This paper will aim to establish that the proper interpretation of Aristotle's epistemology is one of direct realism, rather than representationalism, by way of exploring Aristotle's doctrine of perception, elaborated in his *De Anima* as an isomorphic motion of the soul. It will begin by elucidating and explicating a combination of claims in *De Anima* concerning Aristotle's doctrine of perception such as that "the perceiver is potentially what the perceptible object actually is already" (DA, 418a4-6) and the claim that "each sense perceives the perceptible forms without the matter" (DA, 424a18-19). In order to explain the relationship of identity between the soul perceiving and the object it perceives it will be argued that perception, for Aristotle, involves the motion of the soul insofar as it is reduced from some potentiality, proper to it, to that corresponding actuality. Finally, it will be shown that the relationship of identity between the soul and the object or substance it perceives is not numerical but determinative, and this will obviate the preference for the direct realist reading of Aristotle.

Perception plays a central role in Aristotle's psychological doctrine outlined in *De Anima*, which in turn inevitably informs his epistemological perspective. Perception, for Aristotle, is one of the affections (DA, 403a25-26) of which it can be said that "whatever has even one of these is said to be alive" (DA, 413a25-26). In other words, the ability to perceive is not a necessary, but a sufficient condition, of something's being a living being. Additionally "what makes something an animal is primarily perception" (DA, 413b1-2), and thus perceiving is in part determinative of the human soul, in precisely so far as man is an animal. It is because perception is the kernel of psychology that it is the starting point for discussing Aristotle's epistemology. Two different readings exist of Aristotle's epistemology which relate directly to his doctrine of perception. Before these views can be appraised, however, it behoves us to sketch, in basic outline, Aristotle's doctrine of perception.
Perception, first of all, "occurs in being moved and affected, as we have said, since it seems to be a type of alteration" (DA, 416b34-35). However, as Aristotle explains, "everything is affected and moved by an agent that has the relevant property in actuality, so that in a way like is affected by like" (DA, 417a15-20). It will be important to keep in mind that all perceptible agents, here, or objects of perception, will turn out to be substances which are, for Aristotle, composites of matter and form. Therefore the soul's acquisition of the quality of the object it perceives involves a kind of motion, the catalyst of which is the object or substance perceived. Just as a ball, for example, which is potentially moving, cannot be made to be actually moving except by being moved by some other object, for instance another ball, which is already moving in actuality, so also the soul must be likewise moved to perceive. In other words, the soul cannot be reduced from potentially perceiving some quality, to actually perceiving it, except it be moved by some object with that quality in actuality. This account, though necessary, is insufficient, however, for it leaves open the possibility of inanimate objects being able to perceive. For example the air would perceive insofar as it acquired some perceptible form such as a smell (DA, 424b20-23). As Christopher Shields puts it:

\[ S \text{ perceives } O \text{ if and only if: (i) } S \text{ has the capacity requisite for receiving } O'\text{s sensible form; (ii) } O \text{ acts upon that capacity by enforming it; and, as a result, (iii) } S'\text{s relevant capacity becomes isomorphic with that form. (Shields, 2010) } \]

I would add only that Aristotle is an infallibilist with respect to the perception of a substance insofar as one perceives its sensible forms, thus "perceptions are always true" (DA, 424b20-23). This will serve as the account of perception which will help to negotiate its explication in what follows. In the first place the precondition for something to be a perceiver is the requisite capacity for it to receive a sensible form, and accordingly "the perceptual part is <what it is> by merely potential, not actual, <perceiving>" (DA, 417a7-8). In other words, for a thing to perceive
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*O* it must have the dispositional potentiality to perceive *O*. The second criteria refers to the action of the object observed on its observer, which is the reduction of the observer from merely having the dispositional potentiality for receiving some sensible form, to actually receiving it in perception. Finally the perceptive part of the soul is itself *en*formed by what it perceives, so that while "the perceiver is potentially what the perceptible object actually is already" (DA, 418a4-6) by definition, in the act of perceiving the perceiver becomes actually what the perceptible object actually is already. Thus when the perceptive faculty has been affected "it has been made like the object and has acquired its quality" (DA, 418a4-6). Finally this acquisition of sensible or perceptible forms involves acquiring a substance insofar as it acquires "the perceptible forms without the matter" (DA, 424a18-19).

With this operative, though admittedly not yet exhaustive, understanding of perception now in place, the debate between direct realist readings of Aristotle and representationalist readings can finally be introduced. Michael Esfeld anticipates that some may question whether "it is appropriate to approach Aristotle's texts by using the concepts of representationalism and direct realism" (Esfeld 2000, 321) since these concepts belong to modern epistemology. He excuses this anachronism by arguing that Aristotle's "texts can also be received in the spirit of direct realism" (Esfeld 2000, 321) and "direct realism is an option that fits into Aristotle's philosophy" (Esfeld 2000, 321). The representationalist account, according to Esfeld, is the predominant and privileged reading of Aristotle today, and proposes that perception involves the soul, or perceiving capacity of the soul, re-presenting substances by con-forming to the sensible forms of the objects of perception. Scilicet, "things in the world cause mental images that are representations" (Esfeld 2000, 322) of themselves in the perceiving soul. Representationalists thus propose that "mental representation... mediates between the state of perception... and its...
object” (Esfeld 2000, 324). On the representationalist reading, therefore, the form as it exists in the mind is an epistemic intermediary between the perceiver and the substance perceived, acting as a kind of metaphysical mirror. The direct realist reading of Aristotle, on the other hand, does not admit any room for such an epistemic intermediary, and instead it proposes that the perceiver receives the sensible forms perceived themselves, and not simply representations of them. It is admitted that "this is not to say that perception and the perceived object are numerically identical" (Esfeld 2000, 327), for it must be kept in mind that, for Aristotle, numerical individuation requires matter. Determinative individuation, however, requires only form, and insofar as perceptible forms are public property, substances are also public property. It is in this latter sense that the direct realist reading proposes that the form of the perceptual faculty is not merely related isomorphically with the object it perceives, but is actually identical with it. The whole insight can be articulated in the words of Esfeld himself: "direct realism is an option that fits into Aristotle's philosophy because he assumes that the forms of the things in the world are also our... concepts" (Esfeld 2000, 334). Since Aristotle clearly stipulates that perception does not involve acquiring the matter, but also stipulates that the perceiver can become "what the perceptible object actually is already" (DA, 418a4-6), and not merely become similar to it, it seems that Aristotle can and should be read as a direct realist. To argue that Aristotle spoke loosely when he said we become the perceptible object, at least while it remains possible to interpret him straightforwardly, is just to do violence to the text. According to the direct realist the soul acquires, in perception, the substance perceived insofar as it acquires the determinative form of the substance. The substance in reality is identical with the substance in the mind by being determinatively, and not numerically, identical with it.
To recapitulate, it has been shown that Aristotle's doctrine of perception involves a motion insofar as the perceiving soul is reduced from dispositional potentiality to actuality, being moved thus by the object of perception. The substance with a sensible form moves the soul, reducing it, insofar as it is perceived by it, to the determinate form of that substance. The whole seminal insight of Esfeld is the realization that "the forms of the things in the world are qualitatively identical with our percepts and concepts... that is why Aristotle's epistemology does not need an epistemic intermediary which ties a state of perception... to its intentional object" (Esfeld 2000, 324). Thus, instead of the soul coming to be in the image of its object, the soul really does acquire the substance, becoming determinatively identical with it, and this is a more consonant reading of Aristotle's doctrine of perception.