

# PART I.

WHY SHOULD WE BE INTERESTED IN RENTAL INCREASES?

I.A.Imagery and Knowledge: an Old Story.SI.A.1. Aristotle's Problem: Reality, Imagination and  
Common Sense.

The problem of relativism, or something very like it, is not at all a new, modern, philosophical concern. A central concern of Plato was to answer the sceptical and relativistic claims of the Sophists; he wished to demonstrate that it is possible to attain true knowledge of reality (and virtue), and that we need not be content with mere cleverly argued, but ultimately arbitrary, opinions. However, Plato, influenced as he was by both Parmenides and Heraclitus, seems to have accepted at least one central plank of the Sophist (or at least the Protagorean) position: the impotence of the senses to penetrate to the true nature of things {1}. Thus he believed that the genuine knowledge which he sought could not be of the material world. Real knowledge, for Plato, could only be about the ideal world of forms, not about the experiential world of nature, and is to be reached by the efforts of reason alone. In the *Theaetetus* {2\*} this position is argued for on the grounds that the bodily senses are only competent to apprehend their respective proper objects (such as: sight - colour, taste - flavour, etc.) whereas

what is common not only to these objects  
but to all things {3}

such as

existence and non-existence, likeness and

unlikeness, sameness and difference, and also unity and numbers in general as applied to them {4}

are not grasped by any of the senses but only by the mind itself. It is impossible, we are told, to know the truth of something when we cannot grasp its existence. So

[Perception] has no part in apprehending truth, since it has none in apprehending existence. (...) We must not look for [knowledge] in sense perception at all, but in what goes on when the mind is occupied with things by itself {5}.

In more general terms we can say that Plato's dualism implied an unbridged gulf between the material world, to which the body, including its sense organs belongs {6}, and the mind, alone in which knowledge can arise.

Now Aristotle was just as concerned as his master to reject the relativism of the Sophists. True knowledge, he held, is possible. But neither was he satisfied with Plato's view that only the world of ideas is fully real and truly knowable. Perhaps, like most of us, he could not accept that some intellectual abstraction was more real than the things we bump up against every day. Certainly Aristotle had something of the interests of the modern scientist: part of the knowledge he thought worthy of attainment was knowledge of nature, the experiential world. If such knowledge was to be possible the gap between the material sense organs and the knowing mind had to be bridged {7}. In order that the senses could be seen as enabling access to truth, rather than being sources of deception, an explanation was needed of how aspects of

things not objects of any particular sense could nevertheless be grasped through perception.

In fact, in seeming flat contradiction to Plato, Aristotle asserted that "sensations are always true" (8\*). However, the disagreement is more apparent than real. He only meant that "perception of the special objects of sense is always free from error" (9):

I call by the name of special object of this or that sense that which cannot be perceived by any other sense than that one and in respect of which no error is possible; in this sense colour is the special object of sight, sound of hearing, flavour of taste. (...) Each sense has one kind of object which it discerns, and never errs in reporting that what is before it is colour or sound (though it may err as to what it is that is coloured or where that is, or what it is that is sounding or where that is). (10).

Today we would no doubt justify it differently, but nearly everyone still holds effectively the same view of the special senses, in the relevant regards, as did Aristotle (or, indeed, Plato). We are inclined to see the sense organs as physiological transducers adapted to producing nerve impulses in response to certain very specific sorts of physical stimulation (light colour and intensity for sight, certain airborne chemicals for smell, etc.). However researched the details may be, it is easy enough for us to see in principle how they can do this. What is more, the knowledge we regard as most certain, scientific knowledge, is knowledge of the material world. Thus we are still faced today, perhaps even more sharply,

with a problem situation very similar to that faced by The Philosopher himself. How is empirical knowledge, true knowledge, possible when "sameness and difference", "unity and numbers in general" and especially "existence" cannot be known by any of the senses? Plato and the Sophists, and modern sceptics and relativists, are content to answer that it is not possible (roughly speaking: Platonists relinquish the demand for empiricalness; relativists relinquish the demand for truth; and sceptics relinquish the demand for knowledge altogether). However, if, like Aristotle, we are reluctant to accept this outcome, some account must be given of how we can know through the senses what none of them can sense - or transduce - in themselves.

