

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document: ACTION, PERCEPTION, AND THE LIVING BODY:  
ARISTOTLE ON THE PHYSIOLOGICAL  
FOUNDATIONS OF MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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In this dissertation I show that Aristotle's moral psychology is grounded in his natural philosophy of the living body. Moral psychology studies the ways in which agency and moral responsibility are rooted in the functional structure of the psyche. For Aristotle, the psyche – that is, the soul (*psychê*) – is unified with the living body, and its functional structure is integrated with the dispositional propensities of the body's material constituents. On account of this, “the soul neither does anything nor has anything done to it without the body...” (*DA* I.1, 403a 5) Accordingly, Aristotle considers it an “absurdity” of the accounts of his predecessors that “they attach the soul to the body and set it into it, determining no further what the cause of this is or what the condition of the body is...” (*DA* I.3, 407b 14) However, most contemporary interpretations of Aristotle's moral psychology suffer from essentially this same problem: they interpret Aristotle's explanation of, say, voluntary action or lack of self-restraint (*akrasia*) in entirely psychological terms, and say nothing about the physiological processes that Aristotle takes to partially constitute, and to critically influence, these phenomena. Here I address this imbalance by exploring Aristotle's

view of the somatic dimension of moral psychology. More specifically, I examine Aristotle's so-called "hylomorphism" – the view that a living thing's body and soul are its material and its form (respectively) – and his account of the physiological functions underlying "incidental perception" (roughly, "seeing as" or perceiving particulars under a description), voluntary action, practical reasoning and its role in moving us to act, lack of self-restraint, and moral development.

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OF MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2009

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“[O]ne must ask what purpose and what obvious utility the Aristotelian philosophy has for us. We answer that it is to ascend to the common principle of all things and to be aware that this is the one goodness itself, incorporeal, indivisible, uncircumscribed, infinite and of infinite power.”

Ammonius, *Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, 6, 9

## **Dedication**

For three true teachers –

James Roddy, Daniel Kolak, and Suheil Bushrui

And my “second selves” –

Sarene Appelbaum, James Madaio, and Hope May

## Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere and unutterable gratitude for the heritage of wisdom that has been made available to us all by sages and scholars such as Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Simplicius, Homer, Guatama Buddha, Shantideva, Jesus, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Al-Ghazali, William James, Theophan the Recluse, Kallistos Ware, Joseph Campbell, Jiddu Krishnamurti, G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky, Shunryu Suzuki, Alan Wallace, Robert Thurman, Elaine Pagels, Joe Sachs, as well as countless others who have labored, through whatever means, in the pursuit of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

I thank the members of my dissertation committee for their efforts in working through this dissertation. I am particularly grateful to Lars Svenonius for standing by this project for many years. Additionally, I am thankful for many Aristotelian conversations with James Celarier and regret that he did not survive to see this dissertation's completion. I also thank James Leshar for helpful comments on a few early drafts of some of what is presented here. I must also thank a number of friends and colleagues who have indirectly contributed in a variety of ways to the process of completing this dissertation: Jim Berry, Sihen Beshah, Bill Boos, Chris Cherniak, David DeGrazia and the philosophy department at GWU, Nancy Hall, Tanna Lewis, Mehrdad Massoudi, and Evan and Sheila Rotner.

Last and far from least, I must very sincerely thank Rachel Singpurwalla, who made the completion and concrete realization of this dissertation possible, about which I will simply point to the words of Socrates in Plato's *Republic* VI, 491D1-492A5.

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## Abbreviations and Translations of Aristotle's Works

*Cat.* = *Categories*  
*DA* = *De Anima (On the Soul)*  
*DC* = *De Caelo (On the Heavens)*  
*EE* = *Eudemian Ethics*  
*GA* = *On the Generation of Animals*  
*GC* = *On Generation and Corruption*  
*MA* = *On the Motion of Animals*  
*Metaph.* = *Metaphysics*  
*Meteor.* = *Meteorology*  
*NE* = *Nicomachean Ethics*  
*PA* = *On the Parts of Animals*  
*Pol.* = *Politics*  
*Post. An.* = *Posterior Analytics*

Additional works cited are referred to by their full titles (e.g., *On Dreams*). Except where otherwise noted, I follow the translations listed below. For works not included in this list, except where otherwise noted, translations are taken from the Revised Oxford Translations in Barnes (1984). Full bibliographic details can be found under “Ancient Greek Sources: Editions and Translations” in the bibliography at the end of this dissertation.

*DA* = Joe Sachs (2001)

*EE* = H. Rackham (1935)

*GA* = Arthur L. Peck (1942)

*MA* = Martha Craven Nussbaum (1978)

*Metaph.* = Joe Sachs (1999)

*NE* = Joe Sachs (2002)

*PA* = Arthur L. Peck (1961)

*Phys.* = Joe Sachs (1995)

# Introduction

## The Practice of Ethical Philosophy

### 0.1 Dissertation Overview

“But the following absurdity goes with... most [accounts] that concern the soul. They attach the soul to the body and set it into it, determining no further what the cause of this is or what the condition of the body is...”<sup>1</sup>

This dissertation examines the physiological foundations of Aristotle’s moral psychology. Moral psychology is the subdivision of ethical philosophy that is concerned with the ways in which agency and moral responsibility are rooted in the functional structure of the psyche. For Aristotle, the psyche – the soul (*psychê*) – is imminent in the living body (*sôma*); a living thing is an indivisible psychosomatic whole. This fact, so I shall argue, is crucial to all aspects of Aristotle’s moral psychology. More specifically, I will outline Aristotle’s view of the psychosomatic unity of the living thing, and show how physiological processes are integral to Aristotle’s interconnected explanations of voluntary action, practical reasoning and its efficacy, and lack of self-restraint (*akrasia*).

Chapter 1 concerns the psychosomatic unity of living things, according to which the soul and body are inseparable aspects of a single entity – a plant, an animal, or a human being. It is on account of this fact that, with regard to virtually all of its attributes, “the soul neither does anything nor has anything done to it without the

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *DA* I.3, 407b 14. See also *DA* II.2, 414a 18ff.

body...” (DA I.1, 403a 5) This is because the attributes of soul “have materiality in their very definitions” and “[they have] to be in a certain sort of material if [they are] to be at all.” (DA I.1, 403a 25; 403b 3) Therefore, it is “absurd” (*atopos*) to “attach the soul to the body and set it into it, determining no further what the cause of this is or what the condition of the body is...” (DA I.3, 407b 14) In the remaining chapters we are seeking to identify those causes and conditions in the body, as Aristotle understood them, that are integral to voluntary action, the efficacy of practical reasoning, and lack of self-restraint.

The one perplexing exception to the soul’s inseparability from the body is the activity of intellect (*nous*). At the outset of our investigation we must demarcate between those activities of soul that are embodied, and the one special sort of thinking that is not. In short, I understand Aristotle to hold that virtually all soul-functions that we are familiar with in ordinary experience – including the experience of passions (*pathê*) as well as processes of discursive reasoning (such as *dianoia*, *logismos*, and *sylogismos*) – are embodied soul-functions of the individuated person. On the other hand, the immaterial intellect is none other than the immortal and undifferentiated noetic luminosity that is the Divine Mind, the Unmoved Mover, God.<sup>2</sup> The focus in this dissertation is Aristotle’s understanding of our work and

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to many passages that are to come in this dissertation – passages detailing the integration of discursive reasoning and the experience of emotion with physiological processes – the above interpretation is briefly supported by the following remarks. Aristotle distinguishes between Intellect (*Nous*) and the individual possessor of intellect (*nous*) – the Divine Mind and the individuated person respectively. (See DA I.4, 408b 18ff for a crucial passage.) The thought processes and experiences of the individuated person involve change (we think or feel one thing at one time, another thing at another time), and, according to Aristotle, all things that involve change have or involve matter. (*Metaph.* XII.2, 1069b 25.) In contrast, the Divine Mind is a luminous insight (*nous*) that does not undergo change – it does not think one thing at one time, another thing at another time – and is entirely “unaffected.” (For example, see *Metaph.* XII.9.) Therefore, we must remain clear on Aristotle’s

functioning on the human side of the ambiguous line between the human and the divine.

Chapter 2 examines the psychosomatic sources of voluntary action, particularly actions that are voluntary but not chosen. Aristotle distinguishes between actions that are voluntary (*ekousin*) and those that result from choice (*proairesis*), claiming that all chosen actions are voluntary, but not all voluntary actions are chosen.<sup>3</sup> Roughly, the tokens of these two action types originate from different activities of the imagination (*phantasia*), namely one that is sensory (*aisthetikê*) and another that is rational or calculative (*logistikê*).<sup>4</sup> According to Aristotle, although human beings, and human beings alone, have a capacity for rational imagination, most of the time most of us do not exercise it.<sup>5</sup> Instead, like non-human animals, in many of our actions we are “mere followers of the phantasms.”<sup>6</sup> In this chapter I will construct an Aristotelian explanation of the way in which sensory imagination governs unchosen voluntary actions, based upon Aristotle’s view that the “phantasms” that guide our actions are bodily impressions and motions in the blood.

Chapter 3 turns to the other subset of voluntary action, chosen actions, and the exercise of rational imagination generally called “practical reasoning.” In outline, the

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distinction between the individual possessor of *nous* and *Nous* itself, and on the associated distinction between the discursive reasoning and intellectual insight. The former represents a human expression of reason, and is conditioned by our material embodiment, whereas the latter is something divine in which we partake to a greater or lesser extent through contemplation (*theoria*). Proclus beautifully characterizes the relationship between discursive reason and intuitive insight in his *Commentary on Euclid’s Elements*, §4: “[Discursive reasoning (*dianoia*)] traverses and unfolds the measureless content of *Nous* by making articulate its concentrated intellectual insight, and then gathers back together again the things it has distinguished and refers them back to *Nous*.” (Morrow 1970, p. 3)

<sup>3</sup> *NE* III.2, 1111b 6.

<sup>4</sup> See *DA* III.10, 433b 30.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see *DA* III.3, 429a 4; III.10, 433a 11; *NE* VII.7, 1150b 28.

<sup>6</sup> See *On Dreams* 1, 459a 8 for this phrase. “Phantasms” is Beare’s translation of *phantasmati*, which is variously translated as “images,” “appearances,” “impressions,” and “presentations.”

argument of this chapter has three main parts: (1) deliberation turns wish into choice (that is, deliberation turns one's desire for an end into a desire to do things that promote the end); (2) it achieves this by altering or "marking" the appearances (*phantasmata*) of incidental perception (in more modern terms, deliberation alters the descriptions under which the particulars are perceived); and (3) this perceptual alteration and marking of the appearances takes place along with, and partly on account of, specific physiological conditions in the living body.

Furthermore, the physiological conditions that underlie the processes of reasoning leading up to chosen actions *physically necessitate* the bodily motions involved in those actions. This is brought out, among other places, in Aristotle's discussions of the so-called "practical syllogism." The conclusion of the practical syllogism is the agent's action, and it follows the premises "necessarily," "at once," and "straightaway." Here I am departing from interpretations, such as that of Nussbaum, according to which Aristotle is referring to a "conceptual" or "logical" necessity in these contexts. Against this view, I point to passages such as those from *On the Motion of Animals* where Aristotle directly states that the reason why the animal moves at essentially the same time that it thinks it should or wants to move is because of the active and passive powers of the material constituents of its body.<sup>7</sup> This explains why "necessarily," "at once," or "straight away" the animal moves, like an "automatic puppet."

On certain occasions, however, our reasoning does not move us to act but is overpowered by irrational desires. Thus, in the second part of Chapter 3, we turn to

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<sup>7</sup> *MA* 8, 701a 33ff, *MA* 11, 703b 36, etc.

Aristotle's account of weakness of will or lack of self-restraint (*akrasia*). This takes place when practical reasoning fails to sufficiently motivate the agent to act, so that he knows what is best to do, in some sense, but does something else. I will show that, for Aristotle, in cases of *akrasia*, the action motivated by rational deliberation is prevented by irrational passions because these passions *physically* overpower one's desire to do what one knows to be best. Irrational passions render one's practical knowledge ineffective by "deranging the body." (*NE* VII.3, 1147a 16) This is because "the instrument by which desire causes motion is already part of the body" (*DA* III.10, 433b 19), and "at one time this desire wins out and knocks away that one, and at another time that one wins out and knocks away this one, like a ball." (*DA* III.11, 434a 16) Thus, "the [irrational] desire takes the lead, since it is able to set in motion each part of the body." (*NE* VII.3, 1147b 1) For these reasons, the explanation of the ineffectiveness of the akratic's knowledge is the same as the explanation for the ineffectiveness of knowledge that takes place when one falls asleep or gets drunk; it is an explanation "which one needs to hear from people who study nature (*dei para tôn physiologôn akouein*)." (*NE* VII.3, 1147b 5)

We conclude by reflecting upon the foregoing account's implications for moral development. The stability and malleability of character are based upon the plasticity of organic matter. In a variety of passages throughout his biological and psychological works, Aristotle explains that the constitution of the body, particularly that of the heart and the blood, "pave the way" for character.<sup>8</sup> One reason for this is that the soul's affections are embodied (*DA* I.1, 403a 26), and virtue (and vice)

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<sup>8</sup> For example, see *PA* II.2, 648a 3, and II.4, 650b 19 – 651a 16.

pertains to bearing oneself well (or badly) in relation to these affections. (*NE* II.5, 1105b 28) Therefore, moral development is not an alteration of the soul in its own right, but follows upon an alteration in the body that brings the soul to rest in its natural condition. (*Physics* VII.3, 248a 5)

Moral development is a process of struggling to master the unthinking elements within us, to “master the appearances,” rather than to be “mere followers of the phantasms.” Our noetic passivity explains the fact that, according to Aristotle, most people are “completely slavish” and pursue a kind of life “that belongs to fatted cattle” (*NE* I.5, 1095b 20); that is, a life of pursuing any random impulse for pleasure that arises. This fact calls out for explanation since “each person would even seem to *be* this part [*nous*]; it would be strange, then, [i.e., it would make no sense] if anyone were to choose not his own life but that of something else.” (*NE* X.7, 1178a 2) It is in this sense that Plato’s Socrates states that “the power of appearance (*phainomenou dunamis*) makes us wander all over the place in confusion, often changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices, ...the art of measurement [which employs rational imagination], in contrast, would make the appearance (*phantasmata*) lose its power by showing us the truth...and would save our life...”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Let me repeat that: “save our life” (*sotêria ephanê tou biou*)! (*Protagoras* 356D) This passage is discussed nicely by Jessica Moss in “Appearances and Calculations: Plato’s Division of the Soul” (*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* XXXIV (summer 2008), 35-68), and by Rachel Singpurwalla in “Moral Psychology in Plato’s *Republic*,” §III.2 (*Blackwell Philosophy Compass*, forthcoming). For Aristotle, reason does not make the appearances lose their power *per se*; rather, just as the artisan uses the non-rational power of fire in accordance with a rational art to produce some artifact, the person of practical wisdom (the *phronimos*) transforms the appearances such that what makes an appearance to him and what is truly so are one and the same. He thereby uses the power of the appearances in accordance with insight and right reason so as to live and move in ways that realize the human good.



Thus, Aristotle's moral psychology is grounded in his natural philosophy of the body in ways that make the latter integral to an understanding of the former. The transformative process through which one develops virtue is a visceral, sensuously felt, concrete bodily transformation – a sort of psychosomatic alchemy – through which non-discursive insight (*nous*) and active rational intelligence master and are fused with our passions and become the principal sources that move us through the world.

## **0.2 The Practice of Ethical Philosophy**

“The fathers... kept the commandments; their successors wrote them down; [and] we have placed their books on shelves. And even if we want to read them, we do not have the application to understand what is said and to put it into practice; we read them either as something incidental, or because we think that by reading them we are doing something great...”<sup>10</sup>

As mentioned above, moral psychology is the subdivision of ethical philosophy that is concerned with the ways in which agency and moral responsibility are rooted in the structure and functioning of the psyche. In order to appreciate the significance of this enterprise, it will be necessary at the outset to briefly consider the nature of ethical philosophy and of moral responsibility, as understood by Aristotle. In particular, we must contrast Aristotle's view with the contemporary notion that ethical philosophy is, as one leading introduction to the subject describes it, “the attempt to achieve a systematic understanding of the nature of morality and what it

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<sup>10</sup> St. Peter of Damaskos, “That Stillness is of Great Benefit to those Subject to Passion,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text* Vol. 3 (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 169.

requires of us...<sup>11</sup> In this section we will consider various reasons why this conception is significantly ill-suited to characterize ethical philosophy as Aristotle understood it.<sup>12</sup>

An ethical philosophy aimed at “systematic understanding” is unlike Aristotle’s for at least two reasons. First, Aristotle’s ethics is not aimed at understanding but at action, the development of virtue, and the attainment of *eudaimonia*. Second, and because of this fact, the understanding or knowledge component of ethical philosophy cannot be entirely “systematic,” if by that term we mean that the knowledge in question can be precisely articulated in a consistent set of propositions generated and organized through logical deduction. Aristotle makes many remarks concerning the limited exactitude of ethical discourse. For example,

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<sup>11</sup> James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* 5<sup>th</sup> edition, with Stuart Rachels (New York: McGraw Hill, 2007), 1.

<sup>12</sup> Here we will principally concern ourselves with the first part of Rachels’ statement. However, its second part – that ethical philosophy concerns “the nature of morality and what it requires of us” – is potentially misleading when entering into the study of ancient Greek ethics. For this formulation invites a deontological interpretation according to which moral responsibility means doing one’s duty and conforming to an obligatory set of moral requirements. We can contrast this outlook with that of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle (as well as virtually the whole of ancient Greek philosophy) by analogy to the distinction between technological production and natural growth. An artifact’s principle of organization originates in the craftsman and is imposed upon the artifact’s material from the outside. By contrast, the principle of organization that brings a living organism into being is at work within the material of which that organism is composed, and thus comes forth from within it and makes itself manifest through its embodiment. Likewise, ancient Greek ethical philosophy is not primarily about imposing an external standard of behavior upon the individual, but about serving the individual’s inmost nature and providing for its coming forth in the realization of itself – which is happiness. (We will return to this briefly in the Epilogue of this dissertation.) As Julia Annas notes, “Plato (revealingly) has no terms that answer happily to the notions of moral duty and obligation...” (*An Introduction to Plato’s Republic*, p. 61) The same is true of Aristotle, and it is so because, for them, being morally responsible virtually amounts to being autonomous and happy. One does not have a duty or obligation to be happy, and, while everyone pursues happiness, no one pursues it out of duty or obligation. This connection between being good and being happy is beautifully expressed in a poem attributed to Aristotle, written as an encomium to Plato called “On Friendship”: “[Plato], alone or first of mortals, showed clearly / by his own life and by the courses of his arguments / that a man becomes good and happy at the same time; / but now none can grasp this anymore.” (*The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2, p. 2463. Additional discussion of this poem can be found in Werner Jaeger’s *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of His Development* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 106ff.)

