

## ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΑ IN ARISTOTLE, *DE ANIMA* 3. 3

There is no general agreement among scholars that Aristotle had a unified concept of *phantasia*. That is evident from the most cursory glance through the literature. Freudenthal (p. 53) speaks of the contradictions into which Aristotle seems to fall in his remarks about *phantasia*, and explains the contradictions as due to the border position which *phantasia* occupies between *Wahrnehmung* and thinking. Ross, in *Aristotle* (ed. 5, London, 1949), p. 143, talks of passages on *phantasia* in *De Anima* 3. 3 which constitute 'a reversal of his doctrine of sensation' and perhaps do not 'represent his deliberate view'. This is a serious state of affairs, since *De Anima* 3. 3 is Aristotle's main discussion of *phantasia*. Of passages on *phantasia*, appearances and images in *De Anima* 3. 3, Hamlyn says: 'There is clearly little consistency here'. Even Schofield, who is more optimistic about saving the unity of Aristotle's concept than the last two scholars, grants that 'some of the inconsistencies of Aristotle's account seem more than merely apparent'.<sup>1</sup> He thinks of Aristotle's *phantasia* as a 'loose-knit, family concept' (op. cit., p. 106). My purpose here is to suggest that Aristotle is more consistent in his use of *phantasia* than his critics will allow him to be. The translation of the term as imagination frequently adds unnecessarily to the confusion, so I shall avoid it and use transliteration instead.

It will be generally agreed that the notion is important in his system and occurs throughout his work, from the earliest to the latest writings. One who comes straight from Plato to Aristotle is immediately struck by the increased frequency of the occurrences of the word in the latter's works. Its relative infrequency in Plato must not blind us, however, to the importance of that to which it refers, nothing less than our knowledge of the sensible world. Nevertheless, the topic has been largely ignored in Plato, with consequent distortion of our understanding of Aristotle. The increased frequency of the word in the works of Aristotle is due perhaps to debates within the Academy itself, with Plato and Aristotle both stimulating each other's thinking on the topic. We can be quite certain that Aristotle was thoroughly conversant with Plato's position in the *Sophist* where *phantasia* was defined, and his reaction to this definition dominates his discussion of *phantasia* in the *De Anima*. Further evidence of the importance of Plato's definition is to be found in *Metaphysics* Γ 5, where fundamental problems of our knowledge of the sensible world are discussed with reference to the *Theaetetus*. This paper is an attempt to correct the distortion in our view of *phantasia* in Aristotle which has arisen from the neglect of the notion in Plato and the failure to appreciate the strength of Aristotle's reaction to it.

Aristotle describes *phantasia* in the *De Anima* as a movement which comes about in beings that perceive of things of which there is perception and because of an actual perception. It is similar to the perception, and beings which possess it often act or are affected in accordance with it (3. 3, 428b10–17). The mention of 'beings' is an indication of one source of possible discrepancies in Aristotle's thought. Aristotle,

<sup>1</sup> J. Freudenthal, *Ueber den Begriff des Wortes ΦΑΝΤΑΣΙΑ bei Aristoteles* (Göttingen, 1863); D. W. Hamlyn, *Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford, 1968); M. Schofield, 'Aristotle on the Imagination', *Aristotle on mind and the senses*, edd. G. E. R. Lloyd and G. E. L. Owen (Cambridge, 1978), p. 129. Schofield says in the same essay (p. 103): 'it would be a triumph of generosity over justice to pretend that he (Aristotle) manages to combine his different approaches to φαντασία with an absolutely clear head', and that just in *De Anima* 3. 3.

unlike Plato, does not speak of *phantasia* with reference to human beings only: non-rational as well as rational animals possess it. Yet, as we and Aristotle know, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the lower reaches of non-rational animal life from vegetable life. On the other hand, it is also the case that the achievements of some of the higher animals appear sometimes to be almost human, and to this day occasion acrimonious debate among specialists in the field of animal behaviour. Aristotle wishes to show continuity on the scale of being and yet distinguish clearly the different grades. He agrees with Plato that thinking is characteristic of man and is more than sensing. How is he to show that man has both these capacities and yet not seem to underestimate the achievements of animals? How does man differ from Plato's pig? He wishes also, for the sake of continuity on the scale of being, to indicate the common physiological basis of the sensory activities of animals and men. But he has to do more. If *phantasia* is present in at least all the higher animals, he has also to show what, if any, its special function in man is. He says, in the first chapter of the *Metaphysics* (980b25 ff.), that the other animals live by their *phantasiai* and memories, but man has something more. But at what point and why does the difference arise?

# I. ANIMAL PHANTASIA

Let us start with *phantasia* in animals. Our expectations here should be modest. Aristotle himself says that what concerns *phantasia* is unclear (*De Anima* 2. 3. 414b16). Ross, in his commentary ad loc., explains this by: 'He does not mean that the whole nature of *φαντασία* is obscure; what he is referring to is the question where, in the scale of living beings, *φαντασία* begins to appear'. But that in itself is a pointer to the difficulties we are faced with. Schofield says bluntly: 'Aristotle's whole treatment of *φαντασία* in the non-rational animals is puzzling' (op. cit. p. 135). All are agreed that in this point the disagreements are fundamental. It appears from *De Anima* 415a6-11, for instance, that some animals do not have *phantasia*: 'some do not even have *phantasia*, while others live by this alone'. He explains this statement further (perhaps) in 428a10 ff., where he says that it seems to be the case that some animals, like the ant and the bee, have *phantasia*, whereas the grub does not.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, and directly opposed to this, it is stated in 433b31-434a10 that all animals have what is called *aisthētikē phantasia*. This position seems to be supported by 413b21-3, where he talks without qualification of the parts of insects cut in two having *aisthēsis*, 'and if *aisthēsis*, *phantasia* and desire';<sup>3</sup> and by 433a9 ff., where it would appear that desire is initiated by *phantasia* in the lower animals, again without restriction. The section from the *Metaphysics* referred to above might also be cited to the same effect.

