 53–97, esp. pp. 85–92; compare Richard Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, A Sourcebook*, vol. 1: *Psychology* (London: Duckworth, 2004), pp. 159–60, which alludes to Aristotle's mention of *sunaisthēsis* with reference to insects in *Historia Animalium*, 534 b 18.

4. Galen, *Therapeutikē methodos*, XIII, 1 (X 875, 14 Kühn).

5. Aretaeus, II, 9, 2, p. 30. 25 Hude (*CMG* II, 1923); Iv, 2, 4, p. 66. 10.

6. Polybius, V, 72, 5; Philo Judaeus, *De virtibus*, 76; Sextus Empiricus, *Adv. Math.* IX, 68. For these and other references, see Schwyzer, "'Bewusst' und 'Unbewusst' bei Plotin," pp. 356–57. Compare Gertrud Jung, "*Suneidesis, conscientia*, Bewusstsein," *Archiv für die gesamte Pscyhologie* 89 (1933), pp. 525–50, esp. pp. 237–39.

7. Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 2, 425 b 11–12.

ginetai, epeidan aisthanōmetha tinōn, kai tini]."[8] The commentator went on to assert the universality of the phenomenon: "For to everyone who senses something," he made clear, "there comes about, in addition to the apprehension of the thing that he is sensing, also a certain *sunaisthēsis* of [the fact] that he is sensing" (*Panti gar aisthanomenōi tinos pros tēi antilēpsei toutou ou aisthanetai, ginetai sunaisthēsis tis kai tou hoti aisthanetai*).[9] It was a variation on the claim he advanced in the commentary on the *De Sensu*, where he wrote that "everyone, when perceiving," possesses a *sunaisthēsis* that "he exists and perceives."[10] In the *quaestio* on the *De Anima*, Alexander went to the greatest of lengths to insist on the importance of this fact, which pertained by nature "to everything that has sensation." "The *sunaisthēsis* of sensing," Alexander explained in his conclusion, "comes about in sensation's simultaneously sensing both the thing sensed and its own proper ability in relation to the thing sensed. And for this reason it follows necessarily, for everything that has sensation, that it also has *sunaisthēsis* of its own sensing; it follows, for the sensation that senses some one of the outside things sensed, that it simultaneously also senses itself."[11]

Reading the classical *quaestio* today, it is difficult to avoid the impression that it bears on a structure of the soul close in form to much better known varieties of awareness named long after it. In the guise of annotating an obscure principle in the Aristotelian doctrine of sensation, the Hellenistic commentator could be said to have offered an unmistakable, if compressed, account of what would one day be called self-consciousness: one might even infer that *sunaisthēsis* is its oldest name. But everything depends on the translation of the ancient term, and on this question contemporary classical scholars, for better or for worse, do not concur. Many, to be sure, make no mention of a philosophical or even philological question; but their practice as editors and translators betrays the difficulty of the problem. In contemporary discussions of Alexander, Simplicius, Damascius, Philoponus, and Priscian, one very often finds the Greek expression rendered by "consciousness" and "self-consciousness."[12] Yet other choices have also been made. In his English version of the *Quaestiones*, R. W.

8. The *quaestio* is III, 7, in Ivo Bruns, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora, Supplementum Aristotelicum*, vol. 2.2 (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1892), p. 91. 28–29; trans. R. W. Sharples, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: Quaestiones 2.16–3.15* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 54–56.

9. Bruns, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora*, p. 91. 29–31; Sharples, *Quaestiones*, p. 54.

10. Paul Wendland, ed., *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. III, part 1: *Alexandri in Librum De Sensu Commentarium* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1901), p. 148. 9–10; trans. Alan Towey, *Alexander of Aphrodisias: On Aristotle's "On Sense Perception"* (London: Duckworth, 2000), p. 134.

