

The Meaning of *Phantasia* in Aristotle's *De Anima*, III, 3-8

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Introduction

Aristotle's account of *phantasia* in *De anima*, III, 3, occurs at a critical juncture of his inquiry into the nature and properties of the soul. Having just completed a long discussion of sensation (II, 5-III, 2), and wishing now to turn to a consideration of the power of thought (*nous*), which he regards both as distinct from and as analogous to sensation, he suggests that an explanation of *phantasia* is necessary at this point, since there is no thought without *phantasia*, just as there is no *phantasia* without sensation.¹ But while this sketch of a complex dependency among the soul's cognitive powers makes clear the importance of *phantasia* and the need for some explanation of it, the intermediate place of *phantasia* in the discussion and the incidental way in which it is introduced are indications that Aristotle does not treat it for its own sake, but rather is compelled to turn to a consideration of it by the exigencies of the subject-matter at hand. The analysis of sensation, the characteristic power of animals, could, it seems, be adequately carried out with little reference to *phantasia*, even though Aristotle is elsewhere led to stress the closeness, and even, in some respect, the identity of these two powers;² the discussion of thought, on the other hand, and specifically of the human thought which is Aristotle's concern in *De anima*, III, 4-8, apparently requires a special preliminary treatment of *phantasia*.

It is perhaps significant that the chapter on *phantasia* introduces that part of the *De anima* which is particularly concerned with man, that is, with the human soul and its characteristic activity of *noein*. The fact that

¹ 427b15-16.

² *De insomniis*, I, 459a15-22.

the human soul emerges in the *De anima* from among those souls which perform the activity of *phantasia* would seem to point to the special importance of this activity in human life, and to the significance of Aristotle's analysis of it for his understanding of man in general. And, despite his warning against an exclusive concern with man in the study of the soul,³ it is clear that he shares with Plato a particular interest in the most complex and perfect of souls, the human soul. It follows from this interest that many of his remarks on *phantasia*, both in the *De anima* and elsewhere, are concerned with it as a feature of human life. In keeping with this human significance of *phantasia* in the thought of Aristotle, the present paper proposes to examine the theme of *phantasia* as it is presented in the *De anima*, that is, as a prelude to the analysis of *noein*. Before turning to Aristotle's text, however, we should begin with some introductory considerations of the word *phantasia* itself.

1. *Phantasia* and "Appearing"

Although *phantasia* is conventionally rendered into English as "imagination", and is roughly identified with the faculty studied by later thinkers under that name, this Latinate term in its present-day associations carries with it "sedimentations" which risk obscuring the original force of the Greek word. To begin with, "imagination", which derives from *imago* and ultimately from *imitor*, carries the suggestion of "imitation", and hence of "resemblance", connotations which are not present in the root meaning of *phantasia*. Moreover, the study of the imagination as one of a number of distinct "inner senses" or as a specific faculty located in the brain arises from later developments of the meaning of *phantasia* which are foreign to the thought of Aristotle.⁴ And finally, while "imagination" sometimes occurs in modern discussions as a critical term of poetic theory, or to describe an aspect of scientific genius, these uses, with their implication of an extraordinary power of insight, spiritual vision, or discovery, are far removed from the primary meaning of *phantasia*. Thus, although "imagination" may often be the closest English approximation to Aristotle's *phantasia*, we must bear in mind the extreme inappropriateness of these post-Aristotelian connotations of the term. In order to avoid them altogether, we shall leave *phantasia* untranslated, allowing its meaning to emerge gradually in the examination of Aristotle's texts.

Since the word *phantasia* is not found in Greek literature before the dialogues of Plato, in which it occurs only seven times,⁵ Aristotle is

3 *De anima*, I, 1, 402b3-5.

4 The physiological study of the "imagination" seems to have its origins in Galen's medical researches, which make use of Aristotle's remarks on *to phantastikon*. See the references in Harry Austryn Wolfson, "The Internal Senses in Latin, Arabic and Hebrew Philosophical Texts", *Harvard Theological Review* 28 (1935), 71-73.

5 According to Leonard Brandwood, *A Word Index to Plato* (Leeds: W. S. Maney & Son, 1976), these are: *Republic*, II, 382e10; *Theaetetus*, 152c1, 161e8; *Sophist*, 260c9,

apparently the first writer both to have used it regularly and to have discussed its meaning at length. It is, however, formed from older and less technical words which offer some suggestive indications of its original significance. Although Aristotle's derivation of it from *phaos* ("light")⁶ may not be strictly correct, both words seem ultimately to come from the verb *phaô*, which means "to give light, shine, beam, especially of the heavenly bodies".⁷ From this latter word were derived the two verbs *phainô* ("to show"), with its frequent middle form *phainomai* ("to appear"), and *phantazô* ("to make visible, appear, show oneself"), and thence the verbal nouns *phantasia* and *phantasma*.⁸ Both Plato and Aristotle closely associate *phantasia* with *phainomai* in contexts which suggest that *phantasia* designates the result of the action of appearing, and might, like *phainomenon*, be translated simply as "appearance".⁹ In terms of its genealogy, then, *phantasia* would seem to indicate the effect of a prominent or merely noticeable self-presentation of something to eyesight, though it quickly seems to have acquired the wide meaning of "a presentation to consciousness, whether immediate or in memory, whether true or illusory".¹⁰ Thus, while derived from a term pointing to the spectacle of the heavenly bodies, *phantasia* itself names the manifestation of anything before man, perhaps especially a display in the sensible, and above all, in the visible world, but also including any presentation in dreams, memories, fancies, and delusions. Taken together, the array of all such appearances forms the scene of the pre-philosophic dimension of human experience which precedes and conditions man's subsequent questions about the truth of things.¹¹

260e4, 263d6, 264a6. On the possibility that the term may have been used by some of the pre-Socratics, see the first chapter of Murray Wright Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination in Classical and Medieval Thought* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1927).

6 *De anima*, III, 3, 429a3-4.

7 Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), "phaô".

8 *Ibid.*, *ad loc.*

9 See, for instance, *Theaetetus*, 152c1, and *Metaphysics*, IV, 5, 1010b1-4. On the significance of the *phainomena* for Aristotle, see Martha Craven Nussbaum, "Saving Aristotle's Appearances", in Malcolm Schofield and Martha Craven Nussbaum, eds., *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 267-293.

10 Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, "phantasia".

11 In a manner different from that of the Greeks, modern German philosophy seems also to have had a keen appreciation of the concrete immediacy and human importance of, and of the difficulty in speaking about, the *phainomena*. For the origins of the discussion in Leibniz' description of bodies as *phaenomena realia* and in Kant's radical modern revision of the meaning of the *phenomena*, see the article on "Erscheinung" in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie* (Basel and Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1972). For the meaning of "phenomenon" in the various "phenomenologies" of Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, see Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: An Historical Introduction* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 14, 126, and 321 respectively. It might be observed that while the history of Greek philosophy proceeds from the Protagorean doctrine of the truth of the *phainomena* to the crucial Platonic distinction between the *phainomena* and the *onta* (*Republic*, X, 596e4), the

The English word "appearance" connotes an interesting polarity, since an appearance is always both *of* something and *for* someone, and itself seems to be engendered in a unique coming-together of something and someone: an appearance of one thing is not like that of another, while, on the other hand, the appearance of something to one person may differ from its appearance to another.¹² This duality parallels a similar polarity in the word *phantasia* which is reflected in two basic uses which Aristotle makes of the word, uses described by Bonitz as *speciem rei obiectae ... sive veram sive fallacem* and as *eam actionem qua rerum imagines animo informamus*,¹³ and by J. Freudenthal as *Aussehen* or *Erscheinung* and as *Vorstellung* or *Einbildung*¹⁴ respectively. While this sharp distinction of meaning may conceal an important ambiguity of the word, it seems clear that Aristotle uses the term both in an "objective" sense, to describe the *species* or "look" of something, and in a "subjective" sense, to describe the action of the soul in grasping such a "look".¹⁵ The first sense occurs mostly in his physical writings, usually as naming the "look" of one of the heavenly bodies or of a colour; the second usage is found in the psychological treatises, and describes a certain action by which the soul presents something to itself. Since our interest is in the human activity of *phantasia*, we shall all but exclusively be concerned with the "psychological" or "subjective" meaning of the word. This concern leads us to consider the special nature of certain kinds of "appearances" or "presentations", namely, those Aristotle calls *phantasmata*.