“But let this be acknowledged in advance – that every discourse that concerns actions is obliged to speak in outline and not precisely – just as we said also at the beginning [in *NE* I.3] that one ought to demand that discourses be in accord with their material, while matters that are involved in actions and are advantageous have nothing rigidly fixed about them, any more than do matters of health. And since the general discourse is of this sort, still more does the discourse that concerns particulars lack precision, for it falls under no art nor under any skill that has been handed down, but it is always necessary for those who are acting to look at the circumstances surrounding the occasion themselves, just as is the case also with the medical art or the art of steering a ship.” (*NE* II.2, 1104a 1-9)

Thus, both abstract principles and particular judgments concerning ethical matters elude exact formulation in a general discourse. In *NE* I.3 Aristotle illustrates this by pointing out that things that are good involve a sort of inconsistency in the sense that many of them also bring harm for many people, such as those who are undone because of their wealth or courage. Therefore, though wealth and courage are generally good, they are not good without qualification.

Furthermore, although practical reasoning is surely indispensable, at both its general and particular extremes, ethical knowledge is not an act of discursive reasoning (e.g., *dianoia*, *logismos*, *sylogismos*), but of insight into first principles, on the one extreme, and perceptual apprehension of relevant characteristics of particular circumstances, on the other (both of which Aristotle identifies as *nous*).<sup>13</sup> Here, as in every body of knowledge, the first principles are not grasped by demonstration or deductive proof, but by intellectual insight (*nous*); and the practical wisdom

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see *NE* VI.11, 1143a 35 – 1143b 8: “And intellect is directed at what is ultimate on both sides, since it is intellect (*nous*) and not reason (*logos*) that is directed at both the first terms and the ultimate particulars, on the one side at the changeless first terms in demonstrations, and on the other side, in thinking about action, at the other sort of premise, the variable ultimate particular; for these particulars are the sources from which one discerns that for the sake of which an action is, since universals are derived from the particulars. Hence intellect is both a beginning and an end, since the demonstrations that are derived from these particulars are also about these. And of these, one must have a perception, and this perception is intellect.” We will return to this passage in Chapter 3.

(*phronêsis*) that finally grasps the particulars, at the other extreme, is not knowledge (*epistêmê*) but a perceptual recognition that, with the help of practical reasoning, relates the particular fact of the present situation to the ultimate principles concerning the human good. These considerations will be investigated further in Chapter 3 when we discuss practical reasoning, but for the present they suffice to indicate that the most crucial knowledge or understanding that is sought in Aristotle's ethics cannot be called "systematic" without danger of misrepresentation.<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing concerns the sort of knowledge or understanding relevant in ethics. But, whatever the nature of that knowledge turns out to be, knowledge is not the final aim or *telos* of Aristotelian ethics. In short, for Aristotle, ethical philosophy is not the attempt to gain an understanding of what is good; rather, it is the deliberate

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<sup>14</sup> If one makes the un-Aristotelian assumption that ethical philosophy consists of nothing but ethical *discourse*, the limited precision of such discourse might seem to imply that the standards of ethical philosophy are less rigorous than those of sciences, such as mathematics, in which deductive exactitude is attainable. However, when we drop this un-Aristotelian assumption, the opposite conclusion follows. When we conjoin the limited precision of ethical *discourse* with the view that the full practice of ethical philosophy entails an extremely specific course of *actions* – difficult both to identify and to perform – the consequence is that the true practice of ethical philosophy is the proverbial "path as narrow as a razor's edge," and cannot consist of mechanical rule-following; instead it requires ongoing, dynamic, vigilant attention and spiritual discipline. Limitations on the precision with which ethical principles and rules can be articulated in discourse gives rise to the need to deliberate over what to do, since there is no pre-established art or algorithm that can guide you, but the action to be done is something exact – an action that falls in "the mean." Since virtue "discovers and chooses" this action, "virtue is something more precise and better than any art." (*NE* II.6, 1107a 7; 1106b 15) Thus, even though *discourse about virtue* lacks precision, *virtue itself* is as precise in knowledge and skill as anything of which we are capable. We should also note that, in the same way that the art of politics encompasses other arts and sciences by being in charge of creating the social conditions that advance these endeavors (see *NE* I.2, 1094a 28; also *Politics* I.10, 1258a 27-34), so on the individual scale, ethical philosophy encompasses all other forms of study and action, and indeed the whole of life – and is thus a "way of life" – for even the decision to undertake mathematical study or to engage in meditative philosophical contemplation are themselves practical decisions. In this sense, ethical philosophy, encompassing all aspects of life, encompasses all of its rigors. (Practical wisdom's role as "steward" of theoretical wisdom is discussed with subtlety by C. D. C. Reeve in "Aristotle on the Virtues of Thought" (Reeve 2006, 211ff).)

and strategic attempt to *become good*. Its practices are designed to transform human character and to awaken human intelligence to itself and its proper objects.<sup>15</sup>

So, like ancient Greek philosophers both before him and after him, Aristotle sees ethics as practical rather than theoretical. That is, it is a form of practice that involves action and is not simply designed to acquire knowledge (whether or not that knowledge concerns practical matters). Practical knowledge – particularly knowledge of those principles that articulate the nature of the human good – has a great influence on life since it gives one a mark or target (*skopon*) at which to aim. (*NE* I.1, 1094a 22) However, practical knowledge alone has little or no power, whereas the conditions that come to be present in the soul through repeated actions have all the power. (*NE* II.4, 1105b 2) As Aristotle explains,

“Even if practical judgment (*phronêsis*) is concerned with things that are just and beautiful and good for a human being, these are the things that it belongs to a good man to do, and we are no more able to perform these actions by knowing about them, if indeed virtues are active conditions of the soul [which they are: *NE* II.5-6]; it is just as it is with things that are said to belong to health and to being in good shape, not in the sense of producing those states, but the things that result from one’s active condition, for we are no more able to do those things by having the arts of medicine and gymnastic training.” (*NE* VI.12, 1143b 22-27)

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<sup>15</sup> For Aristotle, ultimately the proper object of all intelligence is the Divine Mind or God – which is also the ultimate subject behind all intelligence (although that is a topic for another dissertation: among other places, see *DA* III.5, 430a 25; “without [the Divine Mind] nothing thinks.”). On the Divine Mind as proper object of intelligence, see *Metaph.* VI.11026a 22, where Aristotle states that contemplative knowledge is more worthy of choice than other kinds of knowledge, and among contemplative studies – the natural, the mathematical, and the theological – it is the theological that is the most worthy of choice and the most honorable. In addition, at *EE* VII.15 / VIII.3, 1249a 21-b23 Aristotle states that “whatever mode of choosing and of acquiring things good by nature – whether goods of body or wealth or friends or the other goods – will best promote the contemplation of God (*poiêsei malista tèn tou theou theôrian*), that is the best mode, and that standard is the finest (*kallistos*); and any mode of choice and acquisition that either through deficiency or excess hinders us from serving and from contemplating God – that is a bad one.” As I will indicate in Chapter 3, contrary to the “inclusivist” / “exclusivist” debate, this does not entail a life of isolated “study” as opposed to action in the world.

Just as knowing the cure does not make one healthy, and knowing the regimen does not make one strong, so knowing what virtue is does not make one virtuous.<sup>16</sup> And so, practical knowledge is of no use if its principles cannot be implemented because they are constantly overpowered by whatever impulse happens to arise. (*NE* I.3, 1095a 5) Therefore, although it involves the articulation of practical principles, ethical philosophy is not finally aimed at knowing these principles, but at virtue attained through action that springs from and is in accordance with these principles. (*NE* I.3, 1095a 7)

In this sense, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* was written to help people become good. We are to study it, he says, "not in order to [merely] know what virtue is but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use." (*NE* II.2, 1103b 28; trans. Ross) Understanding ethical principles is completely useless – or worse – unless this understanding is also worked into the very fabric of one's character as a living wisdom (*phronêsis*) that moves one through the world. As the long and difficult discourse of his *Nicomachean Ethics* comes to its close, Aristotle reminds us of this all-important aspect of his ethical philosophy:

"If these matters and the virtues, and also friendship and pleasure, have been dealt with sufficiently in outline, are we to suppose that our program has reached its end? Surely, as the saying goes, where there are things to be done the end is not to survey and recognize the various things, but rather to do them; with regard to virtue, then, it is not enough to know, but we must try to

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<sup>16</sup> Socrates would object to this statement in connection with his view that, strictly speaking, there is no such phenomenon as *akrasia* – in short, performing an action at the same time that one knows it is not the best course of action open to one to perform. One subtlety that may be relevant here is the distinction between knowing what, say, justice is, versus knowing that this action now would be just or unjust. For Socrates, or Plato, the Form of Justice serves as a standard or model for correctly judging particular actions to be just or unjust. For Aristotle, the weakness of knowledge in the case of *akrasia* pertains to the particular judgment and not the universal. Aristotle's account of this phenomenon will be discussed in Chapter 3.

have and use it, or try any other way there may be of becoming good.” (*NE* X.9, 1179a 33; trans. Ross)

Thus, even though the discourse is done, the program or course, in a sense, is just beginning. And so we must not imagine the sole and paradigm practice of ethical philosophy to be the mere articulation of true propositions concerning ethical issues, whether this takes place while sitting at a computer, while standing at the front of a classroom, or in conversation with others. Of course, such practices are integral elements of ethical philosophy; however, it is *qua* practices conducive to the development and exercise of virtue, and not *qua* acts of articulating ethical propositions, that they are so.<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the practice of ethical philosophy, as I take Aristotle to understand it, is better exemplified when, having articulated ethical principles to oneself, in the moment of action these principles spring back and involve themselves in the governance of one’s action by having become the organizing principles of one’s affective dispositions; when, under the influence of a misdirected and intelligence-lacking impulse, you turn around against yourself and say “No!” –

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<sup>17</sup> What I have in mind here is reminiscent of the conversation between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Book I of Plato’s *Republic* (340Dff). There the distinction is made between the physician *qua* physician and the physician *qua* moneymaker. Strictly speaking, Socrates and his interlocutor agree, whatever the physician does *qua* physician conduces to the health of his patient, and it is these actions and these alone that constitute the practice of the medical art. The fact that these actions are accompanied by the earning of wages is extrinsic to the medical art, and insofar as the accompanying wages constitute the individual’s primary motivation, he is not acting in his capacity as a physician but as a moneymaker. Likewise, the true actions of ethical philosophy are those that improve the health of the soul; insofar as one is discussing or writing about ethical principles in order improve one’s reputation or resume, strictly speaking, one is not acting as a philosopher but as something else. Of course, this does not imply that one’s action is *unethical per se*, only that it does not exemplify the practice of ethical philosophy in the true sense. See also Aristotle’s *Physics* II.3 on causes that are “incidental” (*kata sumbebēkos*): just as it is only in an incidental sense that the doctor built the house (because the one who built the house happened to be a doctor), whereas in the strict sense it is the builder who builds the house, so it is only in an incidental sense that one practicing ethical philosophy is also a moneymaker or an author or a professor. See also *Politics* I.9, 1257b 34 – 1258a 14 where Aristotle mentions those who turn every art into a means of acquiring money. For example, generalship is aimed at victory and to use it as a means to acquiring money is “contrary to nature.”

this is ethical philosophy, and it is through its practice that the mind (*nous*) moves into the heart, and, as Empedocles described, its principles take root in your blood and guts and become a living wisdom that moves you through the world.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Aristotle writes:

“It is well said, then, that it is by doing just acts that the just person is produced, and by doing temperate acts the temperate person; without doing these no one would have even a prospect of becoming good. But most people do not do these, but take refuge in theory and think they are being philosophers and will become good in this way, behaving somewhat like patients who listen attentively to their doctors, but do none of the things they are ordered to do. As the latter will not be made well in body by such a course of treatment, the former will not be made well in soul by such a course of philosophy.” (*NE* II.4, 1105b 9-19; trns. Ross)<sup>19</sup>

Thus, an ethical philosophy composed entirely of words and not also of deeds is hopelessly inadequate to attain the goal. Once again, though, we must note that to say something and to write something are actions too. If the aim toward which one directs these actions is the promotion or exercise of virtue in oneself or in others, this utterance or act of writing is an act of ethical philosophy; if not it is something else.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As Debra Hawhee remarks, in her magnificent book *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), “The learning dynamic described by Aristotle approximates an Empedoclean fragment wherein Empedocles exhorts Pausanias to approach his teachings with a certain intensity: ‘If you push them (*ereisas*) firmly under your crowded thoughts (*prapidessin*), and contemplate (*meletêisin*) them favorably with unsullied and constant attention, assuredly all these will be with you through life, and you will gain much else from them, for of themselves they will cause each thing to grow into the character (*auta gar auxei taut’ eis êthos hekaston*), according to the nature (*phusis*) of each.’ (DK 31 B110; [trans. M. A. Wright]” (Hawhee, p. 145)

<sup>19</sup> Regarding those practice ethical philosophy versus those who take refuge in theory and mere talk, compare Iamblichus’ reference to Pythagoreans versus Pythagoreanists. (*The Life of Pythagoras* §18, in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library*, compiled and translated by Kenneth Sylvan Guthrie (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988), 76)

<sup>20</sup> This is so because, as Aristotle indicates at *NE* III.1, 1111a 18, the end for the sake of which something is done (e.g., wage-earning, or showing off one’s intellectual skills), and that in which the action consists (e.g., producing spoken or written ethical discourses), together constitute the “most controlling circumstances” in the determination of what action was performed.



Now, what of these “acts of ethical philosophy,” and their relation to acts of wage-earning, and whatever else may come to be done in the course of life? Apart from the intrinsic importance of the fact that Aristotle’s ethics concerns *knowledge-in-action* and not simply *knowledge about action*, why make such a fuss about it here in the introduction to this dissertation? Because, ultimately, it is the psychosomatic sources of these very actions – actions performed in the practice of ethical philosophy – that we are hunting for in the chapters that follow. On the one hand, as mentioned above, the practice of ethical philosophy, as a “way of life,” encompasses the whole of life and, ultimately, all actions fall within its scope. Thus, every action, whatever else it may be, is also an opportunity to practice ethical philosophy, to practice and exercise the virtues. As we will see in Chapter 3, this unification of all actions into one total action that exercises virtue is happiness.

On the other hand, when you perform such actions, when you restrain or impel yourself against the grain of your impulses or inhibitions, in the direction indicated by insight, physical processes are taking place in the body that go along with and partly constitute these actions, these resistances, these “countermotions.” We want to decipher Aristotle’s view of what these processes are. Where do the actions that constitute the true practice of ethical philosophy come from? They do not simply come out of the head or the mouth, but from the heart and blood and guts – from the whole person as a psychosomatic totality.

# Chapter 1

## The Physics and Metaphysics of Living Things

### 1.1 The Metaphysics of Psychosomatic Unity

Aristotle views living things as unified psychosomatic wholes. This is crucial to his understanding of the causes and effects of their actions, thoughts, desires, and experiences. In this chapter we will look at the metaphysics of psychosomatic unity through Aristotle's so-called "hylomorphism," according to which body and soul are the material (*hylê*) and form (*morphê, eidos*) of a living thing, respectively. In the subsequent chapters we will turn to Aristotle's empirical account of various phenomena in which living things function as unified psychosomatic wholes.

For Aristotle, a living thing – such as a human being or a bird or a tree – is an individual entity (*ousia*) with a soul (*psychê*) and a body (*sôma*). This view is well known but easily misinterpreted. First, the soul and the body are not entities (*ousiai*) in addition to the living thing that has them. Thus, a man, his soul, and his body are not three different entities. Secondly, however, his soul and his body are not two different entities (*ousiai*) either! The only full-fledged entity under consideration here is the man himself. In Aristotle's ontology, primacy goes to the psychosomatic whole, as opposed to the derivative aspects of this entity – its *psychê* and its *sôma*.

In what sense, then, are the soul and the body not full-fledged "entities" or "beings" (*ousiai*)? According to Aristotle, in the primary sense a "being" (*ousia*) is a particular, self-subsistent, persisting entity – a "this" or "this something" (*tode ti*). In a secondary sense, the "being" (*ousia*) of some particular thing is "what it is" (*ti esti*).

For example, the individual man and the individual horse are “beings” in the primary sense, whereas *man* and *horse* are “beings” in the secondary sense.<sup>21</sup> The former are “things,” and the latter are what it is to be (*ti ên einai*) things of their kinds. These senses of “being” are employed when we single out *this thing here* and identify *what it is*, e.g. “This thing here is a horse” or “Socrates is a man.”<sup>22</sup>

Aristotle begins his account of the soul by distinguishing these senses of being, and indicates that neither the soul nor the body is a “this” – an *ousia* in the primary sense. He states, “one sort [of *ousia*] has being as material, which in its own right is not a *this*, but another sort is the form (*morphê*) or look (*eidos*) of a thing, directly as a result of which something is called a *this*, and the third sort is what is made out of these [i.e., the union of material and form].” (*DA* II.1, 412a 6-10)<sup>23</sup> In other words, the stuff of which a thing is composed, *qua* material, is not a “something” in its own right. Rather, the thing composed of that stuff is the “something,” and it is its form that determines *what* this “something” is. For example, a statue may be composed of clay. Insofar as the clay is what the statue is

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<sup>21</sup> See *Cat.* 5, 2a 11. I should note here that there is debate concerning possible differences in Aristotle’s views of *ousia* as expressed in the *Categories* and in the *Metaphysics*. Some scholars argue that in the *Categories* Aristotle gives primacy to particular compounds of matter and form, and in the *Metaphysics* he assigns this primacy to form. On my own interpretation of Aristotle, forms are presented in the *Metaphysics* not as self-subsistent things or beings, but as the thinghood of things or the being of beings. (I have come across the work too late to consider it thoroughly but Michael Wedin’s *Aristotle’s Theory of Substance: The Categories and Metaphysics Z* (Oxford University Press, 2002) is an extensive book on these issues that argues for the consistency of these two Aristotelian works and seems to defend an interpretation similar to the one I have presented very briefly here.) Although this issue requires more discussion than I can present here, we are about to see in the next paragraph that Aristotle’s account of the soul in *De Anima*, which is our central concern, harmonizes with my reading of the metaphysical issue.