Attempts have been made by various means to lessen, at least, these difficulties, but it seems impossible to get rid of them entirely. The safest general conclusion to draw is that Aristotle could not make up his mind about all the animals. He obviously had a high regard for ants and bees (*PA* 650b24-7; *HA* 488a7-10; *Metaph.* 980b22-4), while in other cases he was puzzled about whether the animal level had been reached at all. The details I leave to the specialists on animal *phantasia*<sup>4</sup> and turn to *phantasia* and movement, where the general account is reasonably clear but an incidental remark about *νόησις* has caused some confusion.

Aristotle says that beings which possess *phantasia* often act or are affected in

<sup>2</sup> See Ross's commentary ad loc. for the reasons for diverging from the MS. reading.

<sup>3</sup> Freudenthal, op. cit. p. 8, thought that *καὶ φαντασίαν* should be removed because it contradicts other statements on animal *phantasia* in Aristotle.

<sup>4</sup> See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Aristotle's De Motu Animalium* (Princeton, 1978), esp. pp. 236-7.

accordance with it. Soul, *psychē*, moves the living thing, and it does so through a choice of some sort or through thinking, διὰ προαιρέσεώς τινος καὶ νοήσεως (*De Anima* 406b24 ff.). In the case of non-rational animals there cannot be question of ethical choice or of the exercise of intellect. When creatures are acting in their own right, they do things because they want to do them. An animal is capable of moving itself in so far as it is capable of desire. But it cannot have desire unless it has *phantasia*. All *phantasia* is connected with either reasoning or perception, φαντασία δὲ πᾶσα ἢ λογιστικὴ ἢ αἰσθητική, and while reasoning is confined to man, the animals other than man share in the *phantasia* that is connected with perception (*De Anima* 433b27–30).

This is Aristotle's summary at the end of the tenth chapter of Book Three of *De Anima*. In the middle of that chapter he has pointed out that what comes first is the object of desire, which produces movement by being thought of or pictured to oneself, τῷ νοηθῆναι ἢ φαντασθῆναι (433b11–12). We might then think that there are three causes of movement, desire, reason and *phantasia*. At the beginning of the same chapter he says that the causes can be reduced to two, desire and *nous*, if one takes *phantasia* to be a form of vision – φαίνεται δέ γε δύο ταῦτα κινούντα, ἡ ὄρεξις ἡ νοῦς, εἴ τις τὴν φαντασίαν τιθεῖν ὡς νόησιν τινα (433a9 f.). *Noēsis* in Aristotle's discussion of *phantasia* has caused difficulty because one associates it with intellectual reasoning. Aristotle indicates, however, that *noēsis* is being used in a wide sense, for a form of consciousness other than intellectual reasoning. He says 'if one may regard *phantasia* as a kind of *noēsis*'. He is aware that the language may seem strange, because, as he points out immediately, *phantasia* is more frequently contrasted with reasoning, as when we notice that many follow their *phantasiai* in spite of their knowledge, *epistēmē*, and secondly, in the other animals thinking, *noēsis*, and reasoning, *logismos*, do not exist, but *phantasia* does (433a10–12). He apparently feels confident that with his cautious expression here, and after his careful distinctions in chapter three, he would not be misunderstood. He was wrong, of course.<sup>5</sup> What he is concerned with in this chapter is not the exact nature of *phantasia*, but with making the point that, presuming that consciousness of some sort exists, it is basically the faculty of desire which moves all animals to action.

The object of desire which provokes action is either the good or the apparent good, meaning here by 'the good' that which can be achieved by action, and implying that something else might be the result of action (433a27–30). The wrong good can be chosen because *phantasia*, like desire, can be affected by error – ὁρεξις δὲ καὶ φαντασία καὶ ὁρθὴ καὶ οὐκ ὁρθή (433a26–7). How error enters in the case of *phantasia* we shall see later. Here it is sufficient to note that animals do not possess the *phantasia* which is connected with deliberation (434a5–7). This *phantasia* is called *bouleutikē* at 434a7 and *logistikē* at 433b29 and is distinguished from the *phantasia* which non-rational animals have, the *aisthētikē*, because whether one is to do this or that is a matter for reflection. One must set the alternatives against each other on the same standard. One then goes after the superior. The fact that the animals are incapable of reflection renders them more liable to deception than the human being whose mind is functioning normally. For the human mind has a sense of time, and is aware that what seems a good thing to do now will be regretted in the future, and reason therefore resists desire. But the appetite of the non-rational animal has no standard of

<sup>5</sup> So Freudenthal (op. cit. p. 8) refers to this passage among others as an illustration of how Aristotle contradicts himself by calling *phantasia* 'eine Art des Denkens'. The emphasis in Schofield's essay is also wrong: see pp. 105, 125, 127 and 128, where he talks of Aristotle beginning by treating *phantasia* 'as a form of thinking'.

comparison for apparent goods: it acts solely in accordance with the desire for the apparent good which is provoked by a perception which recalls automatically the appearance of a similar good on another occasion (433b5–10).

It is obvious, however, in spite of the differentiation just referred to, that human and animal *phantasia*, both in structure and function, have much in common in Aristotle, and that here, as so often, he is anxious to achieve a unified theory. We have already seen that *phantasia* is a movement of some sort, provoked by a perception and like a perception, which comes about in beings that perceive. He explains in *De Insomniis* (459b4 ff.) that actual perception is an alteration of some sort, ἀλλοίωσις τις. Sensible objects produce sensation in us, and the effect remains even in sense-organs that have ceased to perceive, just as movement might continue in air or water even when what caused it has ceased to function. The effect is to be found in both the internal organs and those on the surface of the body.

