The Inner Touch: Archaeology of A Sensation . By Daniel Heller-Roazen. (New York: Zone Books, 2007). 373 pp. £19.95 cloth.

Down the ages, great minds have explored the idea that sentient life incorporates a distinctive and elusive feature – a feature that cannot be wholly captured in terms of the qualitative character associated with what the individual senses are designed to track when performing their offices in enabling creatures to navigate the external world. From Aristotle onwards, rich attention has been paid to this alleged sense (or feeling) of living, of existing, or of one's lived body and so on. The feeling in question purportedly is that which attends all unimpaired sentient activity (and possibly even its absence) – it has been thought of as a kind of animal feeling, that can disrupted or made more manifest by certain psychological and medical disorders. Amongst the many diverse attempts to formulate and understand the nature of this special kind of sentience, it has been variously equated with certain functions assigned to the Aristotelian common sense, a central or master faculty that presides over and unifies the perceptual activity, a kind of inner touch or sensitivity, and as a form of apperception (distinct from explicit consciousness). The twenty-five elegantly written chapters of Heller-Roazen's book treat the reader to beautifully framed insights into the way ancient, medieval, Arabic and modern philosophers addressed this topic.

The book's range (and the masterful scholarship informing it) is truly remarkable. It moves systematically from relevant discussions of the work of Aristotle, the Neoplatonists and the Stoics to variations on the theme offered by Avicenna, Augustine and Aquinas, Montaigne, Bacon, Locke, Leibniz, Rousseau, Merleau-Ponty, and many others. No two attempts to corral the notion and render it intelligible are equivalent. What is revealing and of great contemporary import is that Heller-Roazen's enthralling travail reveals that (despite other differences) until the modern era, nearly all of those who considered the question of

how best to characterize this allegedly ever-present feature of sentient life understood it to be non-intellectual and pre-cognitive in character. That is to say, it was decidedly not to be confused with a form of representational consciousness of the Cartesian variety or lineage. The feeling in question was thought to be something much more animal and basic, but where this does not imply something 'mechanical' or bereft of experiential characteristics.

This matters because many today insist that all conscious experience necessarily involves some kind of 'self-consciousness' (even if only of a minimal variety) and so continue to struggle to make sense of just how we should understand what the latter designates or implies. Heller-Roazen's carefully prepared and beautifully arranged collage of the history of attempts to probe and understand this sensation – his archaeology – reminds us of a rich array of possibilities available to us. Perhaps the greatest merit of this book is that it can help stave off a kind of aspect-blindness that prevents contemporary writers from acknowledging non-cognitive ways of thinking about the character and nature of sentient life; ways that, despite their historical prominence, have become hard to see or understand in the wake of the Cartesian thinking that now dominates so much authorship about consciousness and experience. This captivating book succeeds in opening our eyes.

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