<sup>22</sup> Later we will see that the combined deployment of the primary and secondary senses of “being” are central to the implicit predication that takes place in perceptual recognition of particular things as instances of universals.

<sup>23</sup> The usual translation here is *morphê* = shape and *eidos* = form. Sachs explains his translation, convincingly in my opinion, in his glossary to the *De Anima* (p. 193) and elsewhere.

made of, the clay is not the “thing” in question – the statue is. What differentiates a clay statue from mere clay is the presence of the statue’s form. Of course, we could regard the lump of clay in its own right as a thing, but in that case we are not considering the clay as what anything is made out of – clay is not made of clay, it *is* clay. If we regard a lump of clay simply as clay (and not as material of which something is made), we are treating clay as the form of the thing in question and not as its material.

In a similar way, according to Aristotle, the soul is not a self-subsistent “entity” in its own right in the primary sense; it is the “what it is to be” (*to ti ên einai*) of the living thing – it is the living entity’s “being” in the secondary sense. This means that, for Aristotle, the union of soul and body is virtually a foregone conclusion:

“...it is not necessary to seek out whether the soul and body are one, any more than whether the wax and the shape molded in it, or generally with the material of each thing and that of which it is the material... [For example,] just as the eyeball and the power of sight are the eye, so here the soul and the body are the living thing.”<sup>24</sup>

Being wax and being cylindrical are conceptually distinguishable, but *this* wax and *its* cylindrical shape are not distinct entities. Like a piece of wax and its shape, and like the eye and the power of sight, the soul and the body are two aspects of an indivisible unity – the living thing. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle subsumes all examples of this kind – all hylomorphic compounds (compounds of material and form) – under the following general statement: “the highest level of material and the

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<sup>24</sup> *DA* II.1, 412b 6 – 413a 5.

form are one and the same thing, the former potentially, the latter actively, so that looking for what is responsible for their being one is like looking for a cause of one thing...”<sup>25</sup> We will consider the earlier part of this passage below. Regarding the later part, Aristotle is saying that in looking for what is responsible for a given combination of form and material, we are simply looking for what is responsible for this one thing’s existence (since the form and material are not two independent entities that have been brought together, but are conceptually distinguishable aspects of this one entity).

For example, consider the Great Pyramid at Giza. Looking for who made this limestone take on this pyramidal shape, or looking for who made this pyramidal shape out of this limestone, is just looking for who made the Great Pyramid at Giza. We can consider this entity *qua* composed of limestone or *qua* pyramidal, but “this limestone pyramid” and “this pyramidal limestone” are two descriptions of one entity. Likewise, this ensouled body and this embodied soul are not two things but one thing – e.g., the individual man or horse – considered from two different perspectives. Thus, ontologically speaking, the soul and the living body are not two different things or entities. To imagine them as existentially separable would be like considering the power of sight to be a self-subsistent *thing* with existence independent of the eye (analogous to a soul without a living body), or like considering some random blob of transparent jelly in the eye socket, without any power to serve as an instrument for seeing, to be an eye (analogous to a living body without a soul).

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<sup>25</sup> *Metaph.* VIII.6, 1045b 18.

It should be noted that to assert the existential unity of body and soul in this way is not to “reduce” either to the other. The soul and body are not two things, but they are not one thing either – they are not “things” at all. As R. D. Hicks comments, “We cannot be too often reminded that matter and form are not things, but ‘causes’ or ‘principles’ of things, distinguishable in thought or reasoning and in rational description (*logôî*) but not by sense [perception].”<sup>26</sup> The soul is not identical to the body, and the body is not identical to the soul.<sup>27</sup> They differ in being (that is, “whatness,” *ti esti*), but they are not two different beings (that is, “thisness,” *tode ti*). The soul and the body are thus like the concave and the convex curvatures of the circumference of a circle, or like a road going from Athens to Thebes and the same road going from Thebes to Athens: they are one, but they differ in being.<sup>28</sup>

John I. Beare presents a nice formulation of these points in a passage that links the concepts of *ousia* (substance, being, thinghood), *sôma* (the living body), *hulê* (material, raw material), *eidos* (form), *zôon* (living thing), and *tode ti* (“this thing”). Beare writes, “Accordingly we may see what Aristotle meant by speaking of the animate body as *ousia* of which the *sôma per se* is the *hulê*, while the soul *per se* is *eidos*. For the *sôma* to have life is to have realized in it certain antecedent

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<sup>26</sup> R. D. Hicks, commenting on *DA* II.1, 412b 6 – the above quoted passage on the unity of soul and body as analogous to the unity of the wax and its shape or form and matter generally. See *Aristotle: De Anima, with Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Salem: New Hampshire: Ayer Company Publishers Inc., repr. 1988, originally published in 1907), 314.

<sup>27</sup> See *DA* II.1, 412a 15-22.

<sup>28</sup> As Heraclitus states, “The road up and the road down are one and the same.” (DK 22B60, translated by R. McKirahan in *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 122) For Aristotle, the road up and the road down are one primary substance, but as secondary substances they are not one and the same. See *Metaph.* XII.9, 1066a 32: “...the interval from one to two and from two to one is the same, and the uphill and downhill road, though the being of them is not one [i.e., they are one, but they differ in being]...”

potentialities, which belonged to the *hulê* from which the living body has sprung. *Psuchê* is the realization of such potentialities. The *zôon* is the *tode ti*.<sup>29</sup>

### **1.2 Strata of the Living Thing's Composition**

An elaboration of these claims, and the earlier part of Aristotle's passage from the *Metaphysics* quoted above (with its reference to "the highest level of material"), will introduce us to the important concept of the stratification of the living thing's constitution. This, in turn, will point to the relativity of material and form, and to the fact that Aristotle's concept of material (*hulê*) must not be confused with the notion of corporeality. The upshot of the analysis in this section will be that all strata of a living thing's composition contribute to the explanation of its functioning (in particular, such functions as voluntary action, experiencing emotion, deliberation, etc.).

The body (*sôma*) of a living thing (*zôon*) is composed of various strata of material (*hulê*). In Aristotle's view, a living thing (from the top down) is an organism endowed with the capacity to use its parts or organs as instruments in the performance of life activities. This total organism is composed of non-uniform parts (e.g., head, heart, hands), which are composed of uniform parts (e.g., blood, flesh, bone), which are composed of the natural elements (earth, water, air, and fire), which are composed of the primary powers of hot, cold, moist and dry.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition from Alcmaeon to Aristotle* (Mansfield Center, CT: Mansfield Centre, repr. 2004, originally published in 1906 by Oxford Clarendon Press), 220-221.

<sup>30</sup> For the distinction between the uniform and non-uniform parts, see *On the Parts of Animals* II.1, 646a 13ff. Further useful discussion is presented by James G. Lennox in *Aristotle: On The Parts of Animals I-IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 179-181. In the table below I vary the terms

**Table 1: Strata of the Living Thing's Composition (from the top down)**

1. Individual Human Being, Animal, or Plant
2. Living body
3. Collection of non-uniform body parts (heart, hands, arms, eyes, etc.)
4. Combination of uniform materials (blood, tissue, muscle, flesh, bone, etc.)
5. Mixture of natural elements (earth, water, air, fire)
6. Blend of primary powers (hot, cold, moist, dry)

On Aristotle's view, at its lowest stratum of composition the living body – like all other terrestrial bodies – is qualified in terms of the primary powers (*dunameis*) the hot, the cold, the moist, and the dry. Of these powers, the hot and the cold are active (*poiêtika*), while the moist and the dry are passive (*pathêtika*). In other words, hot and cold are propensities to *cause* change or to act in certain ways, while moist and dry are propensities to *undergo* change or be acted upon in certain ways.<sup>31</sup> More specifically, the actions of the hot and the cold are to bind things together. The hot does this by bringing together things that are alike and separating them from unlike things, which makes the materials acted upon more compact, thicker, and drier, whereas cold indiscriminately brings things together whether or not they are alike.<sup>32</sup> The passive modes of being affected associated with the moist and the dry, on the other hand, are receptivity and resistance to change (respectively).<sup>33</sup> Since these

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“blend,” “mixture,” and so forth on account of technicalities in Aristotle's theory of material substance. For instance, see *GC* I.10. For a classic paper see H. H. Joachim's “Aristotle's Conception of Chemical Combination” (*Journal of Philology* 29 (1904), 72-86). Also see Chapter IV of Gad Freudenthal's *Aristotle's Theory of Material Substance: Heat and Pneuma, Form and Soul* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperback, Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> See *Meteor.* IV (especially Chapters 1, 2, and 4) and *GC* II.2.

<sup>32</sup> See *Meteor.* IV.2, 380a 4; *Meteor.* IV.8, 384b 24; *GC* II.2, 329b 24-31; [*On Breath*] 9, 485a 28.

<sup>33</sup> Over the course of *Meteorology* IV.8-9 Aristotle considers a number of aptitudes for being affected that are attributable to the ratio of moist and dry in a body's constitution. He considers being solidified, melted, softened, bent, straightened, broken, fragmented, impressed upon, squeezed, being malleable, being fissile or easily split, being easily cut, being viscous, being compressible, being combustible, and giving off fumes. Additional passages of relevance to these aptitudes for being



powers are the principles or sources (*archai*) of the natural elements, they are “practically the causes (*aitiai*) controlling life and death, not to mention sleep and waking, prime and age, disease and health...” (*PA* II.2, 648b 3)

Thus, on its next stratum of composition, the living body consists of combinations of primary qualities that comprise the natural elements: earth, water, air, and fire. On Aristotle’s view, earth is cold and dry, water is cold and moist, air is

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affected are found in *Physics* VII.2, where Aristotle describes various forms of motion or change (*kinêsis*) involving change of place. There are two important points I would like to make here. First, the reader may consider such recondite details concerning Aristotle’s theory of material powers to have little or no relevance to issues in moral psychology. As this dissertation will show, this is a mistake that has led to misinterpretations of Aristotle’s views of incidental perception, the efficacy of practical reasoning, and lack of self-restraint or weakness of will (*akrasia*). Thus, we will see that such material aptitudes are crucial to Aristotle’s moral psychology. For instance, on Aristotle’s view, fumes turn out to be the key to explaining *akrasia* (in spite of the fact that, compared to the massive secondary literature on *akrasia*, the secondary literature on Aristotle’s theory of fumes is minimal). In short, passions are partly constituted by the presence of heat in the body; in most bodies this heat produces fumes that disrupt the condition of the blood. The blood is the medium in which our sensory impressions are preserved and communicated to the center of awareness (the heart), and we think and conceptualize the circumstances of action through the use of these images. On Aristotle’s view, then, it is by producing fumes that passions disrupt the weak-willed person’s thoughts and temporarily impair his knowledge that what he is doing is unwise. More generally, as Aristotle explicitly states, attempting to account for psychological phenomena without determining how they are realized in the functions of the living body is “absurd” (*atopos*). (*DA* I.3, 407b 14, quoted above at the opening of the introduction.) The second point I would like to make here concerns material necessity. The actions of the hot and the cold are necessary, and yet have different effects on different occasions. This is because they work upon materials with varying aptitudes or passive dispositional propensities on different occasions. When the conditions are the same, the effects are always the same: “the same cause in the same relation cannot have opposite effects upon the same thing.” (*Meteor.* IV.6, 383a 8; see also [*On Breath*] 9, 485b 15 for the idea that the same agent always produces the same activity and that “nature is always constant.”) This fact forms the basis of material necessity, which is also echoed in Aristotle’s description of “non-rational potencies” (*dunamis alogoi*) in *Metaph.* IX.5, where it is claimed that, in the case of these potencies, “when the agent and the patient meet in the way appropriate to the potency in question, the one must act and the other be acted on.” (1047b 35 – 1048a 10) The same notion of material necessity is presented, among other places, in this passage from *On the Generation of Animals*: “When a pair of factors, the one active and the other passive, come into contact in the way in which one is active and the other passive (by “way” I mean the manner, the place, and the time of the contact), then immediately both are brought into play, the one acting, the other being acted upon.” (*GA* II.4, 740b 22-25) As we will see, for Aristotle these features of the active and passive powers of material bodies are extremely important to the explanation of animal motion and various psychological processes and conditions such as memory, emotion, incidental perception, the efficacy of practical reasoning, falling asleep, becoming intoxicated, and *akrasia*, among others. For instance, remembering involves the formation of an impression and thus depends upon a suitable material aptitude to be impressed upon. If the material constitution into which the impression is made is too moist the impression will not remain, and if it is too dry no impression will be formed in the first place. (*On Memory and Reminiscence* 1, 450b 1ff)

hot and moist, and fire is hot and dry. The commonalities amongst the elements are critical because they provide for the transmutability of each element into the others. For instance, when water (cold and moist) is heated it becomes air (hot and moist). This mutual transmutability, in turn, is the key to the motion of the elements toward their natural places in the cosmos,<sup>34</sup> and, what is more relevant to our purposes, to the propagation of changes through the living body.<sup>35</sup>

On the next level of composition, the living body consists of blends of the elements that constitute uniform or homoimerous stuffs such as tissue, blood, flesh, bone, and muscle. The blend (*krasis*) of these materials is important, particularly the blend of one's blood since, in Aristotle's view, not only is blood the material that nourishes and replenishes each of the body's parts, but the images or appearances (*phantasmata*) of sensory perception move through the blood to the center of awareness in the heart. On this view, having excessively watery blood causes an animal to be timid (since water is cold and being afraid involves chilling), whereas having many thick fibers in the blood makes the animal especially liable to outbursts of anger (because such fibers make the animal susceptible to heating up suddenly and

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<sup>34</sup> In Aristotle's cosmology, the four elements have natural resting places in the cosmos: earth in the center, surrounded by water, surrounded by air, surrounded by fire. Aristotle describes the motion of each sublunary element toward its natural place as motion toward its form. (*DC* IV.3, 310a 34) When the expression of their natures is unhindered, the elements move toward these places and come to rest in them when that motion has "come to term," so to speak, in the attainment of its *telos*.

<sup>35</sup> See *Phys.* VIII.4, *Meteor.* IV, and *GC* II. To foreshadow the relevance to moral psychology, affections of soul, thinking, and "imagination" (*phantasia*), are necessarily accompanied by heating and chilling in the body (cf. *MA* 8, 701b 34). These episodes catalyze elemental motion and changes within the body that lead to bodily motion and the alteration of perceptual dispositions that are integral to character. (For instance, see *Phys.* VII.3 and *MA*, 7-8.) We will discuss these matters in the chapters that follow.

being angry involves heating).<sup>36</sup> Of particular interest are a variety of passages in which Aristotle states that the blend of an animal's material composition accounts for its possession of intelligence. For instance, blood that is thin and cold, Aristotle says, is conducive to intelligence (*noesis*) (*PA* II.2, 648a 3).<sup>37</sup>

Yet higher in its composition, the living body consists of combinations of uniform stuffs that constitute the non-uniform parts such as the heart, hands, arms, eyes, etc. The transition from the uniform to the non-uniform levels of composition is critical, we will see, in endowing the living thing with functional capacities characteristic of living things. For anything that is entirely uniform or homogeneous in its constitution is incapable of moving itself. (*Physics* VIII.4) A living thing's organs must be connected but discontinuous in order for the active and passive powers combined in the body's material constitution to act and be acted upon by one another in ways that endow that whole organism with functional capacities for life

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<sup>36</sup> Among other places, see *PA* II.4 and *DA* I.2, 403a 25ff. For an excellent discussion of this subject see Gad Freudenthal's *Aristotle's Theory of Material Substance*, especially §2.1, "Psychological Effects of the Constitution of the Blood."

<sup>37</sup> There are a variety of passages in which Aristotle links the blend of a living thing's material constitution and its psychological characteristics. For example, "The fineness of the blend (*eukrasia*) in man is shown by his possession of [discursive reasoning] (*dianoia*)."  
(*GA* II.6, 744a 30) Young people are in a condition similar to intoxication and "their bodies are continually being stung" and excited by desire for pleasure because of the way they are blended. (*NE* VII.14, 1154b 10) The human being is the most intelligent animal because the constitution of his flesh gives him the greatest precision in discriminating by touch. "A sign of this," Aristotle states, "is that within the human race, being naturally well or badly endowed with intelligence depends on the organ of this sense [the organ of touch, i.e. flesh] and not on the others, for those with tough skin are badly equipped by nature for thinking (*dianoian*), but those with tender skin are well equipped."  
(*DA* II.9, 421a 20-26) The wasting away of our power for contemplation and insight is also accounted for by the fact that, though Intellect itself is unaffected, "something else in us is destroyed [in the body as it decays with age]."  
(*DA* I.4, 408b 24) More generally, "There are many points both in regard to the temperament of animals and their power of sensation which are controlled by the character of the blood... This is what we should expect."  
(*PA* II.4, 650b 19-651a 19) The constitution of the heart – its being large, small, hard, or soft – influences the animal's temperament. (*PA* III.4, 667a 7-23) The cause (*aition*) of the chameleon's "habit of soul" (*psychê ethous*) is the quantity of its blood. (*PA* IV.11, 692a 20) Each of these passages presents aspects of the animal's material constitution as causes of its enduring psychological characteristics. Also of relevance is Aristotle's reference to physiognomy (reading features of the body as signs of qualities in the soul) at *Prior Analytics* II.27, 70b 7-38.

activities.<sup>38</sup> Finally, then, at its highest level of composition the living body is the combination of its non-uniform parts into one unified totality possessing the functional capacity to put its parts to use in the performance of life activities – namely, the living thing (*zôon*).