## II. PHANTASIA IN PERCEPTION

It is because a movement from the sense-organ reaches the starting point of sensation that when we are awake we feel that we are seeing or hearing or perceiving in any way (461a30 ff.). It appears from what he says a little later (461b11), where he is talking primarily about sleep, that the sense movement(s) is carried to the starting point of sensation by the blood. Disturbance of the blood affects our dreams (*De Insomniis* 461a14 ff.), which are closely related to waking *phantasia* (ibid. 459a11 ff.), and in chapter 2 of *De Insomniis* Aristotle discusses at some length the persistence of sense-images in us in our waking state even after the moment of perception has passed (459a24 ff.). He continues then, at the beginning of chapter three (460b28 ff.), with the words 'From all this it is clear that the movements arising from sensations, αἱ κινήσεις αἱ ἀπὸ τῶν αἰσθημάτων γινόμεναι, which come both from the body itself and from outside it, are present not only when we are awake but also when we experience what is called sleep, and indeed are even more obviously present'.

What is said here about the equivalence of processes in waking and sleeping justifies us in using what is relevant in the work on dreams to gain more information about his concept of *phantasia*. The physiological basis, in particular, of *phantasia* emerges very clearly from the discussion. We do not need to rely on his images to demonstrate this, as, for instance, when he says that the persisting movements arising from sensations (i.e. our preliminary description of *phantasia*) are extinguished as a little fire is by a big one when the senses and mind are active (460b32 ff.). He explains immediately afterwards that at night, because the external senses are not working actively, the movements are carried back to the starting point of sensation more effectively, with the flow back of heat from the exterior to the interior (461a3–7). The movements are disturbed by physical conditions as in the case of people who are 'melancholic', fevered, or drunk (461a22–3). Or again, we should picture the movements as being like little whirlpools in a river, where each movement is often repeated and often reshaped by the resistance it meets (461a8–11). These movements, then, the *phantasiai*, carried in the blood and affected by it (461b11–19), are in some way physical, and we can readily believe that they may be weakened and reduced by the passage of time. Each of them is a remainder, something left over from the actual sensation (461b21–2).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Schofield (op. cit. p. 120) says: 'He had once defined φαντασία as a sort of weak perception, in the early *Rhetoric*; but that approach had been abandoned by the time of the *De Anima*'. This is misleading. *Rh.* 1370a28 says that *phantasia* is αἰσθησίς τις ἀσθενής. It is something like *aisthēsis*, *aisthēsis tis*, like it a movement, but a secondary rather than a primary movement. This approach is common to the *Rhetoric*, *Parva Naturalia*, and *De Anima*.

We turn now to another aspect of *phantasia*, *phantasia* as a power or activity in the soul (logically, this should have been considered before *phantasia* as the result of an activity in the soul, but the two are interconnected, and it is easier to see what Aristotle means by approaching the question as I have done). After the introduction, doxography, and general description of soul in the *De Anima*, there follows a discussion of the nutritive faculty, the lowest form in which life shows itself. But it is obvious that Aristotle is mainly interested in perception and intellect. It is here, at the end of his discussion of perception and the beginning of that of intellect, that his main discussion of *phantasia* appears, and it appears rather suddenly and somewhat strangely. Hamlyn, in fact, says: 'Imagination' (he is referring to *phantasia*) 'has an unsatisfactory half-way status in his scheme between perception and the intellect, and its exact position is never made clear' (op. cit. p. xiv). Aristotle has been discussing perception since chapter five of Book Two, and is beginning to show that perception and understanding are not the same, when suddenly he says: 'For *phantasia* is different from perception and from thought', and gives his reasons for saying so.

φαντασία γὰρ ἕτερον καὶ αἰσθήσεως καὶ διανοίας, αὕτη τε οὐ γίγνεται ἄνευ αἰσθήσεως, καὶ ἄνευ ταύτης οὐκ ἔστιν ὑπόληψις. ὅτι δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ αὕτη νόησις καὶ ὑπόληψις, φανερόν (427b14–17).

Freudenthal (op. cit. pp. 8 ff.) came to the conclusion that Aristotle did not write 427b14–24 in this context because of the difficulty of explaining the sequence of thought and what he saw as contradictions in the content. Schofield also thinks that 'the whole section 427b6–26 bears signs of being composed separately from the sections which follow', but holds nevertheless that 'it was no doubt Aristotle himself who was responsible for putting together chapter 3 of *De An.* 3 in the form in which we have it' (op. cit. p. 103). I believe on the other hand that the passage belongs where it stands. Aristotle is saying that perception and thought are distinct. Any theory which leads to a blurring of the boundaries by suggesting that there is an area between perception and proper knowledge which combines elements of both and therefore forms a bridge between them is wrong. For *phantasia* is not what Plato said it was, a combination of *aisthēsis* and *doxa*, judgement or belief. For *phantasia* does not come about without *aisthēsis*, as even Plato admitted, and without reasoning there is no such thing as taking something to be the case— and that *phantasia* is not the same sort of thing as taking something to be the case is clear.<sup>7</sup> Plato's name is not mentioned, but neither is it later at 428a24 ff., where Aristotle begins to sum up on what *phantasia* is not, and nobody doubts but that Plato is intended.

<sup>7</sup> The usual understanding of καὶ ἄνευ ταύτης οὐκ ἔστιν ὑπόληψις is 'and without *phantasia* etc.': see the translations of Theiler and Hamlyn, and Ross's paraphrase. Schofield takes the phrase in the same sense, and refers (op. cit. p. 125) to Aristotle's 'favourite thesis about the indispensability of *φαντασία* to thinking in the more restricted formulation. . .'. *ὑπόληψις* is taken as doing duty for *διάνοια*. No one will deny that *phantasia* is indispensable to thinking (see 403a9, 432a13), and it makes no substantial difference to what follows in the text on the distinction between *ὑπόληψις* and *phantasia* whether one takes *ταύτης* as referring to *phantasia*, the traditional interpretation, or *διάνοια* as I suggest. (It is, of course, open to someone to argue that Aristotle could not possibly have used such Greek as he does on my interpretation, but I would like to see that proved, if possible.) Taking it as I suggest would improve the sequence of thought, particularly if one agrees that Aristotle is concerned both with attacking Plato's view and with asserting that the (or some) irrational animals also possess *phantasia*. It also avoids the rather awkward substitution of *ὑπόληψις* for *διάνοια*, even though I am not claiming that the substitution is impossible. See Bonitz for the last two terms.