11. *hē men dē sunaisthēsis tou aisthanesthai ginomenē en tōi tēn aisthēsin hama te [tēi] tou aisthētou kai tēs idias peri to aisthēton energeias aisthanesthai. dio ex anagkēs hepetai panti tēi aisthanomenōi sunaisthanesthai kai heautou aisthanomenou tēi hepesthai tēi aisthēsei aisthanomenōi tinos tōn aisthētōn exō ontos to hama kai heautēs aisthanesthai.* Bruns, *Alexandri Aphrodisiensis praeter Commentaria Scripta Minora*, p. 93. 18–22; Sharples, *Quaestiones*, p. 56.

12. See, among many others: Ilsetraut Hadot, "La Théorie de la perception chez les Néoplatoniciens: Sensation (*aisthēsis*), sensation commune (*koinē aisthēsis*), sensibles communs (*koina aisthēta*) et conscience de soi (*sunaisthēsis*)," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 8 (1997), pp. 33–85 (esp. pp. 63–71, where *sunaisthēsis* appears at some times as "conscience," at others as "conscience de soi");

Sharples consistently translates the term as "self-awareness," while Alan Towey, in his edition of Alexander's commentary on the *De Sensu*, opts for another expression, further still from the modern idiom: "joint perception."[13]

That rendition is literal but exact. In distinction to almost all the modern equivalents proposed for it, the Greek term *sunaisthēsis* contains no reference to a "self," and, in contrast to many of the contemporary scholars, Alexander at no point raises the question of an awareness of a subjective state (let alone one of cognition, as is implied by the invocation of "consciousness," if one takes the modern philosophical term in its standard sense). In his gloss, the commentator finds in the letter of his teacher not an inquiry into the nature of "self-sensation" or "self-awareness," as the English translation has it, but what one might term "*with*-sensation," and "how it comes about for us."[14] Alexander shows little interest in the reflection of perception upon itself, and there is no clear sign that he believed Aristotle, for his part, to have meditated on such a subject in the *De Anima*. The commentator's *quaestio* defines a movement of the soul that involves the coincidence not of the self with itself but of an event and its potentiality to occur: the soul's sensation of a "sensible thing" and its "ability in relation to the thing sensed." This is an activity in the life of the animal that lies beyond, or before, the awareness of a single and a doubled self alike: a structural "perceiving-with," by which the perception of perceptual qualities would be, at every moment, necessarily "joined" to another perception, with which it did not altogether coincide. This would be the natural accompaniment to the execution of every act of sensation. Constantly with it, without being completely one with it, it would tap out the measures, so to speak, of the time in which something was sensed at all.

Sunaisthēsis remained a technical term in ancient philosophy long after Alexander of Aphrodisias. It played a notable role in the thought of Plotinus, who knew the Aristotelian commentators well and discussed Alexander's exegeses, in particular, in the seminars he held in Rome in the middle of the third century.[15]

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trans. William Charlton, *'Philoponus' On Aristotle's "On the Soul" 3. 1–8* (London: Duckworth, 2000); Pamela Huby renders the term as "consciousness" in her translation of Priscian's *Metaphrasus in Theophrastum: Priscian on Theophrastus'* On Sense-Perception *with 'Simplicius' on Aristotle's* On the Soul 2. 5–12, trans. Pamela Huby and Carlos Steel (London: Duckworth, 1997). Elsewhere Huby adopts "self-awareness" as a translation of the term: see William W. Fortenbaugh, Pamela M. Huby, Robert W. Sharples, and Dimitri Gutas, eds., *Theophrastus of Eresus: Sources for His Life, Writings, Thought, and Influence*, commentary vol. 4: *Psychology*, by Pamela Huby with contributions on the Arabic materials by Dimitri Gutas (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1999), pp. 81–82.