There are a number of things we should note about this stratification of the living thing's composition. First, each stratum is material relative to the one above it and form relative to the one below it. Thus, an eye represents form in comparison to the eye-jelly of which it is composed, but represents material in relation to the living being of which it is a part. A thing exemplifies form insofar as it is a completed *something*, and exemplifies material insofar as it has the potential to *become* something, or a part of something, other than simply itself.

The relativity of the material / form distinction underscores the fact that this distinction must not be confused with the distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, with its emphasis on magnitude and spatial extension. Aristotle's conception of material (*hulê*) is better captured by the notion of *raw material* as opposed to the *finished product* made out of that material. Some things that are material, in this sense, are not corporeal. For example, an argument's premises – surely not corporeal objects – are the material causes of its conclusion (*Phys.* II.3,

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<sup>38</sup> On the need for a multiplicity of uniform stuffs in the body, note this: “And inasmuch as the actions and movements both of an animal as a whole and of its parts are manifold, the substances out of which these are composed must of necessity possess diverse [powers (*dunamis*)].” (*PA* II.1, 646b 15) With regard to the joining of each non-uniform organ into the total living body, the problem of being discontinuous but connected is solved by the joints, for which reason Aristotle gives the joints a very special significance in his explanation of animal motion. Thus, Aristotle states that “if the forearm were the animal, somewhere in this joint [i.e., the elbow-joint] would be the movement-imparting origin of the soul...” (*MA* 8, 702a 33). This is so because the joints are “where the same thing is a beginning and an end, like a hinge.” (*DA* III.10, 433b 22; also see *MA* 698a 16-b 6 and *On the Progression of Animals* 6, 706b 18-24)

195a 18), in the sense that the information in the conclusion is “put together out of” the information in the premises.<sup>39</sup> Another example of material that is not a corporeal stuff is the sound of vocalized letters, which are raw material in relation to syllables.<sup>40</sup> This relation holds because these uttered letters can be arranged in various ways and become different syllables. Syllables, in turn, exemplify form in relation to letters and material in relation to words, which are form in relation to syllables and material in relation to, say, a comedy or a tragedy. As Aristotle remarks, “Tragedy and comedy are both composed out of the same letters.” (*GC* I.2, 315b 15) Similarly, when it is said that a book or compact disc “contains previously released material,” the claim is not that the corporeal stuff of which the book or compact disc are composed has been previously released, but that the written works or songs have been issued in some other context. The words or songs are material that has been re-arranged into the present compilation, but they are not corporeal extended objects.<sup>41</sup>

Alternatively, some things that are corporeal are not material. For instance, a house is corporeal – a physical, spatially extended object. But a house need not be material (*hulê*), just so long as it is not to become a constituent part of some greater totality such as a housing development. The wood of which the house is made is

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<sup>39</sup> Also see *MA* 7, 701a 10 and Plato’s *Republic* VII, 533C. We will see this notion of a judgment being “put together” in connection with Aristotle’s analysis of “incidental perception” in Chapter 2.

<sup>40</sup> See *Phys.* II.3, 195a 18. It is worth noting that Aristotle is referring to *sounds* (essentially, phonemes) rather than written letters. At *Poetics* 20, 1456b 22, he states “Now a letter (*stoicheion*) is an indivisible vocal sound (*phônê*), though not every such sound, but one out of which a composite sound [i.e., a syllable] naturally comes about...” And note *Metaphysics* VII.12, 1038a 5: “the voice (*phônê*) is a genus and material, and its differentiations make forms and letters (*stoicheia*) out of that.” In general, the Greek word *stoicheia* is used in reference to the elementary building blocks of things in a given domain – in the domain of words, letters; in that of the cosmos, the natural elements; in that of geometry, the axiomatic definitions and propositions that are the principles or sources (*archai*) of geometrical truths (hence the title of Euclid’s *Elements* – *Stoicheia*).

<sup>41</sup> Less corporeal still, Aristotle refers “intelligible material” as opposed to perceptible material. The former comprises, among other things, the objects of mathematics. (*Metaph.* VII.10, 1036a 9-12; *DA* III.7, 431b 17; see also the Prologues of Proclus’ *Commentary on the First Book of Euclid’s Elements*.)

material but since the house is not something that will be incorporated into some other entity that will be made out of this house, the house is not material for any further product. Additionally, a living thing is corporeal in the sense that it has a physical body but it is not material.<sup>42</sup>

I emphasize that the material / form distinction should not be equated with the corporeal / incorporeal distinction because confusing these distinctions leads to a misunderstanding of Aristotle's hylomorphism. In particular, Aristotle's hylomorphism does not involve the notion that soul-activities take place in some incorporeal medium whose relation to the corporeal body is very problematic. When Aristotle states that the body is a living thing's material and the soul is its form, he is not saying that the body is a corporeal thing and the soul is some incorporeal thing. This is a Cartesian way of thinking that we should dispense of in interpreting Aristotle. In reading Aristotle, we must not reify the form: the form is not a thing (primary *ousia*), it is the thinghood of a thing (secondary *ousia*). The form of a chair is not a chair, it is the thinghood or being or essence or "what" of each individual chair. Thus, in stating that the soul and body are the form and material that constitute a living thing, Aristotle is saying that the body is the ground of potentialities that is completed and unified into one total entity by the functional capacity for life activities that is soul. (This will be elaborated below.)

A second thing to note about the strata of a thing's composition is that, for Aristotle, it is the highest level of composition – that is, form – that constitutes what a

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<sup>42</sup> In "Aristotle's Definition of Motion," Aryeh Kosman distinguishes a formal and a material sense of "of," as when we refer to "a statue of Pericles" and "a statue of bronze." As he remarks, "A statue of Pericles in the material sense is imaginable, but too macabre to describe." (p. 48, n. 16)

given thing most fundamentally *is*, its being (*ousia*) in the secondary sense. At *Physics* II.1, 193a 10ff, and at various places throughout *On Generation and Corruption*, Aristotle is at pains to show that, although “nature is twofold” (*Phys.* II.2, 194a 12), that is, involves material and form, form is nature more than material is nature. The highest stratum of a thing’s composition is not a raw material but is the fully formed entity, the definable essence of which is determined by its characteristic function (*ergon*). It is at this highest level, rather than at the lowest, that we find the thing’s nature – the governing principle of its growth and of its becoming and continuing to be what it is. While the Presocratics sought for the source and governing principle (*archê*) of things in the lowest level of material out of which all things are made, Aristotle points to the highest level – to form – for the identification of the source and principle of change of things; that is, nature (*physis*).<sup>43</sup>

In accordance with this view, Aristotle often notes that, e.g., a bed is not simply wood but wooden, a statue is not simply bronze but brazen. Strange though it may seem, this idea is critical to understanding how virtue is acquired. Aristotle’s basic idea in this regard is that, if we change the shape of a lump of clay from rectangular to circular, strictly speaking the subject undergoing alteration is the clay, not the rectangularity of the clay. (This is indicated, Aristotle says, by the fact that what undergoes alteration is called by the same name throughout the alteration. As the clay is being reshaped it is still clay, but the rectangular thing is no longer present

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<sup>43</sup> This view has important metaphysical implications that are difficult to articulate and cannot be considered in detail here. In short, though, from Aristotle’s perspective the “existence” or being of a thing is not to be understood in terms of an inert extended mass of bulk stuff out of which it is made, but in terms of the intelligible principle, definable essence, or form that it is at work holding onto throughout its “being-at-work-staying-itself” (*entelecheia*).

as the circular thing is being brought into being.) Similarly, Aristotle explicitly states, when a person develops virtue (intellectual virtue or virtue of character) strictly speaking the subject of alteration is the body, not the soul. (This view is argued for in *Physics* VII.3.)

Additionally, a thing's material cause is properly identified with that which is "nearest" to its form: in looking for the causes (*aitiai*) of a human being, Aristotle says, "we must state the nearest causes: What is the material? Not fire or earth but the material peculiar to the thing [e.g., human hands, human heart, etc.]." (*Metaph.* VIII.4, 1044a 32)<sup>44</sup> The opening of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* describes a sequence of arts, techniques, or technologies (*technai*) that form a nested hierarchy of ends and means. Thus, the goal of the bridle-making art is the bridle, which is used as a means in the practice of the art of horse riding, which is performed as a means in the practice of the art of battle, which is undertaken for the sake of victory, which is ultimately sought because it is believed to promote happiness. In this sense, each of these arts produces material that one of the others puts to use (except the highest in the hierarchy). In listing things that a rider makes use of in the practice of riding we would include instruments such as the saddle, but we would not include leather (even if the saddle is made of leather). For it is not *qua* made of leather that the saddle is used, but *qua* serviceable in providing a seat on the horse. The saddle-maker works with leather, the horse rider works with a saddle. Likewise, the proper material of the living thing is not to be identified with the most basic constituent but with those

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<sup>44</sup> The notion of proximity to one or another extreme of a thing's composition – its most basic material substratum or the form that defines the total being as a whole – is elaborated upon in *Meteor.* IV.12, 390a 4-9.



organs that are readily serviceable in the exercise of the life-activities that define what this living thing is.<sup>45</sup>

The living thing's *being alive* or *being ensouled* consists in the facts that (a) its material constituents have certain correspondingly stratified powers or potencies (*dunamies*) and (b) in combination, these powers actualize one another in ways that endow the living thing with the ability to perform life activities. The living thing's possession of soul is what makes its body what it is (a living plant, animal, or human body), and therefore soul is the living thing's form (*eidos*); on the other hand, the living thing's body is the ground of potentiality out of which its soul-power is actualized and comes to be present, and therefore the body is the living thing's material (*hulê*). Thus, the attributes of soul "[have] to be in a certain sort of material if [they are] to be at all." (*DA* I.1, 403b 3)<sup>46</sup>

On the other hand, the body parts of a corpse are not what they were before the animal died, except in name. As Aristotle writes, "no soul will be present elsewhere than in that of which it is the soul; [and] no part of the body will be such in more than name unless it has some soul in it (e.g., the eye of a dead person)." (*GA* II.1, 735a 6)<sup>47</sup> An eye is essentially a bodily organ that endows its possessor with the power of sight. Strictly speaking, anything that does not do that, is not an eye. As

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<sup>45</sup> There are various places in Plato and in Aristotle where it is stated that the authority on whether an instrument is good is the one who *uses* the instrument and not the one who makes it. If the saddle does not serve its function for the rider well, it is not a good saddle however much the maker of the saddle may insist that it is. Likewise, the excellence of the soul serves as a higher and more authoritative criteria for bodily excellence. The peculiarly human power is analogous to the "most architectonic" science and master art governing over all other, which for Aristotle is politics. (See *NE* I.2 for politics as the master art.)

<sup>46</sup> In particular, natural heat is critical to possessing soul: "Everything living has soul, and it, as we have said, cannot exist without the presence of natural heat [in the body]." (*On Youth and Old Age* 6, 470a 20)

<sup>47</sup> See also *Meteor.* IV.12, 389b 31ff.

Aristotle states, “What a thing is is always determined by its function [its *ergon*: that is, its characteristic activity or work]: a thing really is itself when it can perform its function; an eye, for instance, when it can see.”<sup>48</sup> Thus, the functional capacity for seeing is the form (*eidos*) that makes the eye what it is. Holding onto that capacity is what being an eye consists in; the being (secondary *ousia*) of an eye is the ongoing activity (*energeia*) of maintaining that capacity. Thus, although a human being’s eye, a fish’s eye, and a fly’s eye are very different structurally, they are all *eyes* because they are organs that procure for the organism a functional capacity to see.

The point of the previous paragraph is very important and should be borne in mind throughout the course of this dissertation, as we stress the importance of bodily processes for the explanation of moral responsibility: for Aristotle, the body is not simply an inert bulk mass of extended stuff, but a dynamic, functional, responsive system of organs or instruments. An animal body is necessarily living, for Aristotle, and when the animal is dead, strictly speaking, its body no longer exists! The corpse that remains may be the same bulk matter but it is not the same thing that it was before. As Aristotle states, “...when the soul departs, what is left is no longer an animal, and... none of the parts remain what they were before, excepting in mere configuration, like the animals that in the fable are turned into stone...” (*PA* I.1, 641a 18) For instance, when an animal dies, the orbs of jelly that remain in place of the animal’s eyes are not eyes but, like the eyes in a statue or a painting, they are eyes “in

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<sup>48</sup> *Meteor.* IV.12, 390a 10. In the Epilogue of this dissertation we will consider the application of this concept to the human being as a whole entity: we are not really ourselves if we have not developed our peculiarly human powers.

name only.” The living body is the soul's manifestation in material, the soul's presence in the realm of phenomenal appearance.

Accordingly, the psychosomatic unity of the living being should not be interpreted as a “reduction” of the soul to corporeal bulk. As Aristotle remarks, “no part of an animal exists without matter, nor is it matter alone; neither will a body in any [random] condition whatsoever be an animal, nor will any of its parts, as has been said repeatedly.” (*PA* I.3, 643a 24; trans. Lennox) Thus, the ensoulment of the body is no less essential than the embodiment of the soul. This may seem to dangerously blur the distinction between soul and body but this is the very point: soul and body are not two separate things, but two different aspects of one thing. Neither the soul of this animal nor the body of this animal can exist without the other.

As mentioned above, according to Aristotle whenever we think, we do so along with “images” (*phantasmata*) that facilitate our apprehension of given intelligible contents. For example, when one thinks about triangularity, one fashions an image of some particular triangle that assists one in contemplating triangularity in general by holding before the mind’s eye a particular instance of triangularity (i.e., a particular triangle). Insofar as this is the case, the kinds of “images” to be employed in the service of grasping what is being said in this dissertation are not merely visual snapshots of bodies or their interior parts, but moving pictures of living bodies in action and memories of the visceral sensations that accompany action and experience. The focus is obviously not on, say, what the heart looks like but on what it does, for, like the whole body and its other parts, the heart “really is itself” only when it is doing its job (*ergon*).

### **1.3 A Hierarchy of Powers: Propensities and Capacities**

Just as its composition is stratified into a hierarchy, as described above, the powers (*dunameis*) held together in the living body are correspondingly stratified. To clarify this point, we need to distinguish between *dispositional propensities* and *functional capacities*. A functional capacity is what a thing can do or can be used to do. A dispositional propensity, on the other hand, is what a thing will do, or will tend to do, if left to its own devices. The distinction here is essentially equivalent to Aristotle's distinction between a power or potency in general (*dunamis*, corresponding to a functional capacity), and the particular kind of power that is a thing's nature (*physis*, corresponding to a dispositional propensity – more specifically, its nature proper would be the central dispositional propensity that causes and governs its growth and change so as to move it toward its end (*telos*)). In reference to this distinction, Joe Sachs notes that “A doctor doctors himself as another, as a patient who happens to be himself, but a cut in his finger heals itself in its own right; medical skill is a potency, while the self-maintenance of a being as a whole is a nature.”<sup>49</sup> The doctor does not spring into action and begin healing his patient (whether that patient is himself or another) in the way that his wounded hand begins to automatically repair itself.<sup>50</sup> (We can characterize a thing's *second* nature in

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<sup>49</sup> Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, p. 167, n. 3.

<sup>50</sup> Compare *DA* III.9, 433a 3-6: “And generally we see that one who has medical knowledge does not necessarily heal anyone, since it is something else that governs one's doing anything in accordance with the knowledge and not the knowledge itself.” The far-reaching significance of this observation will become apparent later. One noteworthy implication here is that the phenomena of *akrasia* is possible exactly because knowledge alone does not govern action and, as Aristotle states at *NE* II.4 1105b 2 “for having the virtues, the knowing [of what is virtuous] is of little or no strength, while the

these terms as a functional capacity that has been transformed into a dispositional propensity through repetition of that functional capacity’s exercise. We will return to this in the Epilogue of this dissertation.)

For example, a well-formed ax has a functional capacity or potency to serve as an instrument for chopping wood, but it does not have a dispositional propensity or nature that moves it to do so – that is, it will not simply tend to chop on its own.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, iron has a dispositional propensity to hold up under pressure, but iron, *qua* iron, does not have a functional capacity to serve as an instrument for chopping – it must be fashioned into an iron ax with a sharp blade. Now, both propensities and capacities come in active and passive forms, being specific ways of tending or being able to act or re-act in determinate ways. Examples are as follows:

**Table 2: Dispositional Propensities and Functional Capacities**

	<i>Dispositional Propensities</i>	<i>Functional Capacities</i>
<i>Active</i>	Iron has an ADP to fall until its motion is impeded (as opposed to, say, fire, which has an ADP to rise). In short, iron is heavy.	Because of iron’s ADP, an anchor made out of iron has a functional capacity to effectively serve as an instrument for holding a ship in place.
<i>Passive</i>	Iron has a PDP to remain rigid under pressure and to maintain its structure. In short, iron is hard.	Because of iron’s PDP, an ax made out of iron has a functional capacity to effectively serve as an instrument for chopping with.

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other conditions [of desire and character] have not a little but all the power...” Compare also *Metaph.* IX.5, 1047b 35 – 1048a 15 on rational versus non-rational potencies, discussed below in §2.2.

<sup>51</sup> If it were composed of materials that also gave it a propensity to chop, and it had the functional capacity to control that propensity and could thus arrest itself as well, this functional capacity would be its soul. (*DA* II.1, 412b 10 – 413a 5) In a different context, in *Politics* I.4, Aristotle presents vivid and enchanting images of instruments that can accomplish their own work (*ergon*), “like the statues of Daedalus, or the tripods of Hephaestus, which, says the poet, ‘of their own accord entered the assembly of the gods.’” He states that “if, in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.” (1253b 33) The notion presented in *De Anima*, with the example of the axe, is that if an instrument has the power to perform or to not perform its function, then that power is its soul.

In order for an instrument to have a specific functional capacity, it must be made of material with appropriate dispositional propensities. A material's dispositional propensities result in its generating certain *necessary consequences* that arise in one way or another depending on the conditions in which it finds itself.<sup>52</sup> Functional capacities, on the other hand, depend upon a set of *necessary conditions* that must be fulfilled for an instrument to become serviceable for the performance of its function (*ergon*). Thus, the functional capacities that constitute an instrument's form arise out of the successful exploitation, by a craftsman or by nature, of the dispositional propensities of its materials.<sup>53</sup> What a thing can do or can be used to do depends upon what its material constituents do or tend to do. By skillfully mastering the dispositional propensities of appropriate material, the functional capacity that constitutes a thing's form comes to be present.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Recall footnote on material necessity in §1.2.