## III. PHANTASIA AND ΥΠΟΛΗΨΙΣ

One of the difficulties traditionally found in the passage arises from the reading in the Greek text, *ὅτι δ' οὐκ ἔστιν ἡ αὐτὴ νόησις καὶ ὑπόληψις, φανερόν*,<sup>8</sup> but, as Hamlyn says (ad loc.), 'whatever be the textual solution the sense required is clear enough', i.e. that *phantasia* and *ὑπόληψις* are not the same. The first reason, according to Aristotle, for maintaining this is that the experience (of *phantasia*) depends on us, whereas it is not entirely up to us whether we believe something is true or not. Through our *phantasia*, he says, we can visualize various things, just as people, to suit themselves, arrange the order of images in mnemonic systems, whereas belief, *δοξάζειν*, is liable to be tested to see if it accords with the real state of affairs. The second reason for distinguishing *phantasia* and *ὑπόληψις* is that if we really believe that something is terrible or fearful, we immediately react accordingly (and similarly in regard to something encouraging), whereas with *phantasia* it is just as if we were looking at terrible or encouraging things in a painting. Aristotle rounds off this section by saying that *epistēmē*, *doxa*, and *phronēsis*, and their opposites are all varieties of *ὑπόληψις*, but indicates that this is not the place for a discussion of the exact differences between them (427b24–5).

It has already been stated (427b15–16) that *phantasia* is different from *aisthēsis*, since it does not occur without *aisthēsis*. This difference requires arguing, but Aristotle's first concern was to show that *phantasia* should not be confused with reasoning by being taken for a form of judgement. Its position is decidedly puzzling and requires careful examination. For *phantasia* must belong in some way to consciousness, and there must be some reality corresponding to it, since language is an indication of reality and we say commonly that something appears, using the verb form (cf. 428a12–15) or the noun, 'there is a *phantasia*'. Is it possible that there is some state or process which is important to awareness and yet is not itself perception or thinking? Aristotle obviously thinks that there is, but what is it? Since *phantasia* has been shown not to be *ὑπόληψις*, and yet *ὑπόληψις* is a part of thinking, it appears that *phantasia* must belong to some other area, as yet to be determined, of human consciousness, for human consciousness is different to, wider than, perception. If we could first obtain clarity on the positive nature of *phantasia*, the correct relationship between *phantasia* and *ὑπόληψις* could then be stated and our views on *ὑπόληψις* confirmed –

*περὶ δὲ τοῦ νοεῖν, ἐπεὶ ἕτερον τοῦ αἰσθάνεσθαι, τούτου δὲ τὸ μὲν φαντασία δοκεῖ εἶναι τὸ δὲ ὑπόληψις, περὶ φαντασίας διορίσαντας οὕτω περὶ θατέρου λεκτέον* (427b27–9).

(cf. 403a8 f. on τὸ νοεῖν including *phantasia*.)

Aristotle says he wishes to study *phantasia* not in the metaphorical sense,<sup>9</sup> but as that 'in virtue of which we say that a *phantasma* occurs to us' (428a1–2). If *phantasia* is to be considered to belong to consciousness in some way as yet unclear, we must look for it among the potentialities or dispositions in virtue of which we are enabled

<sup>8</sup> Ross says ad loc. that 'most of the MSS. have ἡ αὐτὴ νόησις, while the second hands of C and U, and Simplicius' lemma, have ἡ αὐτὴ φαντασία. There can be little doubt that these are rival attempts to interpret; the sentence reads better without either νόησις or φαντασία'. Freudenthal (op. cit. p. 10) had retained νόησις on the grounds of the evidence, as do Hamlyn and Theiler in their translations, and Schofield (op. cit. p. 139, note 88), all reading the word as predicate, and interpreting that 'phantasia is not the same *noēsis* as ὑπόληψις'.

<sup>9</sup> I take 'the metaphorical sense' to be 'mere show'. See Freudenthal p. 18, Theiler ad loc., and Nussbaum, op. cit. pp. 252 ff.

to judge and arrive at truth or falsity, among which we also count capacities like perception, belief, knowledge and intuitive apprehension –

μία τις ἔστι δύναμις ἡ ἕξις καθ' ἧς κρίνομεν καὶ ἀληθεύομεν ἢ ψευδόμεθα· τοιαῦται δ' εἰσὶν αἴσθησις, δόξα, ἐπιστήμη, νοῦς (428a3–5).<sup>10</sup>

We are going to discover that it is not identical with any of these; only then can it be more fully explained in 428b11 ff.

#### IV. PHANTASIA AND AISTHĒSIS

Aristotle first gives reasons to justify the bald statement he made when he first mentioned *phantasia* in chapter 3, i.e. that *phantasia* is not perception, the other term in Plato's definition. Firstly, perception is either a capacity, *dynamis*, like sight, or an activity, *energeia*, like seeing; but something can appear when there is no immediate question of either of these, e.g. in dreams (*φαίνεται* is here, we take it, used as the equivalent of *phantasia*). Secondly, perception is always in animals. If *phantasia* were the same as perception, it too could be present in all animals. But it is not the same, for it is not in all animals; the ant and the bee have it, but not the grub.<sup>11</sup> Thirdly, perceptions are always true, whereas *phantasiai* are for the most part misleading. Fourthly, when our faculties are working properly in regard to perception we do not say: 'This appears to us as a man'. But that is a proper way of speaking when we are not perceiving clearly the true or false.<sup>12</sup> And fifthly, as remarked before, sights appear even when we have our eyes closed.