Setting aside the transferred (*kata metaphoran*) meanings of the word—perhaps referring to the "objective" sense just mentioned¹⁶—

history of German philosophy seems to reverse this progression, beginning with Kant's distinction between the *phenomena* and the *noumena*, and ending with phenomenology's exclusive attention to the appearances. This latter development also coincides with the growth of "historicism", a modern version of the Protagorean doctrine that "man is the measure of all things".

12 The continual engendering of unique and unrepeatable appearances by the ever-renewed union of sense and sensible things is a central point in the discussion of the first definition of knowledge in Plato's *Theaetetus* (151d3-186e12). The fascination to which this perpetual novelty gives rise is, of course, an important Platonic theme.

13 H. Bonitz, *Index Aristotelicus* (2nd ed.; Graz: Akademische Druck—U. Verlagsanstalt, 1955), "phantasia".

14 J. Freudenthal, *Ueber den Begriff des Wortes PHANTASIA bei Aristoteles* (Göttingen: Druck der Universitäts—Buchdruckerei von E. A. Huth, 1863), 15-16.

15 It should be mentioned that "look" is the English word chosen by Jacob Klein to translate Plato's terms *eidōs* and *idea*; see *Plato's Trilogy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3. The visual terminology of *species*, *Erscheinung* and "look", reflects the root meaning of *phantasia*, but is somewhat misleading, since Aristotle will relate the action of *phantasia* to sensation in general. The double sense of *phantasia* is paralleled in the related term *doxa*, which, in the writings of Plato, also shows both an "objective" and a "subjective" meaning. See Yvon Lafrance, *La Théorie Platonicienne de la Doxa* (Montréal: Bellarmin; and Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1981), 22.

16 For other suggestions of what Aristotle has in mind here, see Freudenthal, *Ueber den Begriff*, 30, and Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De motu animalium: Text with Translation, Commentary and Interpretative Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 252-255.

Aristotle says that *phantasia* is that in virtue of which we say that any *phantasma* comes to be in us: *kath'hên legomen phantasma ti hêmin gignesthai*.¹⁷ This terse, almost tautologous definition contains some interesting features. Note, first of all, that Aristotle is describing *phantasia* according to what seems to be the ordinary way of speaking: it is that by which we say a *phantasma* comes to be in us. Note, too, that *phantasia* is made to account for the genesis of the *phantasma*. But what is this *phantasma* within us which is recognized in ordinary discourse? Like its cognates, *phantasma* suggests the action of appearing, but more specifically it points to the transfer of an appearance from its origin in that which appears into another medium. Thus, Plato uses *phantasmata* to name the reflections which things cast into the unstable medium of water, an example which vividly illustrates the difference between the original which appears and its separated and transformed appearance. Often, however, Plato's use of the word indicates a deceptive appearance in particular, suggesting that *phantasmata* are reflections which cannot be trusted to show the truth about their originals.¹⁸

The striking difference between Plato's use of *phantasma* and that of Aristotle is that, while Plato makes it describe every sort of reflected appearance, including visible reflections, mistaken impressions, dreams, and the "reflections" of things in speech,¹⁹ Aristotle uses it exclusively to describe the *inner* appearances or "reflections" which are evident in such activities as dreaming and remembering, instances in which we ourselves are the medium into which the reflected appearances are cast, transformed, and separated from their originals. These inner *phantasmata* are clearly a special kind of appearance, since, as has been said, an appearance usually seems to involve a union between something which appears and someone to whom it appears, or a union of the outer world and an inner act of recognition. It seems, however, that an appearance can become wholly interiorized, so that the subjective pole becomes overwhelmingly predominant: the inner appearance is not only *for* the individual to whom it appears, but it is for him *alone*, since he contains it.

Aristotle's description of *phantasia* as that in virtue of which (*kath'hên*) these inner appearances are generated is somewhat clarified by the definition of *kath'ho* in *Metaphysics*, V, 18, which states that this term has as many senses as *aition* ("cause").²⁰ Thus, *phantasia* as it is commonly understood would seem to signify the hypothesis of an underlying action of the soul, a moving cause which serves to account for the presence in us of *phantasmata*. In pursuing this supposition, then, we are led to consider the genesis of these inner appearances and the action of *phantasia* and its *phantasmata* in the life of the human soul.

17 *De anima*, III, 3, 428a1-2.

18 *Republic*, VI, 510a1; II, 382a2; *Sophist*, 236b7; c3, 4, 7; 239c9.

19 *Republic*, VI, 510a1; IX, 584a9; *Timaeus*, 46a2; *Sophist*, 267a4.

20 1022a19-20.

2. The Context of the Discussion of *Phantasia*

2.1. *The Plan of the De Anima*

The *De anima*'s remarks on *phantasia* prior to the thematic discussion of III, 3 are few and fragmentary. We learn that thinking seems to be intimately related to *phantasia*; that *phantasia*, along with desire, is concomitant with the power of sensation; that the place of *phantasia* among the powers of the soul is unclear and must be dealt with as a separate question; that the animals which possess *phantasia* live according to it; that *phantasia* is somehow involved with the production of voice; and that *phantasiai* persist in the sense organs after the sense objects are gone.²¹ Apart from the vague remark at 414b16, nothing has prepared us for a thematic discussion of *phantasia* at this point, and even within III, 3 the theme of *phantasia* seems to emerge incidentally in the course of a discussion of the difference between sensing and thinking. This discussion is apparently intended to provide a transition between the treatment of sensation (II, 5-III, 2) and that of *nous* (III, 4-8). For our purposes it is important to note first of all that the account of *phantasia* is required for this development. Before focussing on this transition itself, however, we might raise a question about its two terms: what is Aristotle's rationale in passing from the subject of sensation to the subject of thought? While the progression from one cognitive power to another more complex one might strike us as an unremarkable didactic procedure, it invites us to consider the overall plan and coherence of the *De anima* and the peculiar nature of Aristotle's approach to the study of the soul. Such a consideration is appropriate to our theme: as we shall see, the analysis of *phantasia* contains implications which involve some of the most far-reaching and original conclusions of Aristotle's investigation of the soul. Our immediate concern, then, is to situate the chapter on *phantasia* within the structure of the *De anima*.

Although the treatise contains clear and frequent articulations of its topics which suggest careful composition and edition, the overall plan of the book, particularly of its latter half, is not easy to delineate. Certainly, the first chapter is introductory, and is followed by four chapters which pursue Aristotle's normal procedure of examining the opinions of his predecessors. Furthermore, the first two chapters of Book II clearly take up the concern, announced in the introduction, with finding a universal definition of the soul. Then, after an analysis of the different psychic powers possessed by different kinds of souls (II, 3), the activities of nutrition (II, 4), sensation (II, 5-III, 2), *phantasia* (III, 3), thought (III, 4-8), and locomotion (III, 9-11) are taken up in turn, followed by some further remarks on sensation (III, 12-13). What is the ordering principle behind the portion of the treatise which follows III, 3?

