Aristotle pursues an extended analogy between νόησις and ἀισθησίς, only to abandon it, rather abruptly, when turning to the question of their material realizations. He thinks that the ἀισθητικόν employs various sensory organs in effecting its operations; and he accordingly investigates the material causes of sensation both in the De Anima and the more empirically oriented Parva Naturalia. He claims that the νοητικόν, by contrast, lacks an organ altogether; and he consequently says almost nothing about the material causes of thinking. The brief reason Aristotle offers for this disanalogy may seem initially quite unsatisfactory. To some, at any rate, Aristotle's claim that νοητικόν lacks an organ comes to little more than a low-level empirical gaffe. He cannot help but observe that the eyes, ears, and other sense organs play a central role in νοητικόν. Not detecting any such role for the brain or other organ in νόησις, Aristotle supposes that νοητικόν lacks an organ altogether, and infers that it is therefore separate and unmixed with the body (An. 429a24-27, 429b4-5). Thus, his chain of inference leads rather haphazardly from a dubious empirical finding to an extravagant philosophical thesis about the nature of νοητικόν.

One taking this approach might well conclude that since we no longer suffer under the same impoverished empirical limitations, we can safely set aside Aristotle’s unfortunate conception of νοητικόν as immaterial and turn our attention to those features of his concept of mind more germane to our own concerns. If we find the analogy between ἀισθησίς and νόησις otherwise defensible, we should also feel comfortable completing it in a manner in which Aristotle found himself incapable. This, at any rate, seems the best we can hope, given Aristotle’s unfortunate lapse in failing to appreciate that νόησις has a material realization no less than ἀισθησίς.

1 Wilkes 1978 typifies this approach. See also Hartman 1977.
Perhaps not many will agree with this simple, unflattering diagnosis of Aristotle’s motivation for regarding νοῦς as in some sense immaterial. Still, some things Aristotle claims might suggest such a motivation, including especially his remarks about how νοῦς would come to be qualified, perhaps by being hot or cold, if it had an organ (An. 429b25-6). Moreover, if there is general agreement that Aristotle does not reserve a special status for νοῦς on the basis of a misguided empirical belief, there is little agreement about the genuine source of his reservation. Aristotle has some qualms about regarding thinking and perception as directly analogous, even though he insists that the same general account of form assimilation covers both.

In this paper I investigate one central source of Aristotle’s dissatisfaction with a comprehensive analogy between αὐτὸς and νοῦς. I argue that his conception of νοῦς as organless is neither empirically motivated nor obviously misguided. On the contrary, Aristotle’s insistence that νοῦς is separate and unmixed with the body is grounded in an approach to intentionality nascent in his treatment of νόησις.2 This approach to intentionality is, I shall argue, most clearly reflected in the compressed, complex, and tangled series of inferences which open De Anima III 4.

I. Νοῦς is Unmixed with the Body

Perception and thinking are alike in that the same model of form-reception covers both. In perception, as in thinking, some human faculty receives a form in such a way that the relevant psychic capacity is affected in a certain way (πᾶσχειν τι).3 “If, then, thinking is just as per-

2 This paper is drawn from a larger work, where I undertake a more general analysis of Aristotelian intentionality; I do not attempt such an analysis in this paper. Rather, I seek to ground the peculiar status Aristotle confers on νοῦς in a plausible central feature of his approach to the intentionality of the mental. For a comprehensive, if problematic, account of Aristotelian intentionality, see Brentano 1867/1977. I sketch some of the fundamental difficulties for Brentano’s account below in § IV.

3 With the locution πᾶσχειν τι, Aristotle might intend one of three things, of which only the first two have been recognized. If the indefinite τι is an accusative object of πᾶσχειν, Aristotle means (i) in thinking νοῦς suffers something; if, by contrast, τι is a noun agreeing with πᾶσχειν, Aristotle means either (ii) thinking is a kind of being affected, or (iii) thinking is a being affected—sort of (that is, thinking is akin to being affected, but not quite a proper instance