13. Towey, *On Aristotle's "On Sense Perception,"* pp. 36, 163.

14. The English translation is to be found in Sharples, *Quaestiones*, p. 54.

15. On *sunaisthēsis* in the *Enneads* (IV, 4; V, 1; V, 3; V, 4; V, 6), see Schwyzer, "'Bewusst' und 'Unbewusst' bei Plotin"; F. M. Schroeder, "Synousia, Synaisthesis and Sunesis: Presence and Dependence in the Plotinian Philosophy of Consciousness," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 2. 36. 1 (1987), pp. 677–99, as well as "Conversion of Consciousness in Plotinus Enneads 5. 1. [10] 7," *Hermes* 114 (1986), pp. 186–95; Ottfried Becker, *Plotin und die geistige Aneignung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1940), esp. pp. 21–40; P. Lautner, "Rival Theories of Self-Awareness in Late Neo-Platonism," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 29 (1994), pp. 107–16; Andrew Smith, "Consciousness and Quasiconsciousness in Plotinus," *Phronesis* 23, no. 3 (1978), pp. 292–301.

In time, the works of the early commentator became regular objects of study, and later thinkers came to draw from Alexander's concept consequences that Aristotle appears never to have considered. It is already possible to detect the signs of an alteration of the notion of *sunaisthēsis* in the first systematic exposition of the Aristotelian treatise on the soul to have survived from antiquity, the *Paraphrase* on the *De Anima* completed by Themistius in the mid-fourth century. Themistius commented upon the Aristotelian work in meticulous detail and, when he came to discuss the sense of sensing considered by the Philosopher in Book Gamma, he naturally invoked the concept defined by Alexander for the act. To infer that the commentator of Constantinople limited himself to retracing the exegetical steps of his predecessor, however, would be profoundly to mistake the nature of his art. If one examines the text of the *Paraphrase* carefully, it seems that Themistius took from the tradition a thing he was the first to find in it, and his reflections lead one to believe that he may well have received from those who went before him a concept that was never transmitted to him as such.

Themistius recalls and rephrases Aristotle's discussion of the sense by which "we sense that we are seeing and hearing" with precision, and at no point in his explanation of the perception of perceiving does he invoke any term other than the one employed for the experience by the Philosopher himself: *aisthēsis.* This fact alone marks a departure from Alexander, but it is less significant than the one that soon follows. Having established that it cannot be by a sense other than sight that one perceives that one is seeing, Themistius turns to the successive principle advanced by the Philosopher: that sight not only perceives the sensible but also perceives the event of its own perception. For this reason "it is clear," Aristotle had written, "that sensing by sight is not a single thing" (*oukh hen to tēi opsei aisthanesthai*). And as an illustration of the thesis, he had adduced a further fact: "when we do not see," he wrote, "it is by sight that we discern darkness from light" (*gar hotan mē horōmen, tēi opsei krinomen kai to skotos kai to phōs, all' oukh hōsautōs*).[16]

Although the Philosopher himself did not discuss it at any length, the phenomenon to which he alluded raised at least as many questions as it answered. In what way, after all, can one discern obscurity by the faculty of vision and see, in the full meaning of the term, the dark? None would doubt that a sense can be affected by the presence of its proper quality: as it is commonly understood, perception is nothing else. But in what way could the senses be said to apprehend a mere privation and to be receptive not to the presence but to the absence of their characteristic qualities? Themistius finds the solution to the difficulty in the concept of *sunaisthēsis.* "Indeed, when we do not see," he writes, paraphrasing the Stagirite, "<as well as when we see>, we 'discern [objects] by sight,' and we not

16. *De Anima,* III, 2, 425 b 21–22. It is perhaps in relation to this passage that one must understand the Aristotelian statement according to which the sense of sight, like every other, has in truth two objects: "the visible and the invisible" (*De Anima,* II, 11, 424 a 10–12: *epi d'hōsper horatou kai aoratou hēn pōs hē opsis, homoiōs de kai hai loipai tōn antikeimenōn, houto hē haphē tou haptou kai anaptou*).