²¹ I, 1, 403a8-10; II, 2, 413b22-23; 3, 414b16, 415a10-11; 8, 420b29-33; III, 2, 425b24-25.

Clearly, the latter portion of the book is concerned with the attributes, powers or "parts" of the soul,²² and Aristotle seems to be following the general plan sketched in the introduction according to which first the essence of the soul, and then the properties of which the essence is the cause, are to be treated in turn:²³ after the definition of the soul's essence is determined in II, 1-2, the treatise turns to the characteristic properties of this essence.²⁴ Our question thus becomes: how is the discussion of the properties of soul organized?

One complication of Aristotle's approach arises from the fact that, although he is seeking a universal definition of soul, something which has not previously been attempted, he insists nevertheless that different kinds of soul, like different geometrical figures, each require their own definition.²⁵ The identification of soul by the presence of life, and the understanding of life as the cause of various vital activities, suggest that perhaps souls may be distinguished in terms of these activities.²⁶ In II, 3 Aristotle follows up this line of thought, distinguishing five powers of soul (nutrition, sensation and desire, locomotion and thought) which give rise to four grades of life: plants, immobile and moving animals, and men. The chapter repeats this hierarchy of living things in this order twice,²⁷ and thus leads us to expect that each of the kinds of life is to be treated in terms of its distinctive power. And so the text proceeds, at least through the first two levels, discussing first plants and nutrition (II, 4) and then animals and sensation (II, 5-III, 2). But from III, 3 onwards the original ordering of powers becomes somewhat askew. First of all there is the discussion of *phantasia*, which has not been clearly isolated as a distinct power and does not distinguish a grade of life. Then, the discussion of the locomotive power does not closely follow the treatment of sensation, as we have been led to expect it should: rather, there is first an account of *nous*, and only thereafter a discussion of locomotion. Again, the theme of *nous* is carried over *into* the discussion of locomotion in chapters ten and eleven. Moreover, the faculty of desire, which apparently did not distinguish a grade of life and was linked with sensation,²⁸ appears in chapter ten to characterize the

22 "... A. considers himself entitled to use indifferently the terms *morion*, *archê*, *dynamis*, and *diaphora* throughout." R. D. Hicks, *Aristotle: De anima, with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1907), 550.

23 I, 1, 402a7-8.

24 The overall plan of the treatise would seem to be as follows:

1. Introduction (I, 1)
2. Historical Background (I, 2-5)
3. Investigation of the Soul
 - 1) Its essence (II, 1-3)
 - 2) Its properties (II, 4-III, 13)

25 I, 2, 402b5-9; II, 1, 412a4-6; II, 3, 414b20-21.

26 II, 2, 413a20-25.

27 414a32-b19, 414b33-415a13.

28 II, 3, 414b5-16.

locomotive grade of life. Finally, chapter nine takes up the question of the different parts of soul anew as if it had not previously been discussed in II, 3. Clearly, III, 3-11 constitutes a disruption in the plan outlined in II, 3 and followed to the end of III, 2. The themes of *phantasia*, thought, locomotion, and desire seem to be interwoven in a way which escapes the clear plan suggested in II, 3.²⁹

There is, however, another way in which III, 3-11 is set apart from the discussion of the soul's powers which precedes it. The section appears to have two parts, which consider the powers of thought (*nous*, ch. 3-8) and locomotion (*kinêsis*, ch. 9-11) respectively. Each of these parts is introduced with the same enunciation of two fundamental properties of soul, namely, cognition and locomotion.³⁰ It is something of a surprise to encounter these remarks, especially at the beginning of chapter three, since this enumeration of two properties harks back to a similar enumeration made in the discussion of earlier thinkers in Book I. This twofold characterization of the soul first occurred near the very beginning of the treatise, after the introduction, and movement and some form of cognition recur through Book I as the primary features of the soul according to Aristotle's predecessors.³¹ In Book II and in the first two chapters of Book III this twofold characterization is not once mentioned, and the reader is led to believe that it has been displaced by Aristotle's division of five powers distinguishing four grades of life. We may note, however, that there is a gradual transformation of this twofold division of the soul's powers: in I, 2 Aristotle first describes the two powers as motion (*kinêsis*) and sensation (*aisthanesthai*),³² then later as movement (*kineisthai*) on the one hand and knowledge (*ginôskein*) and sensation (*aisthanesthai*) on the other;³³ in III, 3, where the twofold division suddenly reappears, he speaks of motion (*kinêsis*) on the one hand and of thought (*noein*), judgment (*krinein*) and sensation (*aisthanesthai*) on the other;³⁴ in III, 9 he speaks, most clearly, on the one hand of the "distinguishing" power (*to kritikon*), which is the work of thought (*dianoia*) and sensation (*aisthêsis*), and on the other hand of locomotion

29 Insofar as the original plan is followed, the outline would be:

The Soul

- 1) Its essence (II, 1-3)
- 2) Its properties
 1. Nutrition (II, 4)
 2. Sensation (II, 5-III, 2)
 Transition from sensation to *nous* (III, 3)
3. *Nous* (III, 4-8)
4. Locomotion (III, 9-11)

30 427a17-19, 432a15-17.

31 2, 403b25-27, 404b7-9, 404b27-28; 3, 405b31; 4, 408a35-b1; 5, 404b19-25. At 405b12 and 409b21 a third feature of the soul, its "bodiless" (*asômaton*) character, is added.

32 403b25-27.

33 404b7-9.

34 427a17-19.

(*kinein tēn kata topon kinēsin*).³⁵ From the standpoint of III, 9 the division of powers, and of the corresponding discussions of them, would seem to be: the distinguishing power, as treated in II, 5-III, 8; and locomotion, as treated in III, 9-11. Yet this scheme abandons the division according to grades of life. Moreover, the distinguishing power plays a significant role in locomotion, and seems therefore to be more fundamental. Thus, the latter part of the treatise, from II, 5 onwards, might be thought to be devoted to explaining the *kritikon*.³⁶

Yet a third way of approaching the latter part of the treatise might be based on Aristotle's division, in his introduction, between powers which are peculiar to the soul and those which are common to soul and body.³⁷ His repeated suggestions that *nous* is what he means by the first of these³⁸ seem to indicate that the entire treatise is directed towards the discussion of the power of thought. This would not be surprising, since the distinctively Aristotelian theme of *nous* provides the culmination and climax of the *De anima*, as likewise of the *Posterior Analytics*, the *Metaphysics*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. And since the discussion of *nous* spills over into the account of *kinēsis*, for which it is a presupposition, it might be thought that *nous* is the theme embracing the whole of III, 3-11. This section is further complicated by two considerations introduced by Aristotle: the first is that he regards *nous* as a twofold power, being both theoretical and practical, and that it therefore merits consideration both independently, as a "distinguishing" faculty, and within the account of *kinēsis*; the second is that he takes the discussion of animal locomotion as an appropriate occasion to discuss such moral topics as the practical intellect, the practical syllogism, choice, wish, desire and the good. Thus, III, 3-8 and 9-11 thematically overlap, since, on the one hand, the theme of *nous* extends into practical questions, while, on the other hand, the theme of *kinēsis* gives rise to moral considerations. Since the *nous praktikos* appears at the intersection of the discussion of *to kritikon* and *to kinētikon*, one might be led to the strange conclusion that the *De anima* is primarily a text of moral philos-

35 432a15-17.