Aristotle then states briefly that *phantasia* is not knowledge nor intuitive apprehension either, for they are always true, and *phantasia* can be misleading. Unlike knowledge and intuitive apprehension, belief, *doxa*, can be true or false, but that is not sufficient reason to say that *phantasia* is belief. Assurance follows on belief (for we cannot believe things unless we are assured of them). None of the animals has such assurance, whereas many of them have *phantasia*: assurance, *pistis*, would imply reason, *logos*, which the animals have not got (428a16 ff.).<sup>13</sup>

It is therefore clear, says Aristotle, that *phantasia* cannot be what Plato said it was (*φανερὸν* echoing that of 427b17 at the beginning of the discussion of *phantasia*. As I said before, Plato's name is not mentioned). That is, *phantasia* cannot be *doxa* with *aisthēsis*, nor *doxa* through *aisthēsis*, nor a combination of *doxa* and *aisthēsis* (428a24 ff.), since *phantasia* has been shown to be, on Aristotle's understanding, neither *doxa* on its own nor *aisthēsis* on its own. There is an inherent contradiction in Plato's notion. Suppose, says Aristotle, that we were, for the sake of argument, to

<sup>10</sup> I do not accept Ross's emendation at 428a3, which turns a statement into a question. But I do not agree with Schofield either, who says (op. cit. p. 128) 'in concentrating on its propensity to give true or false views of facts, Aristotle seems clearly to count *φαντασία*, like sense perception, as a faculty of judgement – contrary to what the discussion at 427b16–24 might have led one to expect'. Freudenthal (op. cit. p. 18) had made the same mistake before him: he refers to 428a12, 18, and 428b17, 25 f. for *phantasia*'s relation to truth and falsehood, and regards it as a faculty of judgement, citing *Mot. Anim.* 700b19 ἡ φαντασία καὶ ἡ αἴσθησις τὴν αὐτὴν τῷ νῷ χώραν ἔχουσιν· κριτικὰ γάρ. In fact, *phantasia* is veridical or misleading as corresponding to perceptions which are true or false, but it is not true or false in the sense of expressing a judgement. It is involved in the process of supplying materials on which the mind builds judgements: it is only in this sense, I will argue, that it is to be looked for among the potentialities or dispositions in *virtue of which* we are enabled to judge and arrive at truth or falsity, and only in this sense is it *κριτικόν*, connected with judgement.

<sup>11</sup> See again Ross's commentary ad loc.

<sup>12</sup> At 428a15 I take Theiler's reading and rendering: τό τε ἀληθές καὶ ψευδές.

<sup>13</sup> I retain the MS. reading in 428a22–4.

accept Plato's description of *phantasia*.<sup>14</sup> Presumably the *doxa* and the *aisthēsis* will be about the same object: presumably Plato is not thinking of a case where we perceive that something is white and believe that it is good. If they are about the same object we are faced with the situation where we may have an *aisthēsis* which is false and a *doxa* which is true about the same object at the same time. The sun might, for instance, appear to be a foot across, even though we have at the same time the true belief about it that it is bigger than the earth we live on. The result is either that one gives up the true belief or, if one still retains it, it must be both true and false.

After this rather lengthy analysis of what *phantasia* is not, Aristotle returns to state what it is and thereby to demonstrate that it must have its place among the capacities in virtue of which we are enabled to judge and arrive at truth or falsity, even though it is not an actual judgement, in any of the forms of judgement, about truth or falsity, and is not *epistēmē* or *nous*. It is a movement of some sort which does not occur apart from perception and must be like the perception which causes it. It will not come about without actual perception, and beings without perception will not possess it. Those which do possess it do or experience much because of it, and it can be veridical or misleading (428b10–17).

#### V. PHANTASIA AND TRUTH

Aristotle now tries to explain how exactly *phantasia* can be said to be veridical or misleading (428b17 ff.). The likelihood of its being either varies with its relation to the *aisthēsis* which has occasioned it. Aristotle says that perception of the special objects of the special senses is most likely to be true, that of the objects perceived incidentally leaves room for error, and that of objects perceptible by more than one sense, the objects of 'common' sense, leaves most room of all. He is referring to a division he has made in Book Two of *De Anima* (418a8–25) of three types of object. There we learn that the five senses have objects proper to them, and these are colour for sight, for instance, sound for hearing, and so on. Sense objects in common are movement, rest, number, shape and size: these are perceptible by more than one sense. The third class consists of the objects perceived incidentally, e.g. a white object which happens to be Cleon's son. The *phantasia* will differ with the three types: the consequent *phantasia* in the first case is veridical as long as the perception of the special objects is present, while in the case of the others the consequent *phantasia* may be misleading whether the perception is present or absent, and especially when the object of perception is far off. We shall return to this topic in a moment.

Aristotle concludes that if nothing else has the characteristics set out except *phantasia*, and this is what has been said, *phantasia* will be a movement resulting from an actual perception. It takes its name from light because without light we cannot see, and sight is perception par excellence, and *phantasia* as we saw is like perception. Because the *phantasiai* persist and are like the perceptions, animals do many things in accordance with them – some, like the beasts, because they lack reason, and others

<sup>14</sup> A useful way of approaching Plato's notion of *phantasia* is to read, first, the *Sophist*, particularly 260e–264a, where it is defined, and then the *Theaetetus*, especially 152a–186e, where the notion is deployed in a discussion of our knowledge of the sensible world, followed by *Philebus* 38b–40a and *Timaeus* 27d–29 and 52. The word does not occur in the last two dialogues, but the same process is obviously being referred to. In the *Sophist* it is said that when assertion or denial occurs in the soul in the course of silent thinking it is called *doxa*, and when *doxa* occurs, not independently, but by means of *aisthēsis*, δι' αἰσθήσεως, this is called *phantasia* (264a), referred to a few lines later as σύμμειξις αἰσθήσεως καὶ δόξης. In the *Timaeus* we are told that the sensible world is δόξη μετ' αἰσθήσεως δοξαστόν (27d) or περιληπτόν (52a).