<sup>53</sup> One additional factor to note here is that the instrument's design must establish a balance similar to a combinatorial optimization problem. That is, some of a material's dispositions may make it serviceable for constructing an instrument with a certain capacity, while others of its dispositions may have the opposite effect. For instance, the rigidity of iron makes it ideal as material for axes, but its heaviness is much less welcome since an ax that is so heavy it cannot be lifted or swung easily will not serve its function well no matter how sharp the blade is. Thus, as the blade's sturdiness is increased (which is desirable), so is its weight (which is not desirable). To construct the optimal blade, the appropriate balance between sharpness, sturdiness, and weight must be established. In recent years there has been a growing appreciation of the need to make instruments and technological artifacts out of materials that are environmentally friendly. Creative ways of exploiting the powers of various materials is thus highly valued (e.g., the recent invention of a water bottle made of paper rather than plastic).

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting here that Plotinus characterizes beauty as involving the complete mastery of material by form. (See *Enneads* 1.6, especially §§2-3.) In the chapters that follow, we will come to see that the human being's mastery of the dispositional propensities of the body's material constituents is, from Aristotle's perspective, a fundamental problem of the practice of ethical philosophy and of human happiness. For it is through this process of the psychosomatic self-mastery of its material that the human being's form – that is, its soul – can actualize itself in the unimpeded expression of its nature. Insofar as this fails to be attained, the body's dispositional propensities are calling all the shots, and the soul – particularly, that specifically human part of the soul (namely, intellect or *nous*) – is just passively along for the ride. In this case, the lower powers have the upper hand in determining the trajectory of one's life-course. We will return to this idea briefly in the Epilogue of this dissertation.

The principles described above are applicable to the living body as well as to artificial instruments. The difference, of course, is that the forces that govern the generation, growth, and functioning of the living body work from within that very living body's material. This is the sense of Aristotle's claim that if the shipbuilding art were in the wood, ships would come about naturally – ships would not be built, they would be grown. (*Physics* II.8, 199b 28) The principle of change at work in a living thing's material that governs its growth is its nature – i.e., its soul. Now, the necessary conditions that underlie a thing's functional capacities are described in many contexts in terms of the so-called "hypothetical necessities." Just as an ax's functional capacity to chop depends upon the dispositional propensities of its constituent material, so a living thing's functional capacity to perform life activities is dependent upon the dispositional propensities of the stratified material constituents of which it is made. Thus, Aristotle states:

“A hatchet, in order to split wood, must, of necessity, be hard; if so, then it must, of necessity, be made of bronze or of iron. Now the body, like the hatchet, is an instrument; as well the whole body as each of its parts has a purpose, for the sake of which it is [namely, soul (see below)]; the body must therefore, of [hypothetical] necessity, be such and such, and made of such and such materials, if that purpose is to be realized.” (*PA* I.1, 642a 10)

It is in this sense that Aristotle criticizes his predecessors as falling into an “absurdity” (*atopos*) by trying to account for the soul without paying attention to the body, “just as though, in the manner of the Pythagorean myths, any random soul were to be clothed in any random body. For while each body seems to have its own proper look (*eidōs*) and form (*morphē*), they talk as if one were to say that carpentry is transmigrated into flutes; but the art has to use tools and the soul has to use the body.”

(*DA* I.3, 407b 21)<sup>55</sup> Just as one cannot build a house with a flute, one cannot live as a human being without a human body.<sup>56</sup> Human intelligence cannot awaken in a flea’s body: the relationship between the soul and the body is not arbitrary. Furthermore, as indicated above, according to Aristotle, even from person to person, differences in material constitution are mirrored by differences in the degree to which intelligence can awaken in the given person. (*DA* II.9, 421a 20-26)<sup>57</sup>

These points concern the fact that there are *necessary conditions* (or “hypothetical necessities”) in terms of what material can support what functional capacities. However, we must not lose sight of the fact that, for Aristotle, there are also *necessary consequences* that result from the material conditions at hand. These necessary consequences result from the specific active and passive dispositional propensities of the material involved. Throughout *On the Generation of Animals*, and also in numerous passages in *On the Parts of Animals*, Aristotle repeatedly identifies processes of embryonic development, for instance, and states that they occur “both by necessity and for a purpose.” Here I strongly agree with Mary Louise Gill, who notes

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<sup>55</sup> A parallel passage is found in *DA* II.2, 414a 19-24: “those who think the soul neither has being without a body, nor is any sort of body, get hold of it well, for it is not a body but something that belongs to a body, and this is why it is present in a body and in a body of a certain kind, and those earlier thinkers did not think well who stuck it into a body without also distinguishing which bodies and of what sort, even though there is no evidence that any random thing admits of just any random thing within it.”

<sup>56</sup> As we will see in the Epilogue of this dissertation, although a human body is *necessary* for living life as a human being, it is not *sufficient*.

<sup>57</sup> We should note that “intelligence itself” is always awake. In *De Anima* I.4, Aristotle distinguishes between *Nous* itself and the individual possessor of *nous*. The former is the self-subsistent, immortal, unchanging, undifferentiated noetic luminosity that is the Divine Mind. In the individual possessor of *nous*, the immortal noetic luminosity is attenuated by individual’s psychosomatic conditions.



that the necessity in question in such passages is not hypothetical necessity but material necessity.<sup>58</sup>

For example, “The same thing may exist for an end and be necessitated as well. For example, light shines through a lantern (1) because that which consists of relatively small particles necessarily passes through pores larger than those particles... and (2) for an end, namely to save us from stumbling.” (*Post. An.* II.11, 94b 27ff) The sense of necessity referred to in (1) here is certainly not hypothetical necessity but physical necessity. In the context of biological development, consider Aristotle’s explanation of the formation of teeth taking place by necessity and for a purpose. The purpose for which the teeth form is to reproduce the father’s form by endowing the growing offspring with the power to chew its food. In saying that they also develop by necessity, Aristotle is not pointing out that possessing teeth is a necessary condition for having the power to chew one’s food (although that is the case). Rather, he is saying, when the material conditions are suitable, the dispositional propensities of the material undergoing change invariably give rise to the organ in question, by necessity.

The primary active source of change in the development of the body is the body’s internal heat. This catalyzes a process of “concoction” (*pepsis*), which he

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<sup>58</sup> Mary Louise Gill, “Material Necessity and *Meteorology* IV.12” in Kullmann and Föllinger, eds., *Aristotelische Biologie: Intentionen, Methoden, Ergebnisse*. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1997), pp. 145-161 (esp. p. 146). See also *GA* V.1, 778b ff; *PA* I.1, 642a 33; *PA* II.14, 658b 3. There are so many examples of this idea throughout *GA* that it is virtually unnecessary to provide references. However, one of the many pertinent passages is found in the closing page of the work: “Democritus, however, omitted to mention the Final Cause, and so all the things which Nature employs he refers to necessity. *It is of course true that they are determined by necessity*, but at the same time they are for the sake of some purpose, some Final Cause... And there is nothing to prevent the teeth being formed and being shed in the way [Democritus] says [as Peck notes: “i.e., ‘of necessity,’ as a result of mere mechanical causation”], but it is not on that account that it happens, but on account of the Final Cause, the End...” (*GA* V.8, 789b 3, my emphasis)

defines as “a process in which the natural and proper heat of an object perfects the corresponding passive qualities [the moist and dry], which are the proper matter of any given object. For,” he continues, “when concoction has taken place we say that a thing has been perfected and has come to be itself [that is, it has come to be a thing of its kind; e.g. a human being]. It is the proper heat of a thing that sets up this perfecting.” (*Meteor.* 2, 379b18)<sup>59</sup>

In his account of animal generation, Aristotle emphasizes that the material conditions must be appropriate for the right effects to come about as a result of the innate heat’s action. He states,

“This heat, however, to produce flesh or bone, does not work on some casual material in some casual place at some casual time; material, place and time must be those ordained by Nature: that which is *potentially* will not be brought into being by a motive agent which lacks the appropriate *actuality*; so, equally, that which possesses the *actuality* will not produce the right article out of any casual material. No more could a carpenter produce a chest out of anything but wood; and, equally, without a carpenter no chest will be produced out of wood.” (*GA* II.6, 743a 21)

Thus, the reason that dispositional propensities are propensities, and not absolutely inevitable consequences in any and every circumstance, is because the material conditions in which they are situated vary from occasion to occasion. The author of *On Breath* makes similar observations with the example of fire and its use

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<sup>59</sup> I will add here that, as I understand Aristotle’s view, moral development is continuous with biological growth. The natural growth of the human organism falls short of the full realization of human nature, and moral development – to borrow a phrase from Aristotle’s *Physics* II.8, 199a 17 – completes what nature cannot bring to a finish. The transformation that turns a biologically human animal into a fully realized human being is a sort of psychosomatic alchemy through which the inner heating and chilling that takes place in the experience of the soul’s affections and the exertion of voluntary attention alters the symmetry of powers in the body’s inner organs, which alters the agent’s mode of perception, which leads to the agent’s possession of virtue. (See *Phys.* VII.3. We will touch upon these issues in the chapters that follow, particularly Chapter 2 and the Epilogue.)

as an instrument in the arts for producing different effects: the goldsmith, the coppersmith, the carpenter, and the cook make use of fire in different ways and on different materials. While the arts use fire as an instrument, nature uses fire as a material as well. ([*On Breath*] 9, 485b 6)<sup>60</sup> In each case, the effects of fire's use as instrument or as material are dependent upon its dispositional propensities and the dispositional propensities of the material that it works upon. For instance, wood and stone have different passive dispositional propensities, and it is on account of this that setting fire to the wood and setting fire to the stone will have very different results, even though the action of fire is the same in both cases. As Aristotle states in *On Generation and Corruption*, "the character of the process is determined by the character of that which undergoes it." (*GC* II.11, 338b 16)<sup>61</sup>

At [*On Breath*] 9, 485b 9, the author marvels over the fact that nature establishes the "proper symmetry" (*rhuthmon*) in living organisms such that their constituents function as instruments in the performance of life-activities.<sup>62</sup> In the life-activity of reproduction, the proper symmetry in question is the balance of active and passive powers in the material constituents of the fertilized egg (which Aristotle calls a "fetation"), organized precisely in the way required for that material to grow into a

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<sup>60</sup> Although [*On Breath*] is in the Aristotelian Corpus, it is generally agreed that Aristotle himself is not its author. (For this reason, we place its title in brackets.) Nevertheless, it was written in an Aristotelian framework and the passages that I quote from it are matched by passages in authentic works of Aristotle that speak to the same point. For a recent study of this work, and an argument that it is "entirely Aristotelian," see *Aristotle, On the Life-Bearing Spirit (De Spiritu)* (Boston: Brill, 2008), Abraham P. Bos and Rein Ferwerda.

<sup>61</sup> A corresponding passage involving the generation of the living body is found at *GA* III.11, 762a 27: "The object which thus takes shape may be valuable in kind or less valuable; and the differences herein depend upon the envelope which encloses soul-principle; and the causes which determine this are the situations where the process takes place and the physical substance which is enclosed." Relevant discussion is also to be found in *GC* I.5.

<sup>62</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, the idea of proper symmetry is presented by Aristotle, e.g. at *MA* 8, 702a 7, with regard to the organization of the interior conditions of the body that enable the organism to move itself in intelligent ways.

reproduction of its parents (particularly, for Aristotle, a reproduction of its father). As Marcus Aurelius declares, “A man deposits a seed in a womb and goes away, and then another cause takes it, and labors on it and makes a child. What a thing from such a material!” (*Meditations* X.26) Aristotle models the process of generation with the example of “miraculous automatic puppets”:

“And it is possible that A should move B, and B move C, and that the process [of animal reproduction] should be like that of [the motion of] the miraculous automatic puppets: the parts of these automatons, even while at rest, have in them somehow or other a *potentiality*, and when some external agency sets the first part in movement, then immediately the adjacent part comes to be [in motion] in *actuality*. The cases then are parallel...” (*GA* II.1, 734b 9)

Aristotle goes on to list two respects in which they are parallel: in each case, (1) in one sense the source of motion is the external agent (i.e., the father or the one who pushes the automaton forward), and (2) in another sense the source of motion resides within the growing animal or moving automaton itself (i.e., the passive and active dispositional propensities of its constitution). We will return to this principle in connection with voluntary action shortly, but for the moment I want to emphasize a third parallel: in each case, (3) the processes of change or motion that unfold on a given occasion are a necessary sequence of causes and effects. In a later chapter, Aristotle refers to the automatic puppets once again and states that “As the parts of the animal to be formed are present *potentially* in the matter [provided by the female], once the principle of movement has been supplied [by the male], one thing follows on after another without interruption, just as it does in the miraculous automatic puppets.” (*GA* II.5, 741b 8)

## 1.4 Stratification of Actions and Experiences

It is now time to draw together some of the preceding material and to briefly foreshadow its relevance to moral psychology.<sup>63</sup> The central point I would like to make clear before embarking upon our study of the physiological foundations of Aristotle's moral psychology is this: although a living thing is certainly not merely flesh and bones, much less merely earth, air, fire, and water, the powers of each strata of its composition are held together within it. Thus, human thinking, action, and experience take place and are generated by the human being as a psychosomatic whole, and all strata of its composition are involved.<sup>64</sup>

Thus, at one and the same time I hail a cab, I raise my arm, my muscles tense and relax in a specific way, the hot and the cold interact and transform each into the other in some specific way. None of the events in this hierarchy is "reducible" to any of the others. Wittgenstein famously intimated that this is the case in his *Philosophical Investigations*: "Let us not forget this: when 'I raise my arm', my arm goes up. And the problem arises: what is left over if I subtract the fact that my arm goes up from the fact that I raise my arm? ((Are the kinaesthetic sensations my

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<sup>63</sup> I will take this opportunity to note that the use of "material" in the above sentence is obviously not a reference to any corporeal substance. In this sense it exemplifies what was said earlier about the problem of confusing Aristotle's notion of material (*hulê*) with the notion of corporeality or "matter" (in a Cartesian sense). It is not *qua* corporeal that Aristotle refers to a thing as material, but *qua* that out of which something can be made (whether corporeal or not). It is true that many or most sorts of raw material are corporeal stuffs, but that is beside the point. The literal and original meaning of *hulê* is simply wood, a paradigm of raw material since it can be fashioned into a variety of different things that are no longer merely wood but wooden: ships, beds, houses, etc.

<sup>64</sup> Thinking poses special problems. It will be sufficient to point out here that Aristotle explicitly states that if thinking requires an image, then it requires or involves the body. (*DA* I.1, 403a 9) And he states that thinking does require an image. (*On Memory and Reminiscence*, 1, 449b 31; *DA* III.7, 431a 14; *DA* III.8, 432a 7) It follows by *modus ponens* that thinking requires or involves the body (even if thought or mind itself, as opposed to an individual person's thought or mind, has no bodily organ and is ultimately a mind embodied in itself – a mind whose form is its material and whose material is its form). Also recall Aristotle's claim that the blend (*krasis*) of an animal's body has a direct bearing on its intelligence and ability to think discursively. (*DA* II.9, 421a 20-26)

willing?))”<sup>65</sup> There *is* something left over, and so my moving my arm is not reducible to my arm going up. (We will comment upon kinaesthetic sensations briefly below.)

However, in spite of this irreducibility, there is a relationship amongst them such that I cannot hail a cab unless I raise my arm, I cannot raise my arm unless my muscles contract, my muscles cannot contract unless the hot and the cold interact in the appropriate way. Thus, these lower-order and higher-order descriptions of the episode in question are irreducible yet, in a given instance, do not refer to separable or independent events. We can depict this action / event in correspondence to the stratification of the living thing’s composition in Table 1.<sup>66</sup>

**Table 3: Stratification of Action(s) / Event(s)**

<i>Strata of Composition</i>	<i>Stratified Action(s) / Event(s)</i>
1. Human being	I hail a cab
2. Living body	I set my body in motion
3. Non-uniform body parts	I move my arm
4. Uniform materials	My muscles contract and expand
5. Natural elements	Transmutation of elements
6. Primary powers	Heating / chilling coincident with desire

As mentioned above, heating and chilling necessarily go along with the passions (*pathê*), “imagination” (*phantasia*), and thinking.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, these

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<sup>65</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. §621, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1958), 161.

<sup>66</sup> Notice how the language changes when our description moves from the non-uniform to the uniform levels of composition. As mentioned above, while uniform parts are continuous stuffs, a self-mover must parts that are connected but discontinuous. This seems to generate a paradox: how can voluntarily self-moving wholes be composed of parts that cannot move themselves, and the changes of which are involuntary? Although I cannot treat this problem fully here, the resolution of this difficulty would involve some account of the transformation of material powers when constituents form “mixtures” and parts are combined into wholes. As one intimation along these lines, consider the bars and pegs that comprise an “automatic puppet.” When these material pieces are combined in the right way, “even while at rest, [they] have in them somehow or other a potentiality” for moving and being moved in ways that these same parts when disconnected do not possess.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, see *MA* 8, 701b 34.

functions of soul are not incorporeal events that cause corporeal events; rather, they have materiality in the very definitions of what they are. (*DA* I.1, 403a 25) For instance, the physiological surge of heat experienced by an angry person is not *caused* by anger, but is *a constituent of* anger (and so on for the other affections of soul). Similarly, “the instrument by which desire causes motion is already a part of the body....”<sup>68</sup> Before, during, and after voluntary action, there are concurrent physiological changes integral to the origination, performance, and repercussions of the action. Actions do not originate in disembodied thoughts and desires that somehow, just at the moment of action, relate themselves to the body and cause it to move.<sup>69</sup> The psychological processes that are the generators of action are embodied the whole time; they do not become bodily just as the action takes place. Thus, there is a seamless flow from the thoughts and desires relevant to action to the motions that take place when one acts, for there is a seamless flow of physiological processes that takes place from before the action takes place, while its going on, and after its over.

So just as one walks with one’s legs (and cannot walk without them), and sees with one’s eyes (and cannot see without them), likewise, the individual human being feels and reasons along with processes within the body and cannot feel or reason in their absence. Furthermore, just as one’s gait is influenced by the condition of the legs, and one’s visual acuity by that of the eyes, so too the qualities of a person’s

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<sup>68</sup> *DA* III.10, 433b 19.