36 Thus the outline would be:

The Soul

- 1) Its essence (II, 1-4)
- 2) Its "distinguishing" power (*to kritikon*)
 1. *to kritikon* in itself (II, 5-III, 8)
 2. *to kritikon* and locomotion (III, 9-11)

It is not inappropriate to include II, 4 in the section on the soul's essence, since its discussion of powers, acts, and objects, and of the different ways in which the soul is a "cause", continue the general account of the soul, and because the discussion of the nutritive power indicates an intrinsic relation between the soul as such and nourishment (416b11-12).

37 402a9-10.

38 I, 1, 403a8; 4, 408b18-29; 5, 411b18-19; II, 2, 413b24-27; 3, 415a11-12.

ophy. At any rate, *nous* is a continuing and unifying theme throughout III, 3-11.³⁹

2.2. *The Introduction of De Anima, III, 3*

Whether or not a single consistent account of the *De anima*'s structure can be given, there is certainly an important division of the treatise at the beginning of III, 3. The abstract and isolated consideration of sensation is here left behind, and attention is turned to thinking, a much more complex topic which ultimately involves discussion not only of the power of *nous*, but also of sensation, locomotion, desire, and the good. Its most immediate requirement, however, is evidently an examination of *phantasia*. Let us see how Aristotle broaches this theme.

His first concern is to establish a distinction between thinking (*noein* and *phronein*) and sensation, which resemble one another, since in both cases the soul distinguishes (*krinei*) something and recognizes (*gnôrizet*) beings. In response to earlier philosophers, who took thinking to be something bodily, and who held that like is known, as well as sensed, by like, Aristotle objects that such a theory is unable to account for error. It is clear, he continues, that neither *phronein* nor *noein* are sensation: not *phronein*, since it belongs to only a few animals, while sensation belongs to all; and not *noein*, because while sensation is always true of its proper objects and belongs to all animals, *dianoesthai* may be false and belongs only to those who possess *logos*.⁴⁰ Thus appealing to an immediate recognition of the absence both of practical wisdom and of *logos* in many animals who possess sensation, Aristotle is quickly able to distinguish between thinking and sensation.

Here he abruptly introduces the subject of *phantasia*, distinguishing it from both sensation and thought (*dianoia*); it does not occur without sensation, nor does judgment (*hypolêpsis*) occur without it.⁴¹ He then goes on to elaborate the difference between *phantasia* and thinking. What is the motive for this sudden change of subject? Thus far, the main theme of the chapter has been "thinking" in a very broad sense, and Aristotle is attempting to isolate thinking from that which resembles it. The danger of confusing thinking with sensing lay in a materialistic view of knowledge and in a simplistic understanding of the principle that like

39 The third and final division of the *De anima*'s latter portion would be:

The Soul

1) Its essence (II, 1-4)

2) Its powers

1. Sensation, the power shared by soul and body (II, 5-III, 2)

2. *Nous*, the power proper to the soul (III, 3-11)

In all three ways of dividing the text, the concluding chapters on sensation (III, 12-13) stand apart. They seem to form a sort of appendix to the treatise (cf. II, 2, 414a1-2) and a transition to the *De sensu et sensato*.

40 427a19-b14.

41 428a15-16.

is known by like. Wherein now lies the danger of mistaking *phantasia* for thinking? This possible confusion seems to have two basic sources.

The first is that both thinking and *phantasia* may occur in the absence of a sensible object. The example that Aristotle offers of mnemonists ordering their images within themselves⁴² illustrates this well. While sensation requires the physical presence of its object, *phantasia*, like thinking, has for its immediate object something interior which remains and may be "arranged" for consideration in the absence of sensible things.⁴³ Thus, both thinking and *phantasia* have an interiority and an independence of the sensible world which makes them resemble one another. The ordinary view perhaps does not distinguish between thoughtful reflection employing *logos* and the inspection of *phantasmata*, and Aristotle will show how closely these two are in fact interwoven.

The second respect in which thinking and *phantasia* are alike is that both may similarly serve as inner springs of animal activity: "Again, because imaginations persist in us and resemble sensations, living creatures frequently act in accordance with them (*kat' autas*), some, viz., the brutes, because they have no mind (*noûn*), and some, viz., men, because the mind (*noûn*) is temporarily clouded over by emotion, or disease, or sleep."⁴⁴ This resemblance later leads Aristotle to allow that *phantasia* may actually be called a certain *noêsis*:

These two, then, appetite (*orexis*) and mind (*noûs*) are clearly capable of causing movement if, that is, one regards imagination (*phantasia*) as some sort of thinking process (*noêsin*); for men often follow their imaginations (*phantasai*) contrary to knowledge, and in living creatures other than man there is neither thinking (*noêsis*) nor calculation (*logismos*), but only imagination (*phantasia*).⁴⁵

Thus, from the point of view of animal activity, as well as of human activity in so far as it is generated by the passions of the body, *phantasia* and *nous* seem to perform analogous originating functions and to be interchangeable one for the other.

Since, both from its interiority and from its orientation to action, *phantasia* has the appearance of a kind of thinking, Aristotle is thus compelled to distinguish these two cognitive activities. He at once does so in a cursory way, as he has distinguished thinking from sensing, by mentioning two clear indications of their difference: the first is that the exercise of *phantasia* rests with us, as in the case of the mnemonic arrangement of images, while judging something to be so (*doxazein*) is not circumscribed by our activity, but involves some reference beyond us by which it is true or false; the second is that when our judgment

42 427b18-20.

43 Cf. II, 5, 417b18-27.

44 III, 3, 429a4-8. The texts of Aristotle are quoted in the translation by W. S. Hett in the Loeb Classical Library edition of *On the Soul, Parva Naturalia, On Breath* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; and London: William Heinemann, 1957).

45 III, 10, 433a9-12.

confronts something fearful or terrible we are immediately moved, while *phantasia* coolly regards such affecting scenes as one would a picture.⁴⁶ These indications are clearly meant to compel the reader's immediate assent and to allow Aristotle to proceed with the assumption that *phantasia* and thinking are distinct activities of the soul. Yet they are not sufficient to permit him to pass directly beyond *phantasia* to a discussion of *noein*.

In a remark introducing the necessary excursus on *phantasia*, Aristotle anticipates a major theme of his analysis of thinking, namely, that the activity of *noein* in man is somehow double, comprising one dimension which belongs to the sensible world and one which does not: "As for thought (*noein*), since it is distinct from perception (*aisthanesthai*), and is held to comprise imagination and judgment (*to men phantasia dokei einai to de hypolêpsis*), it will be best to discuss it after having completed our analysis of imagination (*phantasia*)."⁴⁷ Having once been touched on, the theme of *phantasia* cannot now be abandoned. This is not only because it is interesting in its own right, as a power of the soul which has yet to be defined: Aristotle in fact has thus far expressed little need for an account of *phantasia* in his investigation of the soul. It is rather because an understanding of *phantasia* will be necessary to the explanation of the human activity of *noein*. While *phantasia* is often found in isolation from *noein*, in man as well as in the other animals, its primary significance for Aristotle in the *De anima* lies in its instrumentality with respect to this human activity.

3. The Definition of *Phantasia*

Although the introductory section of *De anima*, III, 3 points forward to the theme of *nous*, Aristotle's analysis of *phantasia* itself depends heavily on his preceding account of *aisthêsis*. In searching for a definition of *phantasia*, we must see how the inner appearances have their roots in the act of sensation.