(men), because their reason is sometimes obscured by passion, disease or sleep (429a4–8).

## VI. ARISTOTLE'S CONSISTENCY

The discussion of *phantasia* in chapter 3, Book Three of the *De Anima* is closely argued from beginning to end, and not, as Freudenthal thought, made up of scarcely coherent pieces, nor is its principle of unity a loose one, as Hamlyn says, and it took, I maintain, this form from the beginning, as opposed to what Schofield seems to think. It is, Aristotle says, a movement following on *aisthēsis*, but it is not a type of thought, and therefore it is proper to treat it between the two; but that does not mean, as Hamlyn says, that it has an unsatisfactory half-way status. A résumé will make its position clear.

Aristotle begins by saying that *phantasia* does not occur without *aisthēsis*, and therefore, even though he is going to say later that it, like *aisthēsis*, is common to man and beast, it must be conceived of as something different from *aisthēsis*. He commences his argument proper by showing its difference from the distinctively human faculty *dianoia*. *ὑπόληψις*, taking something to be the case, is characteristic of the latter, covering as it does various forms of human knowledge, and being of immediate importance for human action. Plato had confused the issue with his mention of *doxa*, a form of *ὑπόληψις*, in his description of *phantasia*. He had thereby prohibited beasts from sharing in *phantasia*, and at the same time he had skipped a stage in the description of human knowledge. We can distinguish various elements in the make-up of this knowledge (we need to remind ourselves that in Book Three Aristotle is concerned primarily with human beings). *Phantasia* is not identical with any of them: it is not perception, nor knowledge, nor intuitive apprehension, nor belief, nor any form of combination such as Plato proposed. But it is something *like* perception, a movement caused by perception, veridical or misleading depending on whether the perception was true or false, and a cause of action in men and animals, as will be later discussed. It is understandable that *phantasia* should be confused with *aisthēsis*, for the two are closely connected, and it is understandable also that as a consequence it has been confused with judgement. But *phantasia* is simply involved in the process of supplying the materials on which the mind builds judgements: it is only in this sense that it is *κριτικόν*, connected with judgement.

## VII. PHANTASIA AND THINKING

The largely critical nature of Aristotle's exposition has, apparently, led some to think that he did not succeed in working the concept of *phantasia* securely into his theory of human cognition.<sup>15</sup> That Aristotle did, however, consider *phantasia* central to all human cognition is clear from later chapters of Book Three when taken in combination with chapter 3. In chapter 4 Aristotle moves on to discuss the intellect. Chapter 5 contains the famous section on the active and passive intellect, and chapter 6 deals with the ultimate objects of thought. It is only in chapter seven that some remarks of particular relevance to the concept of *phantasia* are to be found. There are genuine difficulties about the structure of this chapter,<sup>16</sup> but the points which interest us here

<sup>15</sup> Ross in the introduction to his commentary, p. 39: 'In the main... he regards it not as a valuable faculty but as a disability'. Hamlyn's views we have already seen. Even Schofield's emphasis on *phantasia* as a capacity for having non-paradigmatic sensory experiences tends to take from the importance of *phantasia* in Aristotle's scheme.

<sup>16</sup> Ross (*Commentary*, p. 303), following Torstrik, suggests that an early editor strung these scraps from the Master together so that none of his words should be lost to posterity.

are echoed in *On Memory*, and there is no reason to doubt their authenticity even if their connection with the main structure of *De Anima* is looser than we could have wished. The immediate context is the perception of something pleasant or painful and the interpretation of pursuit or avoidance as a form of assertion or denial of the goodness or badness of the thing perceived. Aristotle then explains how we come to act on our understanding of good and bad. He says that to the intellective soul *φαντάσματα* serve as sense-perceptions, *αἰσθήματα*. When it asserts or denies something to be good or bad, it avoids or pursues it. And that, he says, is why the soul never thinks without a *φάντασμα* (431a8–17). We recall that *phantasia* comes between perception and intellect, and that it is *that* in virtue of which we say that a *phantasma* occurs to us. *Phantasia* must then be involved in the mutation of sense-perceptions into *phantasmata*, which are then available for the activity of the intellective soul.

Another passage in the same chapter, 7, deals with the same topic, the pursuit or avoidance of the pleasant or the painful. Here (431b2 ff.) we are told that the intellectual faculty, *τὸ νοητικόν*, gains its insight into the forms, i.e. the objects of knowledge in things, in *phantasmata*.<sup>17</sup> For sometimes we perceive directly what is to be pursued or avoided, as for example when we see a beacon alight and moving we realize it is the enemy (and react accordingly). But at other times, and this is what interests Aristotle here, we calculate (not on the basis of immediate perception, but) on the basis of *phantasmata* as such or of thoughts, *noēmata*, in the soul, as if we were actually watching something going on, and we estimate the course of future events in the light of what is in this form present to us. It is in this way, i.e. on the basis of retained images in the human soul, that the avoidance or pursuit of things is generalized. It should be noted, however, that Aristotle does not say that *phantasia* is not present in the case of direct perception and the reaction that there follows.

That *phantasia* is necessary, though not of itself sufficient, for the conversion of perceptions into thoughts is confirmed by one final passage in the *De Anima*, which is found at the end of the next chapter, 8. Aristotle says (432a4–14) that the objects of thought are to be found among the forms which are the objects of perception, and that for this reason someone who did not perceive anything would not learn or understand anything, and when one contemplates, *θεωρῇ*, one must do so contemplating a *phantasma*. For, as we have seen before, *phantasmata* are like sense-perceptions except that they are without matter. We must further note that *phantasia* is different from assertion and denial, because truth and falsity refer to a combination of thoughts – *συμπλοκή γὰρ νοημάτων ἐστὶ τὸ ἀληθὲς ἢ ψεῦδος*. In making this point Aristotle wishes to emphasize once again that even though *phantasia* is central to thinking in providing the material from which thoughts come, it is not itself thinking, and does not therefore make assertions or denials, to which thoughts are essential.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle then wonders out loud: what difference is there between the first (i.e. most primitive, simplest) thoughts and *phantasmata*? His answer is that neither these nor other thoughts<sup>19</sup> will be *phantasmata*, but they will not exist without *phantasmata*.