<sup>69</sup> For Aristotle, there certainly are no disembodied desires, and, as I read him, there are no disembodied thoughts other than the immortal, undifferentiated, unchanging luminosity of the Divine Mind. Either way, as the *MA* passage just referred to shows, for Aristotle thinking is accompanied by bodily changes of heating and chilling.

character and intelligence are grounded in and inseparably bound up with the conditions within the living body.

Human intelligence, recall, cannot awaken in a flea's body. Neither can moral responsibility (which is associated with intelligence). If moral responsibility is a function of psychological capacity, and psychological capacity depends upon the fulfillment of specific necessary conditions in the dispositional propensities of the living body, then moral responsibility can only be exercised by agents with appropriate bodies. Attempting to explain moral responsibility without accounting for the relevant conditions in the living body, from Aristotle's point of view, would be "absurd." (*DA* I.3, 407b 14)

As we will see later, the plasticity of its organic matter is a critical factor that makes a living thing capable of the self-control that makes it responsible for its actions. For the present, the following brief illustrations will help to convey what is being said here. According to Aristotle, one experiences anger and fear and the other passions or affections (*pathê*) of soul within the physical body (more specifically, in the region of the heart). Aristotle defines anger, in abstraction from the conditions of its actual existence, as "a desire accompanied by pain, for a conspicuous revenge for a conspicuous slight at the hands of men who have no call to slight oneself or one's friends." (*Rhetoric* II.2, 1378a 31) But it is "absurd" to speak of anger, or any such emotion, as if it is an incorporeal entity in its own right, just as it is absurd to imagine that the power of sight is a self-subsistent entity existing separately from the eye. While its content is defined in terms of desire for revenge, the actual occurrence of anger is experienced together with a boiling of the blood and a sudden rush of heat



around the heart. (*DA* I.1, 403a 32) These bodily changes are integral to the anger itself. Just as walking depends upon and is partly constituted by the motion of one's legs, so anger depends upon and is partly constituted by a surge of heat around the heart that is experienced along with thoughts of revenge.

I must reiterate here that, for Aristotle, soul-functions and affections do not simply *cause* bodily processes; they are partially constituted by such processes. We can discuss them in entirely psychological terms, but in their actual existence they are psychosomatic in nature. An additional example: in the abstract, Aristotle defines fear as “a pain or disturbance due to imagining some destructive or painful evil in the future.” (*Rhetoric* II.5, 1382a23) The actual conditions in which this affection is experienced, according to Aristotle, involve chilling around the heart – a “horror to freeze the heart!”<sup>70</sup> For Aristotle, the fear does not *cause* a freezing chill around the heart; the fear *is* a freezing chill around the heart, painfully experienced in unison with images of some expected future evil.

Although their understandings of human physiology differed greatly from Aristotle's, William James and Henri Bergson each held views on this issue that are comparable to Aristotle's. Bergson quotes Herbert Spencer: “Fear, when strong, expresses itself in cries, in efforts to escape, in palpitations, in tremblings,” and Bergson adds, “We go further, and maintain that these [bodily] movements form part of the terror itself: by their means the terror becomes an emotion capable of passing through different degrees of intensity [as opposed to being a vapid and vacant thought

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<sup>70</sup> From Homer's *Iliad* (6.407-409), translated by Robert Fagles in *Homer: The Iliad* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1990), 207.

that something bad is about to take place].”<sup>71</sup> Bergson distinguishes the relevant idea and the full extent of the emotion. For instance, the idea that someone has insulted you is not anger, and this idea does not change, Bergson maintains, as the anger becomes more or less intense. The emotion of anger necessarily involves sensuously felt bodily changes and it is the nature and extent of these sensations that account for the relative “intensities” of the emotion.<sup>72</sup> The thought “I have been insulted” combined with a sensation of sudden heating and clenching of muscles is experienced as rage, whereas the same thought-content (or “idea”) combined with a relatively

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<sup>71</sup> *Time and Free Will*, p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> I say that these bodily changes are *sensuously felt* and not simply that they take place: the change or motion (*kinēsis*) in the body does not play the same role without the corresponding sensation (*aisthēsis*) of that motion. This is important, and goes back to Wittgenstein’s reference to kin-aesthetics. However, we must note that we do not generally acknowledge these sensations directly or recognize the role that they play, just as one does not generally attend to the sensation in one’s feet while walking, or in one’s tongue while talking, although these sensations are nevertheless present in some sense. To borrow a phrase from elsewhere in Bergson’s *Time and Free Will*, these physiological changes are “not unperceived, but rather unnoticed.” (p. 169) On this theme, in *Greek Theories of Elementary Cognition From Alcmeon to Aristotle*, Beare writes: “Our *aisthēseis* [sensations] are more numerous than our *aisthēta* [objects of sensation]... because we do not notice the former unless we notice the latter. In modern terms, we do not notice sensations which, not being referred to an object, are not perceptions. There are, in this way, many *aisthēseis* which pass without being attended to or coming ‘into consciousness.’” (p. 207) Compare this with the following from William James: “We notice only those sensations which are signs to us of *things* which happen practically or aesthetically to interest us, to which we therefore give substantial names, and which we exalt to this exclusive status of independence and dignity.” (*Psychology: The Briefer Course* (=PBC), pp. 21-22, and also see p. 38) Becoming mindful of such bodily sensations as they happen along with one’s emotions is one strategy for gaining some traction in struggling with a wayward emotion. In the discourses of the Buddha, mindfulness of the body – particularly mindfulness of one’s breathing – is given an important place. Thus, the Buddha says, “when anyone has developed and cultivated mindfulness of the body, Māra [here a personification of non-virtuous emotions and delusion] cannot find an opportunity or a support in him.” (“Mindfulness of the Body” (*Kāyagatasati Sutta*), from *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, §26, p. 955) Samuel Beckett also presents a vivid depiction of coming to be aware of oneself in the body in the following segment from his play “Not I” (the entirety of which significantly features a completely dark stage save for one narrow spotlight illuminating just the actress’s mouth): “... after long efforts . . . when suddenly she felt . . . gradually she felt . . . her lips moving . . . imagine! . . . her lips moving! . . . as of course till then she had not . . . and not alone the lips . . . the cheeks . . . the jaws . . . the whole face . . . all those— . . . what? . . . the tongue? . . . yes . . . the tongue in the mouth . . . all those contortions without which . . . no speech possible . . . and yet in the ordinary way . . . not felt at all . . . so intent one is . . . on what one is saying . . . the whole being . . . hanging on its words . . . that feeling was coming back . . . imagine! . . . feeling coming back! . . . starting at the top . . . then working down . . . the whole machine. . .” (*Samuel Beckett: The Complete Dramatic Works*, p. 379-380)

uneventful physiological condition is experienced as a mild anger or none at all.<sup>73</sup>

William James expresses a similar view:

“I now proceed to urge the vital point of my whole theory, which is this: *If we fancy some strong emotion, and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind, no ‘mind-stuff’ out of which the emotion can be constituted, and that a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception is all that remains.*”<sup>74</sup>

This distinction between the thought content and the total experience that is the emotion is crucial. The fact that the physiological contributions to that total experience are integral to the emotion itself means that the purely physical properties of the body make a governing contribution to the structure and functioning of the psyche. Such a view, shared in its essentials by Aristotle, James, and Bergson (among others), has enormous implications for moral psychology, which seeks to explain how agency and moral responsibility are rooted in the structure and functioning of the psyche. As was shown earlier in this chapter, for Aristotle the functional capacities that constitute the psyche are conditioned by the body and the dispositional propensities of its constituents.

Like the passions, discursive reasoning also takes place in unison with, and is partially constituted by, bodily changes since, according to Aristotle, it necessarily involves the use of “images” (*phantasmata*) that are present within the blood and

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<sup>73</sup> A completely speculative thought: the practice of constructing advertisements so that they are funny, rather than informative, may be an effective method because it momentarily combines the thought of the product with the pleasurable physical sensation of laughing. This experiential association greases the rails such that one is inclined to have a favorable attitude toward the product in question.

<sup>74</sup> *PBC*, p. 246. As James notes in the next section, in spite of first appearances, his view is not “materialist.”

heart.<sup>75</sup> Even a person's capacity for non-discursive contemplation (*theoria*) is conditioned by his or her bodily state, in spite of the fact, according to Aristotle, that non-discursive contemplation is not a bodily process.<sup>76</sup>

So for Aristotle it is as psychosomatic wholes that we think discursively, perceive, experience emotions, perform actions, and shape our characters. With regard to virtually all of its attributes, "the soul neither does anything nor has anything done to it without the body..." (*DA* I.1, 403a 5) Recall the metaphor from above about the concave and the convex. Like the body and soul, they are conceptually distinguishable but existentially inseparable. Thus, when you bend a stick, its concave and convex aspects bend together. Likewise, when a person acts, or thinks discursively, or experiences emotion, the soul and body act as one: the person is at work as a psychosomatic totality. Attending to a particular intelligible content and sensing certain physiological changes in the living body are one existentially indivisible event: getting angry, feeling distressed over money problems, being stunned by some marvelous discovery, being inspired by some heroic deed, straining

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<sup>75</sup> Recall the following references: *DA* I.1, 403a 9; *DA* III.7, 431a 16; *DA* III.8, 432a 7; *On Memory and Reminiscence*, 1, 449b 31. See also *On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 453a 10-b7, where Aristotle states that recollection is a form of discursive reasoning (*sylogismos*) and involves searching for an image in a material substratum.

<sup>76</sup> A variety of passages support this claim. Some of the most important passages of relevance are to be found in *Physics* VII.3 and *DA* I.4. For instance, "it is by the soul's calming down out of its native disorder that it becomes something understanding (*gignetai*) and knowing (*epistêmon*). For this reason too, children are able neither to learn nor to judge from sense perceptions in the same way as their elders for their disorder and motion [in their bodies] is great. The soul is calmed and brought to rest for some by nature itself, for others by other people, *but in both kinds by the being altered of something in the body*, just as in the case of the use and being-at-work, when one has become sober or has been awakened." (*Phys.* VII.3, 247b 17 – 248a 6, my emphasis) In the Oxford translation, Hardie and Gaye have "...children are inferior to adults owing to the great amount of restlessness and motion in their souls." However, the motion and restlessness in question is certainly in the *body* (as the italicized portion of the above quotation indicates), and there is nothing in the Greek text corresponding to the words "in the soul" in their English translation. (There are a variety of places where Aristotle refers to turbulent motion within the bodies of children and its psychological effects. We will encounter some of these below.)

to recall a forgotten face – all of these are performed or experienced by the person as a psychosomatic whole.

Indeed, in *De Anima* I.4, Aristotle states that it is better to speak of the person, rather than the body or the soul, as acting, thinking, and experiencing. For example, when a man opens a door or decides to take a walk, we do not say that his hand opened the door or that his soul decided to take a walk. Thus, “... to say that the soul gets angry is as if someone were to say the soul weaves cloth or builds a house. For it is better, perhaps, not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks things through (*dianoesthai*), but that the human being does these things by means of the soul...” (*DA* I.4, 408b 12) The source of the action is neither the body nor the soul but the human being as a psychosomatic whole.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, to explain action and self-motion, one must identify the psychosomatic sources from which they come forth.

In conclusion, the psychosomatic unity of the living thing has the consequence that the soul and the living body can be *talked about* in isolation, but they cannot *exist* apart from one another. They are distinguishable, but not separable (like a curved line’s concavity and its convexity, and like a road going from Athens to Thebes and the same road going from Thebes to Athens). However, although it is *possible* to talk about them in separate discourses, according to Aristotle, it is “absurd” (*atopon*) to do so.<sup>78</sup> Aristotle tells us that the motion of animals is caused by desire on account of the fact that “the instrument by which desire causes motion is already a part of the body

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<sup>77</sup> Also see *EE* II.6, 1222b 28 where it is the human being (*anthrôpos*) who is said to be the source of action and motion.

<sup>78</sup> *DA* I.3, 407b 14-24 (quoted above). It is interesting to contrast this view with Descartes’ methodology as stated in his work *Treatise on Man*: “I must describe for you first the body on its own; and then the soul, again on its own; and finally I must show you how these two natures would have to be joined and united so as to constitute men resembling us.” (Descartes, *The World and Other Writings* trans. and ed. Stephen Gaukroger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 99.)

[and] for this reason one must study what concerns animal motion among the acts performed by the body and the soul in common.”<sup>79</sup> It is in this way that we will study Aristotle’s views on action, perception, and their psychosomatic sources in the chapters that follow.

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<sup>79</sup> *DA* III.10, 433b 19.

## Chapter 2

### Appearance, Perception, and Voluntary Action

#### 2.1 Animals, Automata, and Voluntary Action

The previous chapter culminated in Aristotle's view that a human being thinks discursively, acts, perceives, and experiences emotions as a psychosomatic whole – that is, these actions and events take place at every level of the human being's composition simultaneously. Accordingly, the dynamism of the living body is integral to virtually every aspect of the individual human being's action and experience.<sup>80</sup> In the present chapter we are turning from a static picture of the living thing's stratified constitution, to a moving picture of the living thing in action. In particular, we will focus upon the physiological functions that are instrumental in the explanation and origination of voluntary action.

On Aristotle's view, a voluntary action is “one of which the source is in oneself, when one knows the particular circumstances in which the action takes place.” (*NE* III.1, 1111a 22) Alternatively, “All, then, that a man does – it being in his power to abstain from doing it – not in ignorance and owing to himself must needs be voluntary; this is what voluntariness is.” (*EE* II.9, 1225b 8) Thus, an agent acts

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<sup>80</sup> We must note, once again, that Aristotle recognizes the possibility of a contemplative activity that transcends one's human individuality and involves (temporary) union with the immortal contemplative activity of the Divine Mind. On this see *DA* III.5, *NE* X.7, and *Metaph.* XII.7, among other places. Here we are concerned with the actions, desires, emotions, and discursive thinking of individual embodied human beings. For Aristotle divine contemplation is the highest activity in which it is possible for human beings to partake, but this is impossible without the proper organization of the total human psyche and an ethical way of life. This is implicit in Aristotle's view that the intellectual virtues (particularly, *phronêsis*) and the virtues of character are mutually dependent. (See *NE* VI.12, 1143a 34 and VI.13, 1144b 30.)

voluntarily when (1) he is the source (*archê*) of his motion, in the sense that it is up to the agent to either do or not do the things that he does voluntarily, and (2) he is aware of the particular circumstances of the action.<sup>81</sup> In what follows we will see that the latter is critical to the former: one's ability to refrain from acting is based in one's ability to re-frame one's interpretation of the circumstances of action. Furthermore, the act of re-framing or "mastering the appearances" is based in physiological processes, making functions in the living body directly relevant to our power to act voluntarily, and thus to our bearing responsibility for our actions, and thus to moral psychology.<sup>82</sup>

Now, in this chapter we are emphasizing one subclass of voluntary actions. Aristotle divides voluntary actions into those that are chosen and those that are not. All action involving choice is voluntary, but not all action that is voluntary involves choice.<sup>83</sup> For example, actions performed on the spur of the moment, actions performed out of rage, and the actions of the incontinent or weak-willed person are voluntary but not chosen. Additionally, according to Aristotle, children and non-

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<sup>81</sup> Also see *NE* III.1, 1111a 17-22; *NE* III.5 1113b 4; and *EE* II.6, 1233a 4. An additional passage of relevance to condition (1) above is *Phys.* VIII.4, 255a 6-12, where Aristotle explains that although the natural elements (earth, air, fire, and water) possess natures – that is, internal principles and sources (*archai*) of change and rest – they are not voluntary self-movers because they do not have the power to stop themselves from moving toward their natural places in the cosmos.

<sup>82</sup> The process of mastering the appearances is essentially the same as what Stoics such as Epictetus referred to as "questioning the appearances." Contemporary psychologists sometimes call this "re-framing" and "overcoming stimulus control." For instance, see Jonathan Haidt's *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 16. Haidt states that over the course of evolution the use of language partially freed human beings from stimulus control. Below in §2.3.1, we will encounter the importance of attaching "the right name" to the objects of perception.

<sup>83</sup> *NE* III.2, 1111b 6. See also *NE* V.8, 1135b 8.



human animals do things voluntarily but they do not choose to do what they do, since choice involves deliberation and the active exercise of reason.<sup>84</sup>

Chosen and unchosen voluntary actions originate from different forms of “imagination” (*phantasia*), namely one that is sensory (*aisthētikē*) and another that is rational or calculative (*logistikē*). All animals possess sensory imagination, but only mature human beings possess rational imagination. (*DA* III.10, 433b 30)

Nevertheless, on Aristotle’s view, most human beings, most of the time, are like children and non-human animals in that their actions are governed by the appearances or images of sensory imagination.<sup>85</sup> In this condition of intellectual passivity, the somatic imminence of sensory imagination leads to the mechanical construction of the agent’s interpretation of the circumstances of action, framing them under one description rather than another. Furthermore, the same somatic processes that underlie the perception also actuate the agent’s motion, and thus govern the actions undertaken in those circumstances. Thus, the source of such voluntary but unchosen actions are psychosomatic processes within the agent himself (making the action voluntary), but do not involve the active exercise of reason (making the action unchosen).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> *NE* III.2, 1111b 8; VII.4, 1148a 8; VII.8, 1151a 8.

<sup>85</sup> See *DA* III.3, 429a 4; III.10, 433a 11; *NE* VII.7, 1150b 28. As noted in Chapter 1, the relevant term here for “appearances” or “images” is *phantasmata*, which is also translated “presentations,” “impressions,” or “phantasms.” Particularly because the standard translation is “images,” it should be recalled throughout that there is no restriction to visual images. Any sensible form – sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and feels – is referred to as an image or appearance or presentation of the likeness of something. Notable examples of non-visual *phantasmata* are the sensuously felt bodily changes that partly constitute emotional experiences (such as sensations of heating or chilling in the body, and tension or relaxation of the muscles). See §1.4 above.