Among the many and complex ways in which things can "appear" to man, the most fundamental and paradigmatic seems to be the striking and continuous presentation of things to his senses. The close resemblance between sensation and the inner appearances is dramatically evident in the *phantasia* of dreaming, in which the dreamer takes himself to be actually seeing and hearing things beyond himself. It is thus not surprising that Aristotle defines *phantasia* a number of times, in very different contexts, as a function of *aisthêsis*.⁴⁸ On the other hand, in his

46 III, 3, 427b17-24.

47 427b27-29.

48 *De anima*, III, 3, 429a1-2; *De insomniis*, 1, 459a17-18; *Rhetoric*, I, 11, 1370a27. It is customary to compare the *Rhetoric*'s definition of *phantasia* as a "certain weak sensation" (*aisthêsis tis asthenês*) with Hobbes' remark in *Leviathan*, ch. 2, that "imagination is therefore nothing but decaying sense".

discussion of the law of non-contradiction, he pointedly remarks that *phantasia* is not the same thing as *aisthesis*.⁴⁹

The identification of *phantasia* and *aisthêsis* is associated by Plato and Aristotle with the name of Protagoras, which they take to be emblematic of an elaborate doctrine of the instability of the world and of the subjective and material character of knowledge. Both present the Protagorean theme of the truth of the *phainomena* from a hostile point of view, answering it, on the one hand, with a doctrine of an immobile and immaterial being, and, on the other hand, with a firm distinction between sensation and knowledge.⁵⁰ Thus set against the background of the opposition between *ousia* and *genesis*, the theme of *phantasia* as a distinct activity of the soul arises, as in the *De anima*, the *De memoria*, and the *De insomniis*,⁵¹ in the gap opened up by the separation between sensing and thinking. *Phantasia* seems to resemble each of these in certain ways, which may explain the Protagorean confusion between them, while it also serves as the link between them in the Aristotelian explanation of knowledge.

Aristotle opens the thematic discussion of *phantasia* with five indications which distinguish it from sensation. Among these, the decisive point seems to be that an "appearing" (*phainetai*) may occur when the sense-powers are inoperative, as in dreams or when one's eyes are closed, so that *phantasia* cannot be the same thing as sensation.⁵² On the other hand, he observes as a matter of fact that *phantasia* seems not to occur without sensation, since both take place in the same subjects and are directed to the same objects.⁵³ It is in establishing the precise relation between these two activities that Aristotle arrives at his definition of *phantasia*.

Sensation, according to Aristotle, is the distinctive power of animals, one which may be generally described as a passive "being moved" (*kineisthai*) or "altered" (*alloiousthai*) or "acted upon" (*paschein*). More specifically, it is a process of actualization (*energein*) in which the passive sense-power is impinged upon by its object, somewhat in the way that fuel is kindled by fire; in an interpretation of the saying that "like is known by like", Aristotle explains this actualization as an assimilation (*homoioûtai*) in which the sense-power begins as unlike its object, and is transformed into a likeness of it. Finally, sensation involves the reception of sensible forms without their matter, just as wax

49 *Metaphysics*, IV, 5, 1010b3.

50 The Platonic response to Protagoras is found in Socrates' uncovering of the presuppositions and consequences of Theaetetus' definition of *epistêmê* as *aisthêsis* (*Theaetetus*, 151d3-186e12); *phantasia* is identified with *aisthêsis* near the beginning of the argument (152c1). Aristotle alludes to this discussion while opposing to the Protagorean view of the *phainomena* the famous "law of non-contradiction" (*Metaphysics*, IV, 5, 1010b12).

51 III, 3, 427a17-b14; I, 449b9-30; I, 458b1-22.

52 428a5-16.

53 428b11-13.

takes on the imprint, but not the material, of a seal.⁵⁴ Sensation, then, is a physical motion, a process of actualization, an assimilation, and the reception of a dematerialized form.

From among the various elements of this account of sensation, Aristotle, in his explanation of *phantasia*, selects the simplest and most general, namely, the point that sensation is a certain physical motion (*kinêsis*). Observing that something which is moved by another may in turn move something else, and that *phantasia* itself seems to be some sort of motion, one which depends on sensation, he quickly arrives at the definition of *phantasia* as "a movement produced by sensation actively operating" (*kinêsis hypo tês aisthêseos tês kat'energeian gignomenês*).⁵⁵ Such a secondary movement necessarily resembles sensation, which in turn is an assimilation to the sensible object; moreover, the movement of *phantasia* evidently continues in the absence of the sensible object and the inoperancy of the sense-power.⁵⁶ Thus *phantasia*, as the power whereby sensation is capable of generating a likeness of itself which survives it, might be likened to a reproductive faculty: through it, the momentary, stillborn life of sensations is perpetuated in their offspring.⁵⁷

Although this brief sketch of *phantasia* in terms of *kinêsis* requires much amplification, it is important first to see why in itself it is significant for Aristotle. On the one hand, by describing *phantasia* in terms of one of the most fundamental and manifest features of the physical world,⁵⁸ it specifies *phantasia*, in contradistinction to *noein*, as an organic, bodily event; and therefore subject to all the limitations from which *nous* in its passionless incorporeity is exempt.⁵⁹ On the other hand, in characterizing *phantasia* as a secondary motion arising from sensation, Aristotle seems to be appealing to ordinary experience of the inner appearances. His book on dreams, which further develops the *De anima*'s account of *phantasia*, investigates this ordinary experience in greater detail.

After noting the fact that the experience (*pathos*) which occurs in sensation persists when sensations themselves have ceased, the second chapter of the *De insomniis* compares this persistence to the career of serially moved projectiles, the movement of one of which may continue when its mover is at rest. Something similar occurs in the "movement" of change of state (*alloiôsis*), as when something heated transmits its heat to something else; and as with sensation itself, whose actualization is also a certain *alloiôsis*, which explains why its *pathos* persists when the sense organs are no longer active. As evidence of the fact itself,

54 *De anima*, II, 5 and 12.

55 III, 3, 428b10-11, 429a1-2.

56 428b14, 429a4-5.

57 Cf. note 13 above.

58 Cf. *Physics*, I, 1, 185a14.

59 *De anima*, III, 5, 430a17-18.

Aristotle invites us to consider the effect of gazing at something continuously for a while, and then abruptly shifting our attention to something different: in turning from sunlight to darkness, from one colour to another, or from moving things to things at rest, we notice that some trace of the first object appears (*phainetai*) for a time in our consideration of the second.⁶⁰

Aristotle finds in these slight indications a sufficient explanation of dreaming: by day, when our senses and thought are active, the persisting traces of sensation are obscured, as a small fire is by a greater; but when these present-directed activities are at rest, the continuing reverberations of sensation are left to occupy the centre of attention.⁶¹ This explanation suggests that the activity of *phantasia* may prove to be a problem for its subject, since the difference between present sensation and the present persistence of past sensation seems to be a kind of tension, potentially dividing man between his present and his past, between what confronts him in the world and what preoccupies him within.

The *De insomniis* also repeats the *De anima*'s definition of *phantasia*, and in so doing it even more closely unites the powers of *phantasia* and *aisthêsis*:

... the imaginative (*phantastikon*) is the same as the sensitive faculty, although the imaginative and the sensitive are different in essence (*einai*); and since imagination (*phantasia*) is the process set up by a sense faculty in a state of activity (*hê hypo tês kat'energeian aisthêseos gignomenê kinêsis*), and a dream appears to be some sort of mental image (*phantasma*) (for an image [*phantasma*] which appears in sleep, whether simply or in a special sense, we call a dream); it is clear that dreaming belongs to the sensitive faculty, but belongs to it *qua* imaginative (*hêi phantastikon*).⁶²

It is difficult to know what to make of the remark that sensation and *phantasia* are the same but different in *einai*.⁶³ If the suggestion is that the two are different activities of the same subject, both having the same organic foundation, the "secondary movement" of *phantasia* requires further physiological explanation.⁶⁴ From the point of view of the *De anima*, however, the account of *phantasia* now seems to be complete. Its qualified identity with sensation explains why it is not a separate power and does not determine a distinct kind of soul. As the inevitable

60 459a28-b23.