only perceive light but also jointly perceive darkness [*skotous sunaisthanometha*], yet not in exactly the same way."[17] There is, in other words, a perception of the absence of perception. But it is so much a "sensing" (*aisthēsis*) in the narrow sense as a "sensing-with" (*sunaisthēsis*), by which the sensitive faculty, finding itself in the lack of all positive qualities, "jointly perceives" its purely privative state. Themistius leaves no doubt that in psychology, such a sensation of the absence of sensation is every bit as important as the sensation of its presence. He defines the two as the two symmetrical acts of a single faculty, which apprehends, in each case, a bare fact of perception: "We perceive that we are not seeing," he writes, "by the very same sense by which we also perceive that we are seeing."[18]

Methodically retracing the path of the Aristotelian treatise, Themistius immediately moves on from this passage and its problems and, faithful to the book on which he comments, goes no further in the analysis of the sense of sensing and its absence. That was to be the achievement of a later scholar. Of the last generation of the Greek commentators of antiquity, Priscian of Lydia lived a good three centuries after the author of the *Quaestiones* and some hundred years after Themistius. He was a distinguished representative of that moment of late antiquity in which the interpretation of the peripatetic teachings could no longer be distinguished from the elaboration of neo-Platonic doctrine. Little is known of his life, but he is said to have played an active role in the Academy of Athens until 529, when Justinian decreed that the pagan center of learning be definitively closed. Accepting an invitation from a monarch more benevolently disposed to his profession than was the Christian emperor, Priscian then journeyed, together with two illustrious colleagues, Damascius and Simplicius, to the court of the Persian king Khosroes. Today only one of Priscian's works survives in its totality: a *Metaphrase* of a lost treatise on psychology by Aristotle's early successor, Theophrastus. It offers a brief but far-reaching exposition of the problem of the sensation of sensing, which at once recalls and refashions the invention of the Aristotelian exegetes.

Turning to the question of *sunaisthēsis* in the final paragraphs of his *Metaphrase*, Priscian introduces the argument of Theophrastus by explaining that "it proceeds along the same lines as Aristotle" (*kata ta auta tōi Aristotelei diatithēsi ton logon*).[19] One would be at a loss, however, to find any exact textual source, either in the *De Anima* or in the *Parva Naturalia*, for the bulk of the discussion that

17. The full passage reads as follows: *phaneron toinun hoti oukh haplōs legetai to aisthanesthai. kai gar hotan mē horōmen, tā opsei krinomenon kai ou monon phōtos alla kai skotous sunaisthanometha, all' oukh hōsautōs. hēi toinun aisthēsei aisthanometha hoti oukh horōmen, tēi autēi tautēi aisthēsei aisthanometha kai hoti horōmen, hautē de estai hē opsis.* Richard Heinze, ed., *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, vol. 5, part 3: *Themistii in Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899), p. 83. 22–26; trans. Robert B. Todd, *Themistius: On Aristotle On the Soul* (London: Duckworth, 1996), p. 105.

18. *hēi toinun aisthēsei aisthanometha hoti oukh horōmen, tēi autē tautē aisthēsis aisthanometha.* Heinze, *Themistii in Libros Aristotelis De Anima Paraphrasis*, p. 83. 24–25; Todd, *On Aristotle On the Soul*, p. 105.

19. Ingram Bywater, ed., *Supplementum Aristotelicum* vol. I, part 2: *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum* (Berlin: Reimer, 1886), p. 21. 32–33; trans. Huby, *Metaphrasus in Theophrastum*, p. 31.

then follows; and it is difficult to imagine that it could have been altogether contained in the lost work of the Stagirite's first student, its terminology being unmistakably neo-Platonic. The commentator begins, to be sure, by recalling a basic principle in the Aristotelian doctrine of the forms of perception: in the commentator's condensed terms, that "the opposites are of the same [sense]" (*tēs gar autēs tanantia*).[20] He then concludes that the faculty that senses the "activity" (*energeia*) of perception must, by that token, sense its "inactivity" (*argia*) too. Priscian explains that the simultaneously unitary and multiple faculty of the "common sense" (*koinē aisthēsis*) alone could be responsible for such acts:

> Following this, about how we sense that we sense, he <Theophrastus> sets out his argument on the same lines as Aristotle, wanting the common sense to be that which has this extra distinction [*boulomenos eina tēn epikrinousan*], since it perceives jointly both the activity of each <sense> and its inactivity [*tēs energeieas sunaisthanomenēn hekastēs kaiu tēs argias*]. For the opposites are of the same <sense>. But the common sense is neither the same as the particular ones nor entirely different. For it is by way of the synthesis of all <the senses> and their concentration into an undivided one [*sunairesin kai tēn eis hen ameriston apokoruphōsin*]. Hence in a way each <sense> senses jointly that it perceives [*sunaisthanetai hoti aisthanetai*], not as having been divided off but as joined together in the one [*sunēptai tēi miai*]. For it belongs to a power already separate from bodies to revert into itself and know itself, and each is more corporeal in so far as it has been divided up, and it goes up more to what is apart by means of its indivisible unity with the others. For in fact this indivisible unity [*ameristos henōsis*] is appropriate to the forms which are apart from bodies. But if, as he himself well claims, it belongs to the same <sense> to discern opposites, and for this reason of <its own> inactivity also, on the one hand even each <sense> will grasp what is separate in a way from its own organs—for <otherwise> sight would not have perceived that the sense-organ's not being affected was darkness, for it <sight> appears to be active even when <that> is not affected—and, on the other, to a greater extent the common <sense>, which is aware also of the inactivity of the senses themselves. Hence, the common <sense>, but not each <individual one>, will jointly sense itself and its own activity: and if of its activity, then also of its inactivity: and if of its inactivity, it would at the same time be, as sensing-with, inactive and active at once [*dio kai hē koinē all'oukh hekastē heautēs sunaisthēsetai kai tēs oikeias energeias. ei men gar tēs energeieas, kai tēs argias. ei de tēs argias, hama te an argoiē kai energoiē hōs sunaisthanomenē*].[21]

20. Bywater, *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum*, p. 22. 1; Huby, *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum*, p. 31.
21. Bywater, *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum*, p. 22. 14–16; Huby, *Metaphrasis in Theophrastum*, p. 31.

"Neither the same as the particular ones nor entirely different" from them, the "common sense" is that in accordance with which the individual senses "revert back into" their indivisible and original principle. Where they are corporeal, it is incorporeal; where they are separated, it is undivided; and where they are by definition multiple, it is by essence unitary. The central sense is the power in the soul that "jointly perceives itself" (*heautēs sunaisthēsetai*), not as a "self" but as a faculty in which the multiple activities of the senses, all felt at once, reach their "indivisible unity." Priscian presents it as the constant companion to sensuous life, which by nature cannot cease. As the commentator observes, whenever the senses are active, the "common sense," sensing their operation, also remains active; when, by contrast, the senses fall into inactivity, it senses, too, their rest, "as sensing-with, inactive and active at once" (*hama te an argoiē kai energoiē hōs sunaisthanomenē*).

This "common sense" is at once more and less than those that went before it and bore its classic name. The principle of the presence of perception as of its absence, it is that by which living beings feel that they feel and feel, no less, that they do not. When the various perceptual powers of the living being would seem to end, when all the organs of perception find themselves consigned, like the eyes in darkness, to the privation of those qualities to whose apprehension they are suited, an element in the sensing power does not end: an *aisthēsis*, Priscian teaches, continues in anesthesia. Sensation, in this way, outlasts its own activity. At the limit, there remains an absence of feeling that is felt, and "with" nothing at all, a perception of a kind persists. To this extent, the accompanying faculty defined by this last commentator on the commentators is absolute. It will not be deterred by the vanishing of that which it would escort. An accompanist to the end, it stays "with," without any being with which it could be said to be. Like a marginal note that exposes the blankness of the page that is its element, the common power may reveal its nature most fully then. It joins the animal, disjoined from all things sensible, to that which is no thing and which, never far from the edges of its senses, keeps it constant company: its life.