<sup>86</sup> For Aristotle, as I interpret him, ethical philosophy is aimed at transforming this passive condition in which our animal nature dominates our humanity, into an active condition in which all elements of the human being function in accordance with their proper virtues, most particularly the highest and most divine element – *Nous*. Such activity in accordance with the highest virtue is happiness (*eudaimonia*),

It will be useful to begin by recalling Aristotle's comparison between the processes of reproduction and the movement of automatic puppets. As discussed in Chapter 1, the developing organism's formative growth and the automaton's locomotion are alike in three respects: (1) in one sense the source of motion is external to the embryo or automaton, (2) in another sense the source of motion is internal to the embryo or automaton, and (3) the given process of motion evolves immediately, by necessity, and in a manner determined by the active and passive dispositional propensities of the material undergoing change.

In *On the Motion of Animals*, Aristotle applies the same automaton analogy to the voluntary self-motions of animals (including human beings). There he parallels the bones and sinews of animals with the iron bars and cables of the automata. (*MA* 7, 701bff) Alongside the three points of comparison between self-movers and automata as mentioned above, he introduces two points of contrast that differentiate voluntary self-motions from the motions of automata: (i) the plasticity of organic matter and (ii) the role of intelligible content in actuating self-motions. (I quote the relevant passage at length, inserting markers in pointed brackets for later reference.)

“<A> The movement of animals is like that of automatic puppets, which are set moving when a small motion occurs: the cables are released and the pegs strike against one another; and like that of the little cart (for the child riding in it pushes it straight forward, and yet it moves in a circle because it has wheels of unequal sizes: for the smaller acts like a center, as happens in the case of the cylinders [that are smaller at one end, i.e. cones]). For they have functioning parts that are of the same kind: the sinews and bones. The latter are like the pegs and the iron in our example, the sinews like the cables. When these are released and slackened the creature moves. <B> Now in the puppets and carts no alteration (*alloiōsis*) takes place, since if the inner wheels

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which is the goal of ethical philosophy and human life. (Recall the discussion of the aims of ethical philosophy in §0.2.)

were to become smaller and again larger, the movement would be circular. But in the animal the same part has the capacity to become both larger and smaller and to change its shape, as the parts expand because of heat and contract again because of cold, and alter. <C> Alteration is caused by *phantasiai* and sense-perceptions and ideas (*ennoiai*). For sense-perceptions are at once a kind of alteration and *phantasia* and thinking have the power of the actual things. For it turns out that the form conceived of the... pleasant or fearful is like the actual thing itself. That is why we shudder and are frightened just thinking of something. All these are affections (*pathê*) and alterations (*alloiôseis*); and when bodily parts are altered some become larger, some smaller. <D> It is not difficult to see that a small change occurring in an origin sets up great and numerous differences at a distance – just as, if the rudder shifts a hair’s breadth, the shift in the prow is considerable. Further, when, under the influence of heat or cold or some other similar affection, an alteration is produced in the region of the heart, even if it is only in an imperceptibly small part of it, it produces a considerable difference in the body, causing blushing and pallor, as well as shuddering, trembling, and their opposites.” (MA 7, 701b 1-32)

Let us briefly examine each segment of this marvelous passage. In segment <A> Aristotle parallels the parts of the automata and those of the animal body in terms of their functional roles in the genesis of the automaton’s and the animal’s motions. An interesting and important detail is elucidated with the example of the toy cart possessing wheels of unequal sizes. The explanation of *the fact that* the cart is moving and the explanation of *the way in which* it is moving are not the same. It is moving because the child pushed it, but it is moving *in a curve* on account of the unequal sizes of its wheels. Illustrating parallels (1) and (2) mentioned above, in one sense the source of the cart’s motion is external and in another sense it is internal. Recalling Chapter 1, the relative sizes of the cart’s wheels constitute the “symmetry”

(*rhuthmon*) of the cart's constituent parts, which establishes its passive dispositional propensity to move in a curve when pushed.<sup>87</sup>

Now, even though the cart's motion is partially accounted for by the cart itself, the cart surely does not set itself in motion, or even move itself in a curve, voluntarily (just as the reproductive formation of the body is partly based upon the symmetry of powers within the developing offspring but is not a voluntary self-motion of the offspring or its parents). However, if the toy cart could alter the sizes and shapes of its parts as it moved, so as to steer and stop itself, it would be on its way to becoming responsible for the direction of its movements. This is just the feature that Aristotle attributes to animal bodies in the next segment of the passage above.

Segment <B> presents the first crucial difference between animals and automata: the notion of alteration (*alloiôsis*) and what later philosophers such as William James refer to as the "plasticity" of organic material. The plasticity or malleability of organic matter is a function of its balance of receptivity and resistance to change. James defines plasticity as "the possession of a structure weak [i.e., receptive] enough to yield to an influence, but strong [i.e., resistant] enough not to

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<sup>87</sup> *Physics* VIII.2 is an important chapter concerning the relevance of external causes to the self-motion of living things. There Aristotle states: "having been at rest beforehand, afterwards the ensouled thing walks, having been moved by nothing outside it, as it seems. But this is false. For we always see something moved in the animal, of the parts congenial to it; but the cause of the motion of this is not the animal itself, but perhaps the surroundings. We say it moves itself not in the case of every one of its motions, but in the case of those in respect to place. So nothing prevents, but it is perhaps rather a necessity, that many motions come to be present in the body by means of the surroundings, while some of these set in motion thinking (*dianoian*) or desire, and that presents sets in motion the whole animal, such as happens with those that are asleep; for even though no motion of perceiving is present, because some motion is nevertheless present [in the body], the animals wake up again." (253a 10 – 22)

yield all at once.”<sup>88</sup> Recall from Chapter 1 that Aristotle designates the hot and cold as active (*poêtika*), and the moist and dry as passive (*pathêtika*). A material’s plasticity is determined by the passive modes of being affected associated with the moist and the dry, the former being characterized by receptivity and the latter by resistance to change. Here in segment <B> above, Aristotle notes that the presence of these active powers, coupled with the symmetry of the passive qualities, causes the inward parts of the animal body to expand and contract, to change size and shape. At *MA* 8, 702a 7 he also includes amongst the changes so produced changes of the inner parts from liquid to solid (and vice versa), and from hard to soft (and vice versa).

Segment <D> notes that these comparatively minor changes of size, shape, and so on, in the inner parts of the body, most of all in the heart, cascade their way through the body and manifest themselves outwardly in significant changes such as blushing, pallor, and so forth. Clearly we must also count the locomotion of the body as a whole among these outward consequences of subtle changes in the heart. Thus, the plasticity and symmetry (or plastic symmetry?) of its inward parts prepare the body to react in specific ways to the presence of the active powers of hot and cold. In this sense, self-movers do not *defy* nature, they *exploit* nature.

Segment <C> presents the second critical factor distinguishing animals from automata: the active powers of hot and cold that catalyze these changes in the animal body are the heatings and chillings that partially constitute the passions and necessarily accompany our thoughts, imaginings, and perceptions. This means that the physiological processes underlying and partially constituting our psychological

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<sup>88</sup> *Principles of Psychology*, Ch. IV, p. 68.

lives are also the sources of our physical motions, and this is how, say, desiring to walk can cause one's legs to move. This makes it possible to control one's motions and actions by changing what one is thinking or imagining. This is virtually what makes one morally responsible for one's actions. (Later in this chapter we will consider our capacity to control our thoughts and emotions, and to "master the appearances," which is finally the key to autonomous moral responsibility.)

Now let us re-connect this discussion to the three parallels that Aristotle draws between automata and the processes of reproduction and voluntary self-motion with a simple example. Suppose someone insults me and out of anger I strike him. (1) In one sense the man or his insult is the source of my action – I struck him because he insulted me; (2) in another sense I myself am the source of my action – I struck him because I became angry and followed the resulting impulse to strike the man; and (3) the process of change proceeds necessarily or without interruption – (a) the perception of the insult as such, (b) the swelling up of anger, (c) the impulse to strike, and (d) the striking motion of my arm all seamlessly flow from one to the next, each one growing directly out of its predecessor. For Aristotle each segment of this process is rooted in the living body, and the process as a whole is unified and conditioned according to this fact. The perception of the insult as such, the swelling up of anger, and the impulse to strike are no less integrated with physiological functions than the observable striking motion of the arm.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> As pointed out in Chapter 1, this is not to say that the relevant psychological processes are "reduced" to being nothing but physiological processes, any more than vengefully striking a person is merely a motion of the arm.

We must stress here that, although Aristotle states that the object of anger or fear or desire is a source of the animal's motion, the responsibility for action lies in the agent and not in the object of anger or fear or desire. This is because it is not the external thing as such that causes my action, but the external thing *perceived as* painful or fearful or desirable.<sup>90</sup> It is this fact that finally makes our self-motions unlike the movements of the automata since the sources of self-motions are internal to the self-movers in a stronger sense than this is so in the case of the automata: the voluntary self-mover, recall, has the power to do or not to do the things that it does voluntarily. For example, the toy cart neither has the power to either move or not move, nor does it have the power to either move in a curve or not move in a curve.

Thus, the source of the self-mover's motion is not simply *in* the self-mover; it *is* the self-mover. For (a) the motivating or moving power of the object of desire is bestowed upon that object by the animal or human being who perceives it as desirable, whereas the motivating or moving power of the child's push on the toy cart is not similarly bestowed upon the child by the cart; and (b) the self-mover is responsible for its mode of perceiving things as desirable or undesirable.<sup>91</sup> Contrary to the famous example of Baron d'Holbach, then, there is a great difference between a man who voluntarily jumps from a window and one who is thrown from the window

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<sup>90</sup> This point is presented nicely in David Furley's article "Self Movers" (1978), reprinted in *Self-Motion: From Aristotle to Newton*, edited by Mary Louise Gill and James G. Lennox (Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>91</sup> For example, see *NE* III.5, 1114a33ff and III.1, 1110b9-18. More on this below.

by the force of another person.<sup>92</sup> The question is not *whether or not* the fall was necessitated, but *by what* and *in what conditions* it was necessitated.<sup>93</sup>

Now, our modes of perception are deeply influenced by, and have a significant impact upon, our experience of passions (*pathê*).<sup>94</sup> As previously stated, on Aristotle's view the passions or affections of soul possess intelligible content but they are also sensuously felt bodily experiences: they move through the blood and through the tissues of our inner organs; they flow in waves of hot and cold through this fleshy medium in which we sense the presence of ourselves as human beings; they increase, decrease, rarify, condense, soften, harden, liquefy, and solidify the uniform constituents of the body; and they clench and release the muscles, moving and directing the non-uniform parts of the body. Thus, they originate in the central region of the heart and show themselves on our surfaces as grimaces of disgust, the blush of embarrassment, the pale visage of fear, the wide-eyed expression of amazement, and are displayed by all those bodily motions through which we pursue the objects of desire and flee from those of fear. This union of the intelligible and somatic dimensions of our experience can be described both as the somatic

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<sup>92</sup> Baron d'Holbach, *System of Nature* vol. 1, 137.

<sup>93</sup> The idea here is reminiscent of the compatibilist view of A. J. Ayer: "But if all that is meant [by determinism] is that it is possible, in principle, to deduce [the future course of events] from a set of particular facts about the past, together with the appropriate general laws, then, even if this is true, it does not in the least entail that I am the helpless prisoner of fate. It does not even entail that my actions make no difference to the future: for they are causes as well as effects; so that if they were different their consequences would be different also." ("Freedom and Necessity," 23) As poet Kathleen Raine nicely expressed this point, "We are the agents, not the victims of fate." (Kathleen Raine, "Blake: The Poet As Prophet," 74) This is intimated in the story of Oedipus, for instance, in the sense that he met his fate directly on account of his own actions.

<sup>94</sup> The term *pathê* is variously translated as "feelings," "affections," and "passions." It derives from the verb *paschein* meaning to passively undergo change due to the action of another thing. Thus, passion is to action as passive is to active: in spite of their occasional intensity, the *pathê* are passivities; they are not things that we *do* but things that *happen to us*. Insofar as our behavior is governed by passions alone, we do not *do* anything but are the subjects of a multitude of happenings – including the happenings of our inner life such as emotions and thought-like imagination.



imminence of the soul and as the animate and sentient life of the body. We will now take a closer look at the nature of this somatic imminence and its profound impact on the explanation of voluntary action and moral responsibility.

## **2.2 The Particular Circumstances of Voluntary Action**

In this section I will present a basic outline of Aristotle's view of voluntary action as described in *NE* III.1. This will help to set the stage for displaying the centrality of our modes of perception to the actions we undertake and the voluntariness of those actions. Subsequent to that we will see that physiology is a decisive factor – sometimes virtually the sole factor – in determining our mode of perception.

Aristotle introduces the subject of voluntary action by noting that virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, and that agents are only praised, blamed, punished, or honored for their voluntary actions, while they are sometimes forgiven and pitied for their involuntary actions. But exactly how do voluntary actions differ from involuntary actions? In short, Aristotle's view is that involuntary actions are those that happen through force or ignorance (1101a 1), while voluntary actions originate in oneself and one's awareness of the circumstances of action (1111a 21).<sup>95</sup> We will briefly examine each of these in turn: the force and ignorance underlying involuntary actions, and the agency and awareness underlying voluntary actions.

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<sup>95</sup> Strictly speaking, Aristotle calls an action involuntary if and only if it is done through force or on account of ignorance, and is also accompanied by regret. When the condition of regret is not met the action is "non-voluntary." (*NE* III.1, 1110b 24) I will generally ignore this point.

According to Aristotle, an action happens by force when its source is external to the one who is forced. The source is said to be external when the one who is forced “contributes nothing,” e.g. when a wind or group of people carries one away. (*NE* III.1, 1110a 2) It is essential to recall that external objects that move one to act because they are desired cannot be said to compel or force one’s action. In these instances, it is not the external object as such that is the source of one’s motion; what moves the agent to act is the external object *as perceived and desired by the agent*. In perceiving the object as desirable, the agent is contributing the very stuff that gives the object of desire motivational power. The source of his or her motion is not the external object strictly speaking but the intentional object of his or her own desire. The reasons for the object’s being desired or perceived as desirable are to be found primarily within the agent. (As we will see, the explanation of the agent’s mode of perception is grounded in the conditions of the living body.) For this reason one cannot blame the objects of desire but must blame oneself “for being easily caught by such things.” (*NE* III.1, 1110b 15)<sup>96</sup>

An action happens through ignorance when it occurs because the agent fails to adequately grasp the particular circumstances in which the action takes place. For example, Aeschylus revealed secrets pertaining to the Mysteries of Demeter in his tragedies involuntarily, so he said, because he did not know that it was forbidden to speak of such things. (*NE* III.1, 1111a 10) He may have identified his action as

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<sup>96</sup> See *NE* III.1, 1110b9-18. Also see III.5, 1114a33ff where Aristotle argues that we are in control of the appearances, and bear the responsibility for what appears to us as good. Additionally, at III.1, 1111a23-b5 Aristotle states that actions performed on account of desire or spiritedness are not unwilling actions (implying that these actions originate in oneself and not in the relevant external objects), and that “irrational feelings” are just as much a part of human nature as reason.

“writing a tragedy” or as “writing dialogue about the Mysteries,” but he could not have identified what he was doing as “exposing secrets about the Mysteries” since he did not know they were secrets. Oedipus killed his father involuntarily because he did not know that the man in the road was his father. He may have identified the man under the description “man blocking my way,” but not “my biological father.”<sup>97</sup> These actions were both involuntary actions because they were performed on account of ignorance of the nature of the action and the patient of the action, respectively.

However, Aristotle notes that acting *on account of ignorance* must be distinguished from simply acting *while being ignorant*. (*NE* III.1, 1110b 25) For example, suppose a person does something that he would not otherwise do because he is enraged or drunk. He may be acting while ignorant but he is not acting on account of ignorance since the primary explanation of his uncharacteristic behavior is his rage or drunkenness, not his ignorance. (*NE* III.1, 1110b 25-29) Like Aeschylus and Oedipus, the drunken agent would not have done what he did if he had known or been actively attending to the particular circumstances of his action. However, unlike Aeschylus and Oedipus, the drunkard brings about his ignorance knowingly; that is, he puts himself into this condition of ignorance knowingly through his own willing actions of drinking alcohol.

In all of these cases, if the agent had known the circumstances of his action, he would not have performed the action. But if the agent himself is responsible for the ignorance that lead to his uncharacteristic action, then this action does not come about on account of his ignorance but on account of the actions that knowingly

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<sup>97</sup> See *Poetics* 1153b 31 – 1154a 10 for discussion of the impact of knowledge and ignorance on tragedy. (Referenced in Sachs’ *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 39, n. 49.)

brought about his ignorance (e.g., drinking the alcohol with full knowledge of its stupefying powers), or the negligent failure to act that is responsible for his ignorance (e.g., demolishing a building without checking to see if anyone was inside first). In *NE* III.5 Aristotle mentions responsibility for ignorance and the blame that it warrants:

“In fact people apply punishment for ignorance itself if the one who is ignorant seems to be responsible for it, as when the penalties are doubled for people who are drunk, for the source [of the ignorance that goes along with drunkenness] is in oneself, since one has the power not to get drunk, which is the cause of the ignorance. And they also punish those who are ignorant of anything in the laws which one ought to know and which is not difficult to know, and similarly in other cases in which people seem to be ignorant through carelessness, on the grounds that it is up to people themselves not to be ignorant, since they are in control of how much care they take.” (*NE* III.5, 1113b 29 – 1114a 3)

Since involuntary actions come about through force or ignorance, voluntary actions seem to be those that come about in the opposite conditions: when the source or starting-point (*archê*) of the action is in oneself and when one is aware of the particular circumstances of the action. (*NE* III.1, 1111a 22) The crucial feature of actions that originate in oneself, according to Aristotle, is that it is up to oneself to perform them or not to perform them. (*NE* III.1, 1110a 17) This is repeated in *NE* III.5: “[I]n those cases in which acting is up to us, not acting is also up to us, and where it is up to us to say no, it is also up to us to say yes...” (1113b 4)

It will be worth pausing a moment to consider this power – our power to do or not to do the things that we do voluntarily. Neither the uniform nor the non-uniform parts of the body have this power. For example, neither the blood nor the arms have the power to move themselves voluntarily. Similarly, the natural elements do not

have the power to move themselves. Thus, in the *Physics* Aristotle argues that the natural elements are moved away from their natural places by force and toward their natural places by nature, but that even in the latter case they cannot be said to move themselves. (*Physics* VIII.4, 255a 4ff) For if they had the power to move themselves, he says, they would also have the power to stop themselves; and if they had the power to move themselves toward their natural places, they would also have the power to move themselves away from their nature places. (VIII.4, 255a 6-12)

If neither the human being's parts nor the constituents of its parts have the power to act voluntarily, then how does the human being as a whole have this power? We will find that the key to this power is incidental perception and our capacity to "master the appearances" through what William James calls "voluntary attention." For now recall from Chapter 1 the following passage from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (quoted here at greater length), juxtaposing what Aristotle calls "rational potencies" (*dunameis meta logon*) and "non-rational potencies" (*dunameis alogoi*).