61 *De insomniis*, 3, 460b28-461a8.

62 1, 459a15-22.

63 For discussion of this formulation, see Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De motu animalium*, 234-236.

64 Aristotle's account of the physiology of *phantasia* in terms of reflected sensations which are borne inward toward a central organ, and sometimes distorted or obscured, by the currents of the blood (461a8-462a8) may be scientifically naive, but is metaphorically precise, since the paradigmatic instance of a *phantasma* seems to be the visible, inevitably altered reflection of the outer appearances in the fluctuating element of water (cf. *Republic*, VI, 510a1). See *De prophetia in somno*, 2, 464b9: the inner appearances (*phantasmata*) are much like the "images" (*eidôla*) found in water.

after-effect of sensation, *phantasia* is a dimension of the life of all animal souls.⁶⁵

Apart from the concept of *kinêsis*, there is one other feature from Aristotle's account of sensation which is carried over into his discussion of *phantasia*, namely, the remark that sensation involves the reception of form without matter. It is because this is so, he suggests, that sensations and *phantasiai* remain in the sense organs even when the sensible objects have gone.⁶⁶ This lingering, resonating, echoing presence of sensible forms freed from their original matter appears to be the essence of *phantasia* for Aristotle. The movement in the sense-power caused by the sensible object itself sets up a second movement which continues after the sensation has ceased and the object has gone. The animal soul, therefore, is not merely one which is in touch with its environment through the cognition of sensation, but one which carries the reverberating effects of its past encounters with sensible objects; it is not only a receiver, but also a preserver and a storehouse, of the sensible forms of things.⁶⁷

4. *Phantasia* and *Nous*

It remains to show how Aristotle's discussion of *phantasia* subserves the analysis of *noein* which it introduces. What is the role of the persisting inner appearances in the activity of thinking?

Taking up the delicate task of explaining the origin of thinking (*noein*) in *De anima*, III, 4, Aristotle once again, as he had at the beginning of chapter three, initiates the discussion with a comparison between thinking and sensation. However, having been freed of the danger of confusing thinking with sensing, or with its offspring *phantasia*, the comparison can now proceed more instructively. Like sensation, then, thinking is a certain "being acted upon" (*paschein*) which is possible because thought is receptive of (*dektikon*) and potentially (*dunamei*) identical with the forms (*eidê*) of beings. In thinking, as in sensing, cognition is not to be understood by means of any *a priori* structure other than a specific emptiness, openness, and susceptibility to the forms of things. As the sense-power (*aisthêtikon*) is to its objects, the *aisthêta*, so, by strict analogy, is *nous* to the *noêta*, with the crucial difference that, unlike sensation, the operation of thought is free of any admixture (*amigê*), whether in the power or in its object, with matter and the body.⁶⁸

65 Aristotle suggests a division between animals which have *phantasia* and those which do not (*De anima*, II, 3, 415a10-11; III, 3, 428a10-11), but finally allows that even the imperfect animals possess an indeterminate *phantasia* (*ibid.*, III, 11, 433b31-434a4).

66 *De anima*, III, 2, 425b23-25.

67 Thus Aristotle's *phantasia* resembles very much the *memoria* eloquently described by St. Augustine (*Confessions*, X, 8-26): *venio in campos et lata praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum de cuiusce modi rebus sensis invecarum ...*

68 429a13-18.

The comparison between sense and *nous* is further developed in chapter eight. The soul is in a way all of the beings (*onta*); for the beings are either sensible (*aisthêta*) or intelligible (*noêta*), and while knowledge is in a way knowable objects (*epistêta*), so sensation is in a way sensible objects. In what way *are* these powers their objects? Potentially so. They are potentially identical, not with the beings as they are in themselves, but with their forms (*eidê*), which they are capable of taking on.⁶⁹ Just as sense is moved by and assimilated to its object by receiving its form, so thought is similarly affected by its object. The human soul's two principal cognitive powers enable it to extend to and identify with the two corresponding fields of beings because these powers, while empty of themselves, are receptive of and open to the assimilating influence of the *eidê* of beings. Like the potentiality of matter, they are nothing in themselves until they take on form.

Beyond this similar structure of openness, on which Aristotle insists so emphatically, these two parallel kinds of cognition have also a unifying relationship in the life of the human soul. *Phantasia*, which is a modulation of the sensitive faculty, and which, Aristotle has said, is integral to the activity of *noein*, seems to point the way to the root unity of sensing and thinking, and of the human soul itself in its identity with all of the beings.

The unity of sense and thought seems to be grounded in the limitations of human *nous*, which, though immaterial in itself, is constrained to operate within the sensible confines of space and time. It seems (*hôs dokei*), says Aristotle, that there is nothing which exists apart from magnitude or the sensible beings.⁷⁰ This "it seems" apparently signals a description of the beings from the point of view of human *noein*, which, for a reason left unstated by Aristotle, is compelled to include "the continuous" in all its considerations, and to regard even the eternal beings from within the horizon of time.⁷¹ But if all of the beings accessible to human cognition come within the range of sensation, what makes the power of *noein* distinctive and not merely superfluous? Within the context of the *De anima*, the answer to this question must be in terms of the object of *noein*.⁷² If *nous* and *aisthêsis* are to be distinct, their objects must be distinct. But since *nous* is surrounded on all sides by the sensible beings, where is it to find its special object? Not apart from or beyond the sensible beings, Aristotle suggests, but rather within them: the *noêta* are present potentially (*dunamei*) in things which have matter.⁷³

In order to understand this potential presence of the *noêta* in the *aisthêta*, we must unravel Aristotle's compact account of the different

69 431b21-432a1.

70 432a3-4.

71 *De memoria et reminiscentia*, I, 450a7-9.

72 Cf. II, 4, 415a20-22.

73 III, 4, 430a6-7; 8, 432a4-5.

ways in which things may be considered in relation to matter.⁷⁴ Distinguishing between material things and "separated" (*en aphairesei*) or mathematical things, he notes that in each case there is always a difference between the thing itself in its substrate, whether this be matter or "the continuous", and the "being" (*einai*) of the thing in isolation from its substrate. Material flesh is different from the isolated "being" (*einai*) of flesh, just as that which is straight is different from the "essence" (*ti ên einai*) of straightness. Now Aristotle thinks that these two different considerations of one and the same thing require to be discriminated (*krinei*) by different faculties or by different modifications of one inclusive faculty. By sensation we distinguish hot and cold, and whatever else pertains to material things in their materiality. By *nous*, however, we disengage the *einai* of material things, that is, the immaterial and therefore unmoving essence or mathematical aspect which is present within them: "speaking generally, as objects are separable from their matter, so also are the corresponding faculties of the mind (*ta peri ton noûn*)". The process of thinking, then, involves the uncovering and separation of the intelligible form—the "being" of the sensible thing which is the specific object of *nous*—from its enveloping sensible forms, such as the hot and the cold, which signify the presence of matter. This being so, it is clear not just that *noein* is analogous to sensation, but that it relies on sensation for its very object.

