

‘Common Sense and Metaperception’

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One of the functions of the common sense in Aristotle’s theory of perception is apparently to monitor the activity of our sensory modalities, and to make us aware that we see, hear, touch, taste, etc. However, the status of the common sense as a “second-order” perception, and its relationship to “first-order” perception (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, etc.) remains to be clarified. On the one hand, numerous examples (involving perceptual certainty and uncertainty, perception of silence, darkness, and more generally absences) show that second-order perception cannot be reduced to first-order perception. On the other hand, second-order perception can hardly be conceived as a form of metarepresentational awareness, whether perceptual or theory-based. In this presentation, I shall suggest that the monitoring function of the common sense is best understood in relation with contemporary cognitive science research on metacognition. Common sense is a metaperceptual ability which is distinct from both object level sensory perception and metarepresentational knowledge about our senses.