But if Aristotle thus bequeathed us a problem he also bequeathed us a solution to it, or at least the blueprint for a solution. What he effectively did, I will contend, was to delineate the necessary faculty to bridge between the bodily senses and the rational intellect. This faculty is known in different aspects as the "common sense" (*sensus communis* {11\*}) or the "imagination" (*phantasia* in the Greek {12\*}); the former inasmuch as it operated during perception and apprehended the "common sensibles", and the latter inasmuch as it integrated the deliverances of sense into "images" (*phantasmata* {13\*}) for the contemplation of the intellect.

Aristotle does not explicitly say that imagination

and *sensus communis* are the same. What he does say is that

the faculty of presentation [*phantasia*] is identical with that of sense-perception [*aisthesis*], though the essential notion [*sinai*] of a faculty of presentation is different from a faculty of sense-perception {14}

and this seems best interpreted as implying that sense and imagination are two functions of, or two ways of regarding the activity of, the same mental faculty or power {15}. Clearly Aristotle is talking about the perceptual faculty as a whole here, rather than the particular special senses, and we shall see below that *sensus communis* is also plausibly regarded as "the perceptual faculty as a whole" {16}. Some commentators {17} do take Aristotle to believe in two separate faculties, "common sense" and "imagination" which operate successively between external sense and reason. But it seems far more parsimonious, not to say sympathetic, to take the line of those {18} who take them to be aspects of the same thing (considered, as it were, from its output and its input ends respectively) {19\*}. The former interpretation surely makes it look as if Aristotle's 'explanation' of mental functions amounts to no more than the vacuous naming of faculties. The principal discussion of the "common sense" and the imagination is in *De Anima* Book III chapters 1-3, and Aristotle explicitly asserts (memory) images to be affections of the "common sense" (*koine aisthesis* {20\*}) in *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* {21}. As we would, he saw *phantasia* as producing these images not only during perception itself, but also whenever we remember something (even something abstract {22\*}) and when we imagine or

dream {23}. Such phantasata he saw as providing the contents of all thought {24}:

To the thinking soul images serve as if they were contents of perception (and when it asserts or denies them to be good or bad it avoids or pursues them). That is why the soul never thinks without an image. {25},

for:

Without a [re]presentation [phantasata] intellectual activity is impossible. {26}.

Thus:

Thinking is different from perceiving and is held to be in part imagination, in part judgement. {27}.

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It may not be immediately obvious that (or how) this "imagination" is intended to answer Plato's objections to the possibility of empirical knowledge {28\*}. After all, the list Aristotle gives of the "common sensibles" is quite different from Plato's list of, as it were, 'common insensibles'. Aristotle's list is:

movement, rest, figure, magnitude, number, unity {29\*},

of which only the last two items directly overlap Plato's. However, the existence of the *sensus communis* is primarily justified in chapter 2 of book III of *De Anima* {30}, and the central problem with which this chapter is concerned is how we are able to compare and distinguish the deliverances of different special senses - how we are able to recognise that sweet and white, for example, are different when white is known in sight and sweet in the quite separate faculty of taste. He holds that this ability entails that we have a unitary perceptual power which comprises our awareness of our seeing, tasting etc. {31\*}, a single perceptual faculty which takes in and

interrelates the deliverances of the different sense organs. This has been interpreted, for example by Brentano {32} and Beare {33}, as a sort of internal special sense whose special object is sensation itself, as engendered in the external senses - a sort of extra 'stage of processing' (to use modern jargon) between sensation and reason. However, Aristotle seems to have explicitly rejected such a solution to the problem of perceptual awareness; it would lead, so he says, to an infinite regress of senses of senses {34}. Recent commentators such as Hamlyn {35} and Kosman {36} have taken him instead to have in mind the idea that all the senses, functioning together as parts of the total person, can be regarded as forming an organic whole, a single multimodal perceptual system, itself an integral part of the whole person. *Sensus communis* is not an additional sensory power, but rather refers to the way the senses work together. I find this latter interpretation attractive, but on either view it is clear that this "principle in virtue of which we say that animals are percipient" {37}, this "one sensory function", "common power" or "controlling sensory faculty" {38\*} is what enables us to empirically grasp "likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference" {39}.