Thus conveyed by means of the spatial metaphor of interiority, Aristotle's point is clearly that *nous* discovers its distinctive object by its power of picking out an aspect of the *aisthêta* which is hidden from sensation. Nevertheless, in stating a major theme of chapters seven and eight, he consistently prefers to say that *nous* thinks its *eidê* in the *phantasmata*.⁷⁵ That *nous* depends more immediately on the intermediate faculty of *phantasia* than on the primary faculty of sensation is evidently of central importance in the discussion, and would appear to be the justification for the digression on *phantasia* in chapter three. Yet Aristotle does not make explicit the full significance of this dependency. Why do the *phantasmata* serve *noein* as *aisthêmata*? Why is *aisthêsis* of itself incompetent to provide *nous* with its object? By considering the essential role of *phantasia* in human thinking, we are led to reflect on the peculiar nature of human thinking itself.

We may note at once that there is nothing exceptionable about substituting *phantasmata* for *aisthêmata* in the act of *noein*. Since the secondary movement of *phantasia* takes on the imprint received in *aisthêsis* and differs from *aisthêsis* only in its continuance through time, there is no reason why *nous* cannot discover the *einai* of sensible things within the enclosing sensible forms preserved by *phantasia*. Our ques-

74 III, 4, 429b10-22.

75 7, 431a14-15, 431b2; 8, 432a8-10.

tion is not why *phantasia* may serve *nous* equally with *aisthêsis*, but why it is valuable to *nous* in a way in which *aisthêsis* cannot be.

Aristotle's text suggests a number of answers to this question, all of them revolving around a single important point: *noein*, it seems, requires some degree of permanence in the sensible beings if it is to be able to penetrate their material coverings and reveal to itself their intelligible interiority. While it is true that their sensible forms afford some permanence to the material beings, this permanence is extremely unreliable, subject as it is to the abrupt changes of the continually vanishing sensible world. More crucially, the immediate human contact with the sensible beings, *aisthêsis*, is an instantaneous, ever-new event which is wholly confined to the fragment of time Aristotle calls "the now".⁷⁶ Even to the extent that the sensible beings show some degree of constancy, our sensitive apprehension of them is inevitably momentary and changing. *Aisthêsis* continually offers to *nous* its object, but only to at once withdraw it and substitute a different object. Even if *nous* could follow *aisthêsis* through its transformations, glimpsing the essence or mathematical aspect of each object in rapid succession, these would not be grasped as the unmoving or timeless *einai* which *nous* requires for its object. The action of *phantasia*, which lends to the appearances a stability which they do not have of themselves, would seem to be the human soul's response to this dilemma. By means of preserved *phantasmata*, *nous* is enabled to continuously behold its timeless object, even when the mediating sensible thing is past, absent or in motion.

As an illustration of how *phantasia* extends the range of *nous* beyond the now, we may note how necessary preserved *phantasmata* are to the process of learning.⁷⁷ Without this retention and accumulation of past encounters with sensible beings, it is clear that there could be no acquisition of knowledge, but only a forgetful succession of insights. This dependency of *nous* on *phantasia* for retention, however, reveals to us that of itself the power of thought has no memory. This in turn makes the similarity between *nous* and *aisthêsis* even closer, since both seem to be purely present actualizations, *aisthêsis* because of its confinement to the now, and *nous* because of its orientation to the timeless. This is not to say that *phantasia* is simply identical with memory, which Aristotle takes to be a special activity of *phantasia* in which the appearances (*phantasmata*) are regarded as images (*eikones*) of sensible objects in the past.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, while it is not the pastness of the objects of *phantasia* as such to which *noêsis* is directed,⁷⁹ it is their deliverance from the passing of time which allows *noêsis* to make use of them.

⁷⁶ *Physics*, IV, 10-14; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 4, 1174a13-17.

⁷⁷ Cf. *De anima*, III, 8, 432a7-9.

⁷⁸ *De memoria et reminiscentia*, I, 450a25-451a14.

⁷⁹ Aristotle says that objects of *noêsis* are only incidentally objects of memory (*ibid.*, 450a24-25).

In a less direct way, *phantasia* also seems to extend the range of *nous* into the future. Aristotle brings this out in showing the interplay of practical thinking, desire, and the *phantasmata*:

So the thinking faculty (*noêtikon*) thinks the forms (*eidê*) in the mental images (*phantasmasi*), and just as in the sphere of sense what is to be pursued and avoided is defined for it, so also outside sensation, when it is occupied with mental images (*phantasmatôn*), is moved. ... But sometimes by means of the images (*phantasmasin*) or thoughts (*noêmasin*) in the soul, just as if it were seeing, it calculates and plans for the future in view of the present; and when it makes a statement, as in sensation it asserts that an object is pleasant or unpleasant, in this case it avoids or pursues; and so generally in action.⁸⁰

Once having gained a foothold in time by means of *phantasia*, *nous* is capable of putting its survey of the past into the service of a calculation of the future. The importance of experience for practical wisdom is clearly based on the preserving activity of *phantasia*.

In an illuminating image, Aristotle compares the use made by the noetic soul of *phantasia* to the role of diagrams in geometry:

It is impossible even to think (*noein*) without a mental picture (*phantasmatos*). The same affection (*pathos*) is involved in thinking (*noein*) as in drawing a diagram; for in this case although we make no use of the fact that the magnitude of a triangle is a finite quality, yet we draw it as having a finite magnitude. In the same way the man who is thinking (*ho noôn*), though he may not be thinking of a finite magnitude, still puts a finite magnitude before his eyes, though he does not think of it as such. And even if the nature of the object is quantitative, but indeterminate, he still puts before him a finite magnitude, although he thinks of it as merely quantitative. Why it is impossible to think of anything without continuity (*tou synechous*) or to think of things which are timeless except in terms of time, is another question.⁸¹

Phantasia resembles Plato's "painter in the soul", whose job is to illustrate the text of the soul's grasp of truth.⁸² As a geometer with a portable slate, the noetic soul considers truth at its leisure, not because it has no need of paradigmatic sensible images, but because it can produce its own such images in the activity of *phantasia*. *Phantasia* preserves the characteristic features of sensible things, such as their determinate quantity, but *nous* is able to disregard these and to disengage the immaterial "being" of material beings, much as a geometer makes use of a specific right-angled triangle in deducing a truth about all such triangles. It might be noted in passing that this comparison perhaps indicates that Aristotle is here responding to the *Republic's* account of the divided line, which also compares a certain kind of thinking (*dianoia*) to the image-making activity of geometers.⁸³ But while Socrates there attempts to describe a higher kind of thinking (*noêsis*) which makes no use of images whatsoever,⁸⁴ Aristotle, like the Glaucon of the *Republic*, seems

80 *De anima*, III, 7, 431b2-10. The role of *phantasia* in practical thinking and animal activity is further developed in *De anima*, III, 10-11, which is doctrinally parallel to *De motu animalium*, 6-8. See, for discussion of these passages, Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De motu animalium*, 232-241.

81 *De memoria et reminiscencia*, 1, 449b31-450a9.

82 *Philbeus*, 39b1ff.

83 VI, 511a1, e2.

84 511d8.

to have difficulty in conceiving the possibility of such a pure and imageless thought.

Nous, then, depends on *phantasia* to provide the relative steadiness which it requires of its object. A further point, however, one which may be even more important for an understanding of human activity, is that the continuousness of *noein* is also a requirement of the very nature of *nous* itself. Thinking, according to Aristotle, is both an activity which of its very nature tends towards a constant, uninterrupted actualization,⁸⁵ as well as the activity which man *can* perform most continuously.⁸⁶ The discussion of the life of *nous* at the conclusion of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (X, 6-8) suggests that human thought, the imperfect image of the life of the gods, takes its nobility and resemblance to the divine from the degree to which it is able to operate with some continuity. It would seem to be a measure of the importance of *phantasia* to man that it provides some secure foundation, however intermittently, for this divine operation in the life of a perishable being.

