

ARISTOTLE ON PERCEPTION AT A DISTANCE

a philosophy talk by

Michael Arsenault

(UC Berkeley)

In *Enneads* IV.5, Plotinus objects to Aristotle's claim that distance perception (via vision, audition, or olfaction) is mediated by the effects that colors, sounds, and odors have in the intervening medium (air or water) between subject and object. Just as Aristotle thinks we cannot strictly speaking feel the heat of a distant fire, but only the heat it produces in the intervening air, so Plotinus argues that if vision were mediated by the effects of color in the medium, we should perceive only these effects and the medium itself, rather than distal objects. Yet we do perceive distal objects, and so Plotinus concludes that Aristotle must be wrong that vision is mediated by such effects. Arsenault will argue that Aristotle has the resources to resist this objection, and that exploring these resources sheds important light on Aristotle's understanding of perceptible qualities. Distance perception is possible because the special objects of the distance senses enjoy a peculiar ontological status: Sounds, odors, and the effects of color inhere 'in' the bodies that serve as media for distance perception—air and water—but are 'of' their distal causes, like bells, or cheese, etc. This peculiar ontological status allows us to explain why they not only do not get in the way of their sources (like the heat in the air did), but afford us perceptual access to them.

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