

Αἰσθητά εἶδη and “direct realism” in Aristotle’s *De anima* II.xii, 424a 16-18

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Abstract

The question concerning the structure of our knowledge and its relation to the world has always been an issue of controversy between Representationalism and more recently in philosophy of science. Representationalists argue, that what we are cognitively related to are not the things out there, but rather their *representations*. However, if this is the case, how shall we be able to transcend the boundaries created by our representations? How can we defend the thesis that our picture of reality corresponds to what really is out there? I believe that Aristotle offers an extremely interesting solution to this issue. To defend my thesis, I will start with the examination of the term *αἰσθητὸν εἶδος* in the famous and most puzzling definition of αἴσθησις in *De anima* II.xii, 424a 16-18: “Καθόλου δὲ περὶ πάσης αἰσθήσεως δεῖ λαβεῖν ὅτι ἡ μὲν αἴσθησις ἐστὶ τὸ δεκτικὸν τῶν αἰσθητῶν εἰδῶν ἄνευ τῆς ὕλης...” (We must understand as true generally of every sense, that sense is that which is receptive of the *sensible eidos* without the matter). In referring to this passage, Hilary Putnam suggested that in the case of sensory perception, the «*sensible forms*» are simply the sensible properties of external things (“Aristotle’s Mind” in *Aristotle and Contemporary Science*. Editor D. Sfendoni-Mentzou. N.Y.: Peter Lang, 2.000). He thus, rejected the view, that for Aristotle *form* is both in the object perceived and in the mind, as an «unhelpful metaphysical explanation». On the other hand, Michael Esfeld finds Aristotle’s direct realism an attractive theory, which nevertheless, “loses much of its attraction” (p. 336), if we try to connect it with an ontology of a conceptual structure of the world, which is similar to that of our forms in the mind. (Aristotle’s Direct Realism in *De Anima. The Review of Metaphysics*. Dec. 2.000, 54, pp. 321-336). As opposed to these approaches, I will try to base my analysis of *αἰσθητὸν εἶδος* on Aristotle’s ontology. In this context, I will try to shed light on the way *αἰσθητὸν εἶδος* is connected with *αἴσθησις*, *φαντασία*, *νοῦς*, *νοητά*, as well as with the ontological structure of the world, in order to show that we have a lot to learn today from Aristotle’s solution to the issue of «direct realism».