Whether this faculty is also supposed to allow us to empirically grasp "existence", the reality of things, is a little less straightforward. It rather depends on how you understand "existence". I would like to suggest that a pretty good rough characterization of what it is for

ordinary material or empirical things to exist would be "the taking up of a portion of space-time". This would not have satisfied Plato of course, and perhaps not Aristotle entirely either, but I doubt if many modern scientists would seriously object to it. Anyway, it is clear that Aristotle's "common sensibles" are precisely the spatio-temporal properties needed to capture something's existence in this sense - its 'thereness' as it were. It is worth noting that the "common sensibles" are virtually identical to the "primary qualities" of Locke {40\*}, which were the 'really real' for him (and, surely, for the subsequent scientific tradition). It is in this sense of 'the real', I think, that we can say that Aristotle's psychology allows him to avoid Platonic idealism {41\*} as well as scepticism and relativism, and maintain that empirical access to material reality is possible.

There is, though, one further problem. Aristotle never makes it quite explicit that the "common sense", the *koine aisthesis* which he invokes to explain perception of the "common sensibles" is to be taken as identical with the unitary perceptual faculty, the "common power" (*koine dunamis*) explaining perceptual awareness and intersensory comparison (and wakefulness). Although these have traditionally been identified, Hamlyn {42} has recently argued that this is a mistake, that Aristotle had in mind, on the one hand, the unity of the overall perceptual system, and, on the other hand, a potentiality for perceiving the common sensibles which is "possessed by

each of the individual sense organs" (43) alongside, as it were, their characterizing potentiality for perceiving their own "special sensible". If Hamlyn is right about this, then my contention that the Aristotelian "imagination" is intended to explain the possibility of empirical knowledge clearly fails (44\*). *Phantasia* would surely be an aspect of the *koine dunamis*, the general sensory power, not the very specialized *koine aisthesis*, but it would be the latter which cognized 'existence'. Fortunately Hamlyn's reasons for this untraditional multiplication of entities do not seem very strong. He gives no real textual warrant for his positive interpretation of *koine aisthesis*, and his textual reasons for differentiating it from *koine dunamis* are readily rebutted by Modrak (45). Also there do seem to be positive reasons for making the identification. Although it is true that Aristotle does not directly explain how the *koine dunamis*, the "controlling sensory faculty" (46) could allow us to perceive the common sensibles, surely it is natural to assume that the faculty enabling us to compare and differentiate perceptions from different senses (such as sweet and white) would also be that enabling us to compare and identify, for example, visual and tactile sensations as arising from the same movement, shape etc.. Furthermore, Aristotle does tell us that we perceive "all" the common sensibles

by movement, e.g. magnitude by movement, and therefore also figure (for figure is a species of magnitude), what is at rest by the absence of movement: number is perceived by the negation of continuity

(47).

Hamlyn says it would be typical of Aristotle to be running together here both physical movement (like, I take it, running the eye or the hand over something) and "mental movement, i.e. changes of attention" (48), but either way, surely, such perceptual movements have to do with the way the sense organs are integral to the whole organism, with its muscles and brain (or heart) - with the *koine dunamis* as Kosman (49) and Hamlyn himself (50) interpret it - and not with a power to perceive common sensibles possessed by special sense organs in themselves. It is also surely very peculiar, on Hamlyn's view, to call the *phantasata* affections of, explicitly, the *koine aisthesis*, as is done in *De Memoria et Reminiscentia* (51). Nor would it be clear why perception of the common sensibles would, like *phantasia*, be thought highly subject to error (52), whilst the special senses are not. All in all then, it would seem that the *sensus communis/phantasia* is indeed supposed to allow us to empirically grasp not only: "likeness and unlikeness, sameness and difference"; not only also "unity and numbers in general"; but "existence and non-existence" (in the relevant sense) too. Thus originates the tradition that it is through the imagination that we reach the truth of nature.