The need for the hypothesis of *phantasia* in an account of the human soul seems to arise from the complexity of human cognition, or, more specifically, from the complex way in which human cognition is related to time. In souls characterized by sensation alone, *phantasia* gives rise to memory and desire, prolonging the now of sensation into past and future for the sake of the animal's preservation. In the noetic or human soul, however, *phantasia* is a step in man's progression beyond time altogether, enabling him at certain points and for certain periods to pass beyond the confinements of sense to a consideration of the timeless natures of things. To be sure, the imperfection of this transcendence may be attributed to the origins of *phantasia* in the time-conditioned circumstances of sensation. But while *phantasia* may be the source of the failure of human *noein* to fully realize itself, it is also what makes this activity possible at all.

The two prominent moments of human cognition, *nous* and *aisthêsis*, are strikingly similar in their empty receptivity and in their total, present-directed absorption in the forms of beings, though the fleeting present of sensation and the abiding present of mathematical truth are apparently essentially disjoined. The union of these two presents, and hence the unity of the human soul, require the mediating activity of *phantasia*, which does not merely receive, as do *nous* and *aisthêsis*, but also retains, in order that the present of sensation may be made to resemble the present of mathematics. *Phantasia* achieves this resemblance, however imperfectly, simply by allowing the movement of sensation to persist. Because the impermanent sensible beings are thereby, in their reflections within us, caused to imitate the fixed *noêta*, human thinking in turn is enabled to imitate the noetic life of the gods.

85 *De anima*, III, 5, 430a22.

86 *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 7, 1177a23-25.

Conclusion

The role of *phantasia* in human life, according to Aristotle, goes far beyond its contribution to the activity of *noein*, and is, in fact, pervasive. That the discussion of the noetic soul occurs in the *De anima* just after the treatment of *phantasia*, on which it depends, seems to underline the human importance of this activity, which is apparently both incessant in man and at the heart of his deepest concerns. As we have just seen, the activity of thought, man's highest endeavour, is impossible without the concurrent activity of *phantasia*; moreover, when the power of thought is eclipsed in man, as it easily is, he, like the other animals, acts in accordance with *phantasia*,⁸⁷ which, in its hidden interaction with the passions,⁸⁸ thus plays a significant part in his moral and political life. Finally, the operation of man's *phantasia* is not restricted to his waking life, but continues, perhaps even more intensely, in his dreams. Whether awake or asleep, then, and whether thoughtful or thoughtless, man never ceases to take his bearings in the world by means of *phantasia*.

Just as the roots of the word *phantasia* connote light, visibility, and the heavenly phenomena, so *phantasia* in its "objective" sense, as has been said, is often used by Aristotle when speaking of the heavenly bodies and of colours. The milky way, comets, shooting stars, planets, lightning, and rainbows—all the celestial occurrences which orient man in the cosmos—each have their *phantasia* or "appearance", which may include their brightness, figure, swiftness, and presumably any aspect which they present to the earthly observer.⁸⁹ Colours too, which for Aristotle are a primary source of our knowledge of the differences among things,⁹⁰ each have their own unique "look" or *phantasia*.⁹¹ These visible phenomena, both in their usefulness and in their charm, perhaps lend resonances to the word *phantasia* which carry over into its "subjective" meaning. As it occurs in Aristotle's discussions of memory, dreaming, thinking, and desire, the term may suggest that the inner appearances which accompany such experiences have all the diverting prominence in human life which the more striking features of the visible

87 *De anima*, III, 3, 429a4-8.

88 Aristotle offers some interesting examples of this interaction: the passions of anger, fear, confidence, and shame involve the activity of *phantasia* (*Rhetoric*, II, 2, 1378a30-b10; 5, 1382a21ff., 1383a17; 6, 1383b12-1384a22); the cowardly, the erotic, and the angry are easily deceived by slight resemblances between the inner appearances and the objects of their passions (*De insomniis*, 2, 460b4-11); *phantasia* is operative in the "self-image" which is a spur to victory, honour, and excellence (*Rhetoric*, I, 11, 1370b33; 1371a9, 19); the melancholy are particularly susceptible to the influence of the inner appearances (*De memoria et reminiscencia*, 2, 453a19).

89 *Meteorologica*, I, 3, 339a35; 5, 342b23; 6, 342b32; II, 9, 370a15; III, 4, 374b8; *De mundo*, 4, 395b6; *Problemata*, XV, 4, 911a13; XXVI, 12, 941b22.

90 *De sensu et sensato*, 1, 437a5-7.

91 *De coloribus*, 1, 791b17; 2, 792a6, 8, b15; 3, 793a25; *Meteorologica*, III, 2, 372b8; *De sensu et sensato*, 3, 439b6.

world have in the panorama of nature. By internalizing and preserving such features, the power of *phantasia* provides man with a familiar interior landscape which, in contrast with the sensible beings in themselves, he may consult with confidence in its permanence. The relative permanence conferred on the sensible beings by *phantasia* is necessary and interesting to man in many practical ways, but its highest function is to provide an index of orientation and differentiation to the power of *nous*, and it is this highest function which points to the motive for the *De anima*'s digression on *phantasia*, as well as to the deepest meaning of the inner appearances in the life of the human soul.

Aristotle's various suggestions concerning the role of *phantasia* in human life would seem to be of particular relevance in our own time, when the scene of the outer appearances has been overlaid and intensified with an unprecedented proliferation of man-made *phantasmata*. Unlike the appearances of nature, these artificial *phantasmata*, which are in large part "appearances" of man himself, are formed from the beginning to become "inner appearances" and thereby to affect the course of human thought, passion, and ultimately action. The transmission of these *phantasmata* and the sharing of them among their receivers give rise to preoccupations which suggest that *phantasia*, the private and inner side of man's contact with the sensible beings, paradoxically has its greatest significance in our waking and public life.⁹²

92 The reader interested in pursuing the theme of *phantasia* in Aristotle might wish to consult the studies already mentioned, as well as the following: J. Frohschammer, *Ueber die Principien der Aristotelischen Philosophie und die Bedeutung der Phantasie in Derselben* (München: Adolf Ackermann, 1881); Robert J. Roth, S.J., "The Aristotelian Use of *Phantasia* and *Phantasma*", *The New Scholasticism* 37 (1963), 312-326; K. Lycos, "Aristotle and Plato on 'Appearing'", *Mind* 73 (1964), 496-514; M.-D. Phillipe, O.P., "Phantasia in the Philosophy of Aristotle", *The Thomist* 35 (1971), 1-42; A. D. Rees, "Aristotle's Treatment of *Phantasia*", in John P. Anton and George L. Kustas, eds., *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1971), 491-504; Seth Benardete, "Aristotle, *De Anima* III.3-5", *The Review of Metaphysics* 28 (1975), 611-622; Joyce Engmann, "Imagination and Truth in Aristotle", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14 (1976), 259-265; Malcolm Schofield, "Aristotle on the Imagination", in Jonathan Barnes, Malcolm Schofield, and Richard Sorabji, eds., *Articles on Aristotle: 4. Psychology and Aesthetics* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 103-132; and Jean-Louis Labarrière, "Imagination humaine et imagination animale chez Aristote", *Phronesis* 29 (1984), 17-49.