It would appear from this that in a judgement where the term 'white' occurs, there is involved the (first) thought, *noēma*, 'white' (see *De Anima* 430a26–8), which in turn would not exist without the *phantasma* of white. The *phantasma* of white would not in turn exist without the perception of white. For the perception to become the

<sup>17</sup> The problem of whether or not to delete *τῇ κοινῇ* in 431b5 does not affect our understanding of the passage.

<sup>18</sup> See note 10 above.

<sup>19</sup> Reading *οὐδὲ τὰλλα* with Theiler.

*phantasma* it is necessary for the *phantasia* to act, for this has been stated to be something between perception and thinking, that in virtue of which a *phantasma* occurs to us. The process is to be envisaged presumably as follows: when a colour, for instance, comes before the special sense of sight, the special sense reacts and causes the further movement of *phantasia*. If in a particular instance three senses will be affected, special, incidental and common, the three *phantasiai* or movements corresponding to each of the three initial sense movements will correspond also as regards veridical nature. The *phantasia* or movement following on the special sense will contain an accurate reflection of reality, while those corresponding to the incidental and common senses are liable to be distorted, since the incidental and common senses are liable to error, as we saw. The *phantasmata* which are the end result of the transforming agency of *phantasia* in perception will consequently vary in reliability. *Nous*, in the case of human beings, transforms the *phantasmata* into *noēmata*: how exactly Aristotle does not say. So, in the second section of chapter 7, 431 b 2 ff., *phantasia* would be the activity through which models of various objects and courses of events are created, various sequences and combinations of which are then drawn up by the mind, which then can take the final decision on action. Aristotle leaves unexplained the details of the conversion of *phantasia*, the movement which remains in the soul similar to the perception which has caused it, into a *phantasma*, the image which results from *phantasia*. What is clear is that the transforming agency of *phantasia* remains within the realm of sense. In the case of animals the process ends with *phantasmata*. In the case of men the *nous* can act on the *phantasmata* and educe *noēmata*.

#### VIII. PHANTASIA AND THE *PARVA NATURALIA*

We may now turn to the *Parva Naturalia* to complement what has been said in the *De Anima* on *phantasia*. We have already seen some relevant contributions from *De Somno* and *De Insomniis*. In another work he discusses memory and recollection. There (*De Memoria* 450 a 22 ff.) he says it is obvious that memory belongs to that part of the soul to which *phantasia* belongs: those things of which there is *phantasia* (directly) are capable of being remembered of themselves, *per se*, and things that involve the presence of *phantasia* are capable of being remembered accidentally, *per accidens* – καὶ ἔστι μνημονευτὰ καθ' αὐτὰ μὲν ὧν ἔστι φαντασία, κατὰ συμβεβηκὸς δὲ ὅσα μὴ ἄνευ φαντασίας. To understand the latter statements we have to turn back to 449 b 30 ff. in the same work, where he refers to his treatment of *phantasia* in the *De Anima*. (This does not necessarily mean that *De Anima* preceded *De Memoria*: the reference back could be a later addition). We find again what we saw in the *De Anima*: it is impossible to think, νοεῖν, without a *phantasma*. He illustrates this from the way in which we try to solve problems in geometry. There we have to draw a triangle, for example, of a definite size. But we are not really concerned with the physical dimensions: we are concerned with thinking about the properties, and these remain the same however the physical model varies in size. Yet we still have to use a physical model at any given time. Similarly with the raw material for thinking. We can have the thought, and we can remember it, that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides. But to have come to that conclusion in the first place we needed to have one definite physical triangle before us – on a page or blackboard, for example, or in the mind's eye: this is a thing 'of which there is *phantasia*', and which is capable of being remembered of itself, *per se*. The properties of triangle involve the presence of such a *phantasia* and are capable of being remembered accidentally, *per accidens*.

Hence he says (450a 12) that memory, even of intelligibles, does not take place without a *phantasma*.

The emphasis here is again very much on the physical aspect of memory. This is further brought out by Aristotle's insistence that, because memory belongs to the mind only accidentally and is *per se* an activity of the primary faculty of perception, it is to be found in other animals also and not just in man and those that possess opinion and practical wisdom, *δόξαν ἢ φρόνησιν* (450a 13–16). The same emphasis is found in the explanation of *how* we remember and why it is that the retentiveness of memory varies from one individual to another. Aristotle says (450a 30–2) that the movement which comes about because of the perception imprints a sort of impression of the received perception, something like that produced when we seal things with signet rings: we say that memory is the possession of a picture, as it were (450a 29–30). Aristotle is borrowing from Plato (*Theaet.* 191c–e) the simile of the impression on wax, which we can trace back to Democritus, and which he also uses in the *De Anima* (424a 17 f., 435a 9). He also explains that the very young have poor memories because they are in a state of flux while growing, and memory-imprinting is like making an impression on running water, while the receiving surface in the old has grown hard and does not take the impression well, and the surface is simultaneously decaying (450a 32–b 11). Once again, he is echoing Plato on the quality of the wax (*Theaet.* 194b–195a), but the very repetition shows how attracted by the physical analogies Aristotle was.

One final passage in *De Memoria* deserves our attention. Having attempted to distinguish memory and recollection, he says towards the end of the work (453a 7 ff.): 'While many other animals share in memory, one may say that none of the known animals can recollect except man. This is because recollecting is, as it were, a kind of inference, *οἶον συλλογισμός τις*; for when a man is recollecting he infers that he has seen or heard or experienced something of the sort before, and the process is a kind of search. This power can only belong by nature to such animals as have the faculty of deliberation, *τὸ βουλευτικόν*; for deliberation too is a kind of inference.'

In spite of the cautious wording at the beginning of the passage there seems to be no doubt from the context of the work about what Aristotle is here intending to say: man is distinguished by his ability to make a connection between apparently unconnected realities based on associations between them which he has either discovered or deliberately, and sometimes arbitrarily, imposed. If something strikes his mind he can direct his attention to its possible context. He can recall associations if need be after a sort of search, even when he has temporarily forgotten the links, because he is following either a system of his own, as in the sequence milk–white–mist–damp–autumn (452a 14–16), or a more general system governed by the notions of similarity, contrariety or contiguity (451 b 17 ff.). Depending on the system, signs which might appear arbitrary can have a meaningful sequence which other rational beings could learn to follow. These might be strung together as memory images and concepts as in the milk–autumn example given above. They will all have taken their origin in the physical, even though man shows his superiority by his ability to manage and adjust them. Aristotle ends the work (453a 14 ff.) by recalling the close connection of the *phantasma* with the bodily, even though unlike the animals man is not entirely determined by the body. 'The experience is in some sense bodily, and recollection is the search for a *phantasma* in such a sphere' (453a 14–16). We might conclude by adding, even though Aristotle does not do so here, that the most convenient way of sharing such a system between human beings would be language.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See *Pol.* 1253a 1 ff. on language and its contribution to human society.

## CONCLUSION

Aristotle's discussion of *phantasia* in *De Anima* 3. 3 must be read with continual reference to the views of Plato. He is critical of Plato's concept of *phantasia* because he thinks it is misleading. As we might expect, he is not always fair in his criticism. His final argument against Plato in the chapter is, as we saw, that there is an inherent contradiction in Plato's position.<sup>21</sup> He says that on Plato's view a single *phantasia* will be simultaneously true and false, as in the case of the sun, which the eye takes to be about a foot across but expert opinion estimates as greater than the earth. The perception is false and the belief is true, and *phantasia* for Plato is a combination of perception and belief. Now, this dilemma would be valid if Plato meant that *phantasia* was simultaneously a perception of and a belief about exactly the same object. But what Plato in fact seems to say is that we see something; as, for example, some object beside the rock and under the tree. We are not sure what it is: is it a man or is it, say, a monument of some kind? We finally come to the tentative conclusion that this object impinging on the senses is a man. So *phantasia* for Plato is taking something we have become aware of to be a particular case. *Doxa* follows on *aisthēsis*; they are not in the first instance simultaneous. In the case of the sun, for instance, we can imagine a child becoming aware of its size for the first time and saying that it was just a foot wide. This perception expressed in words might then be corrected by someone else, and the reason for the illusion explained. It is afterwards highly unlikely, if not indeed impossible in a normal sane person, that there should *simultaneously* co-exist in the mind the perceptual judgement that the sun is a foot wide and the belief that it is greater than the earth. This is not the place to go into the ambiguities in Aristotle's account of *aisthēsis*,<sup>22</sup> but these ambiguities are partly responsible for his unsympathetic attitude to Plato on perception, and why he writes occasionally as if Plato were talking about the same thing as himself with the word *phantasia* but failing to express himself properly. Plato is using *phantasia* to describe a perfectly recognizable experience where we become aware of something in the realm of the senses in a situation which should cause hesitation, and then come to a conclusion on the matter which should be tentative. *Phantasia* used like this by Plato underlines the uncertainty which indeed attaches to all human judgement but which is particularly obvious in the case of the sensible world.<sup>23</sup>

Why then if Aristotle was so critical of Plato's understanding of *phantasia* did he continue to use the same word? Why did he, who introduced so much technical language, not develop a new word, if necessary, for the process he wishes to draw attention to? Again we can only speculate, but the speculation is not unduly daring. Plato uses the word *phantasia* to refer to a situation where we might say 'It appears to me (and therefore I think) that such is the case'. Aristotle felt that such an understanding of *phantasia* led to the neglect of an important step in the process of perception, and that *phantasia* should refer only to the fact that through the primary sense we are aware of effects of perception which persist for some time even when the

<sup>21</sup> The dilemma which Aristotle has constructed is discussed by K. Lycos in *Mind*, n.s. 63, no. 292 (1964), 496 ff., and Hamlyn ad loc. See also Schofield, op. cit. pp. 112–15. My criticism of Aristotle here is suggested by a reading of the *Metaphrasis* of Priscianus Lydus, which contains views of Theophrastus on *phantasia*: see *Supplementum Aristotelicum* 1. 2, ed. I. Bywater (Berlin, 1886), p. 25, lines 25 ff.

<sup>22</sup> I have had the opportunity of reading a paper by Allan Silverman on *aisthēsis* in Aristotle, and wish to thank him here for the enlightenment which I derived from it.

<sup>23</sup> See N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London, 1962), pp. 161 f.

actual moment of perception is over. Such a *phantasia* may or may not correctly reproduce reality, like the perception from which it arises. But for the moment the *phantasiai* are simply there like vibrant pictures. The decision on whether or not they do refer correctly to reality is a different stage of the soul's activity, and therefore *phantasia* should not be confused with judgement, even though it lies between perception and judgement and is closely associated with both. Aristotle's continued employment of *phantasia* was then a deliberate and stubborn correction of Plato.

There is a further reason for the continued employment of the word, suggested by the etymology for *phantasia* which he gives, that it comes from *phaos*, light. The process as he sees it is like *aisthēsis* though not identical with it. Sight is perception par excellence, and from Aristotle's description of sight we learn that colour moves the transparent, and this movement through the transparent causes the eye to be moved. Light is the *ἐνέργεια* of the transparent, what makes it to be transparent when it actually is transparent. Light is essential to visibility: the colour of each thing is always seen in light (for all this, see *De Anima* 2. 7). It is light, then, which permits the transformation of an object into a sense-object: if it were not there the sense could not act. Aristotle obviously thinks it fitting that that which permits the transformation of what is sensed into potential objects of intellection should take its name from light.

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