... some things can produce change according to a rational formula and their potencies involve such a formula, while other things are non-rational and their potencies are non-rational, and the former potencies must be in a living thing, while the latter can be both in the living and in the lifeless; as regards potencies of the latter kind, when the agent and the patient meet in the way appropriate to the potency in question, the one must act and the other be acted on, but with the former kind of potency this is not necessary. For the non-rational potencies are all productive of one effect each, but the rational produce contrary effects, so that if they produced their effects necessarily they would produce contrary effects at the same time; but this is impossible. There must, then, be something else that decides [on a given occasion whether to exercise a rational power, and, if so, in what way]; I mean by this, desire (*orexis*) or [choice] (*proairesis*). For whichever of two things the animal desires decisively, it will do, when it is present, and meets the passive object, in the way appropriate to the potency in question. Therefore everything which has a rational potency, when it desires that

for which it has a potency and in the circumstances in which it has the potency, must do this.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, the dispositional propensities of the natural elements are non-rational potencies that are discharged automatically and necessarily, while functional capacities to act voluntarily are actualized by desire and by deliberate desire (i.e., choice). Below we will see in greater detail how incidental perception, sensory imagination, and rational imagination, and their grounding in the processes of the living body, conspire to endow the human being with the power to act voluntarily.

Now, recall that for Aristotle, voluntary actions differ from involuntary and non-voluntary actions in that whatever an agent does voluntarily he does (1) while retaining the power to refrain from doing what he is doing and (2) while knowing, perceiving, or being aware of the particular circumstances of what he is doing. These are importantly related because our responsibility for our modes of perception is essential to our moral responsibility for our actions.<sup>99</sup> Our moral responsibility depends upon the fact that we have the power to question the appearances, to reconsider our judgments, and to re-evaluate our impulses, each of which will alter our perception of the circumstances of our action and thus re-direct our courses of action.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Metaph.* IX.5, 1047b 35 – 1048a 15 (trans. Ross). Regarding rational potencies, recall *DA* III.9, 433a 3-6, quoted in Chapter 1, on the doctor who does not automatically heal because he knows the medical art. Regarding non-rational potencies, recall the passage from *On the Generation of Animals*: “When a pair of factors, the one active and the other passive, come into contact in the way in which one is active and the other passive... then immediately both are brought into play, the one acting, the other being acted upon.” (*GA* II.4, 740b 22-25)

<sup>99</sup> See *NE* III.5, 1114a 32 – b 6.

<sup>100</sup> Virtue critically involves holding on to the right way of perceiving or naming or putting together an interpretation of the circumstances.

What, then, is the nature of the knowledge or perception integral to voluntary action? Two kinds of knowledge (and corresponding forms of ignorance) play a role in the production of action: knowledge of general principles pertaining to actions in the abstract and knowledge of the particular circumstances in which action takes place.<sup>101</sup> The general principles that are relevant here pertain to a good, pleasant, or advantageous end that is attainable through action. The particular circumstances are six in number and discussed below. Here we are concerned with the psychological processes through which we become (or fail to become) aware of the particular circumstances under certain descriptions as opposed to others.<sup>102</sup>

While knowledge of the general principles is clearly of immense importance, according to Aristotle it does not play an essential role in accounting for whether an action is voluntary or involuntary; it is knowledge or ignorance of the particulars that has this function. Ignorance of the general principles concerning good and bad actions makes one unjust or morally depraved, whereas ignorance of the circumstances of some particular action makes the action involuntary or non-voluntary.<sup>103</sup> For example, if I take another person's property because I am ignorant of the fact that doing so is morally impermissible then I am morally depraved and a thief. But if I have mistaken their property for mine my action is not a sign of moral depravity; rather I have taken another's property involuntarily.

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<sup>101</sup> These different knowledge factors are represented in the practical syllogism as the major and minor premises (respectively); more on this in Chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel Wegner refers to essentially the same psychological process of perceiving the action under a certain description as "action identification." See *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, p. 159ff.

<sup>103</sup> See *NE* III.1, 1110b 28 – 1111a 2.

Now, the particular circumstances that comprise the structure and content of an action are the following (presented at *NE* III.1, 1111a 3-6):

(1) the agent – who is performing the action?<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> In the passage cited above, Aristotle suggests that only an insane person could fail to identify the agent when the agent is himself. However, according to the reports of Daniel Wegner, psychological studies confirm the phenomenon of “action projection,” in which, in some sense, the agent misperceives his own actions as actions of another. (See *The Illusion of Conscious Will*, Chapter 6.) This is made possible, Wegner argues, because (a) we are not intrinsically informed about the causes of our actions, and (b) we have an inclination to attribute a perceived action to whoever or whatever appears to us to be its most plausible source. (p. 198) The apparent agent and the actual agent may typically coincide, but cases of action projection are by no means confined to the insane. Nevertheless, even when they do coincide, it is always only on the basis of “apparent mental causation,” Wegner argues, and not on the basis of any direct perception of the causal sources of one’s actions, that one has the experience of consciously willing one’s actions. This experience is associated with an “authorship emotion,” a visceral sense of oneself as the source of one’s actions. Wegner characterizes this unique emotion as a “somatic marker” (a phrase he borrows from Antonio Damasio), a “body-based signature” that anchors our sense of ourselves as agents in our bodies. (p. 325-327) But grasping the agent or “who?” of the action is not simply a matter of saying “I” or “me.” Rather, it raises the perennial injunction to *Know Thyself!* by setting in motion one’s personal self-perception and one’s general notion of human nature. These contents of one’s incidental perception of oneself influence the actions one performs and the manner in which one performs them (the “manner” being the sixth factor of the action, e.g., vigorously, confidently, hesitantly, etc.). Thus, concerning ourselves as individuals, we say things like “I can’t see myself doing that,” or, when someone behaves inappropriately we may rebuke him by rhetorically asking “Who do you think you are?!” Furthermore, we identify the means to our ends through deliberation, and the object of deliberation is an action that is within one’s own power to perform. Therefore, confusion about what is within one’s own power will undermine one’s ability to recognize the means to one’s ends, and, so, to realize those ends. One’s conception of human nature generally is no less critical here, which underscores the importance of Aristotle’s function argument (*NE* I.7). Through this argument Aristotle seeks to articulate the nature of the human being as such in order to pinpoint what ultimate undertaking, or way of life, is the natural end or goal (*telos*) representing human fulfillment or happiness. In line with these observations, some of Aristotle’s formulations of the practical syllogism make special reference to the nature of the agent. Paula Gottlieb brings this out insightfully in her general schema for the practical syllogism: Major Premise – “Such and such a human being ought to do such and such a thing”; Minor Premise – “I am such and such a human being, and this is such and such a thing.” Since this is a practical syllogism, the conclusion that follows is not a judgment but my performance of the action. (“The Practical Syllogism” in *Blackwell Companion to NE*, p. 224; also see Jonathan Lear *Aristotle: The Desire to Understand*, p. 148-9, and William James *PBC*, p. 47 on different actions being appropriate to different selves or kinds of persons). Striking in Gottlieb’s schema is “I am such and such a human being.” For insofar as the major premise represents the agent’s aims or the good sought for through action (e.g., *MA* 7, 701a 24), the minor premise of such syllogisms will have the agent explicitly asserting to himself “I am a virtuous human being,” “I am a courageous human being,” “I am a healthy human being.” In this way, the agent defines himself – in both word and deed – by deliberately and actively taking on the role of the person he desires to become. What I have in mind here are not self-inflating or self-deceiving delusions, but ways in which the agent authentically sets forth for himself or herself a role and “[acquires] a taste for the real thing from imitating it... [for] imitations, if they are practiced much past youth, get established in the habits and nature of the body, tones of voice, and mind.” (*Republic* III, 359C-D) On playing a “role” or “character” (*prosôpon*: literally face or countenance; more generally, characteristic way of making oneself manifest), and “those who have forgotten their



- (2) the action – what basic action is being performed?
- (3) the patient – who or what is being acted upon?
- (4) the instrument – with what is the action being performed?
- (5) the purpose – for the sake of what is the action being performed?
- (6) the manner – in what way is the action being performed?<sup>105</sup>

Of these particular circumstances, the most important are the action and the purpose: above all, the agent must know *what* he is doing and *why* he is doing it.<sup>106</sup> The manner of the basic action is also noteworthy: if the basic act is, say, telling someone that he or she has great potential, then to do so *sincerely*, or *sarcastically*, or *condescendingly*, constitutes a very different action overall – e.g., encouraging, discouraging, or insulting the patient.

own proper character (*idiou prosôpou*),” see the ever-brilliant Epictetus, *Discourses* I.2. We will return to some of these issues in Chapter 3.

<sup>105</sup> We can compare Aristotle’s framework for conceptualizing action with a parallel analysis from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition concerning action and karma. (Note: the base meaning of “karma” is “action,” and also includes the notion of an action together with its repercussions, and thus expands the notion of action into that of the law of cause and effect. The details of this concept are comparable to Aristotle’s view of the development character.) In the Tibetan Buddhist framework, the elements of the action are divided into (i) the basis, (ii) the state of mind, (iii) the execution of the act, and (iv) the culmination of the action. For example, one of the non-virtuous actions is stealing, which is characterized in this framework as follows (see Jinpa’s translation of *Mind Training: The Great Collection*, p. 456ff):

- Action: Taking what is not given
  - (i) Basis: An object owned by someone other than oneself
  - (ii) State of mind (twofold)
    - (a) Recognition
      - (u) Specific: particular basis of theft perceived as such
      - (v) Non-specific: as when basis is flock of sheep
    - (b) Intention
      - (w) Taking what is not given through attachment
      - (x) Taking what is not given through anger
      - (z) Taking what is not given through delusion
  - (iii) Execution: theft by force, deception, refusal to return item, etc.
  - (iv) Culmination: when object is removed or thought of its attainment occurs in the mind

<sup>106</sup> See *NE* III.1, 1111a 18, referred to in a footnote in §0.2 above.

Now, knowledge of the particular circumstances of action is a sort of perceptual recognition rather than an abstract demonstrative knowledge (*epistēmē*).<sup>107</sup> The perception of these particular circumstances of the action involves what Aristotle calls “incidental perception.” This sort of perception concerns not what things look like, sound like, taste like, and so forth, but what we judge things to *be* (e.g., a table, a book, a generous action, a contemptuous remark, etc.). Incidental perception thus concerns how your perception or interpretation of a situation and its significance are put together in your experience with certain intelligible contents built in. This can be as simple as perceiving a black cylindrical shape as a cup (which may serve as a basis for your act of picking it up for the purpose of drinking), or as complicated as perceiving, all in an instant, that the subtle but concerned facial expression of your friend indicates that something has gone wrong which cannot be discussed in the present company and thus an opportunity to leave the room must be created and seized upon (which may serve as a basis for your act of fabricating some excuse to leave the room). So in the following section we will examine incidental perception, keeping in mind that the voluntariness and course of one’s actions depends upon one’s incidental perception of (1) oneself as the agent, (2) what one is doing, (3) to whom, (4) with what, (5) for what reason, and (6) in what way.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> For example, see *NE* VI.8, 1142a 13-31.

<sup>108</sup> Before advancing beyond our brief discussion of Aristotle on voluntary action in *NE* III.1, it is worth noting that, in addition to voluntary, involuntary, and non-voluntary actions, Aristotle identifies a class of “mixed actions.” Some actions are involuntary in the abstract, but voluntary in the particular circumstances in which they are performed. In more contemporary terms, these are involuntary action *types* that are realized, sometimes, by voluntary action *tokens*. Aristotle gives the example of throwing goods overboard in a storm, or performing some base action at the command of a tyrant who has one’s parents held captive. In abstraction from contextual factors one would not voluntarily throw goods overboard, or perform the commanded base action, but in these particular circumstances, for the sake of safeguarding oneself and others on the ship, or saving the lives of one’s parents, one performs the

## 2.3 Appearance and Perception

In this section I will show that alterations in the living body are critical to the process of “putting together” (*suntithemenôn*) one’s perception of the circumstances of action (which, in turn, is essential to which actions one voluntarily performs). First I will describe Aristotle’s notion of “incidental perception” and its relation to *phantasia*. Secondly, I will present Aristotle’s view of how the appearances of incidental perception are altered by the passions (*pathê*). Thirdly, I will show that the alteration of appearances and judgment by the passions is based on the embodiment of the *pathê*.

### 2.3.1 Incidental Perception and Perception Management

In *De Anima* II.6 Aristotle distinguishes between the proper objects of perception, the common objects of perception, and the incidental objects of perception.<sup>109</sup> The proper objects of perception are the special objects unique to each

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given action tokens voluntarily. Thus mixed actions are involuntary in the abstract since no one would choose them for their own sake (*NE* III.1, 1111a 18), but they are voluntary at the time when they are performed since they are chosen and “the end for which an action takes place is in accordance with its occasion.” (*NE* III.1, 1110a 14) Thus, the fact that “actions are in the particulars” (*NE* III.1, 1110b 8) leads to the consequence that tokens of mixed actions are more properly categorized as voluntary actions because they originate from an agent who knows what he or she is doing and has the power to refrain from doing it. However, there are certain circumstances that “strain human nature too far, and no one could endure them.” (1110a 25) In these cases, the actions are no longer mixed-but-in-these-conditions-voluntary but are involuntary because one no longer retains the power to refrain from performing them. “For what rests with himself,” Aristotle tells us, “and it wholly turns on this,” he says, is “what his nature is able to bear” (*EE* II.8, 1225a 25).

<sup>109</sup> I will generally stick to the Aristotelian terminology of “incidental perception.” The sense of this term here is that color, sound, and the other proper perceptibles are perceived in their own right, while a book or a tree is perceived incidentally (*kata sumbebêkos*) or not in its own right but along with the perception of the relevant colors and shapes. However, where the context is clear, I will simply use “perception” or other terms for what I take to be the same thing: “perceiving as,” “seeing as,” “perceptual recognition,” or “propositional perception” (see Barnouw’s *Propositional Perception*).

sense: colors, sounds, tastes, smells, and tactile impressions. These are the presentations of what things look like, sound like, smell like, taste like, and feel like (in short, what later philosophers might call “qualia” or “sense data”), which includes sensations within one’s own body. The common objects of perception are those that are shared by more than one sense modality. For instance, we can both see and feel motion. Incidental perception refers to those observations that go beyond what a given thing looks like, sounds like, and so forth, and involve a judgment about or recognition of what the thing *is*.

Although in a different context, the distinction between proper and incidental perception is illustrated nicely by both Berkeley and Descartes. In Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues*, Philonous states, “For instance, when I hear a coach drive along the streets, immediately I perceive only the sound; but from the experience I have had that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to hear the coach. It is nevertheless evident, that in truth and strictly speaking, nothing can be *heard* but *sound*: and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested from experience.”<sup>110</sup> Additionally, Descartes provides a well-known example relevant to Aristotle’s distinction between proper and incidental perception:

“We say that we see the wax [candle] itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be there from its colour and shape; and this might lead me to conclude without more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eye sees, and not from the scrutiny of the mind alone. But then if I look out of the window and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I

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William James refers to this as “apperception” (e.g. *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, Ch. XIV), although I will generally avoid this term since it is also used, for instance by Kant, more specifically for the mind’s awareness of its own states as such.

<sup>110</sup> George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues* (Oxford World Classics, 1999), 144.

normally say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I see any more than hats and coats [or more strictly, colors and shapes] which could conceal automatons? I *judge* that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgment which is in my mind.”<sup>111</sup>

From Aristotle’s perceptive, Descartes goes too far in claiming that sensible particulars are known “by the mind alone” and grasped “solely by the faculty of judgment in [the] mind.” The significance of this will emerge shortly. For the present, having illustrated the distinction between proper and incidental perception, I want to stress that, ordinarily, the intelligible contents of incidental perception (e.g., “coach,” “wax,” “hat,” “coat,” “man”) are not consciously *inferred* from the sensible qualities of proper perception (sounds, colors, shapes, etc.); rather, these intelligible contents are presented immediately in perceptual experiences that are structured outside of conscious awareness. Thus, in ordinary circumstances I do not consciously infer that I am seeing a tree from an antecedent recognition of green- and brown-colored shapes. Instead, the perception is put together as “tree” or “that’s a tree” in the first instance.<sup>112</sup> As will become evident shortly, apart from its metaphysical and epistemological consequences, this fact about the construction of the content of incidental perception also has extremely important practical and ethical ramifications since the content of incidental perception is central to voluntary action.

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<sup>111</sup> Second Meditation, *Meditations on First Philosophy* edited and translated by John Cottingham (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21. Additional material of relevance is found in the Sixth Meditation.

<sup>112</sup> It is very important that “nothing is acted upon by the incidentally perceived thing as such.” (*DA* II.6, 418a 24) This means that the responsibility for the appearance of “tree,” or “person in distress,” or “harmful insult” – and any action initiated in relation to these perceptions – primarily lies in the perceiver and not in an external cause of the perception. This is even more poignant when applied to our perceptions of life conditions as good or bad, cause for joy or sorrow, and so on: the characteristics of being bad and a cause for sorrow are largely a function of our mode of perception and not the conditions themselves.

So, incidental perception involves the coincidence or fusion of intelligible and sensory content.<sup>113</sup> I would like to clarify the nature of this fusion of intelligible and sensory content by briefly analyzing Aristotle’s statement that “the thinking potency grasps in thought the forms that are present in things imagined” or, as another translation renders this statement, “the faculty of thinking, then, thinks the forms in the images.”<sup>114</sup> Aristotle gives the following example: “perceiving that a signal light is fire, and observing by what is common to the senses that it is moving, one recognizes that it is an enemy.” This example combines a special object of perception (light), a common object of perception (motion), and an incidental object of perception (a sign of an enemy, although perceiving the light as fire is also already an instance of incidental perception). So, the thought “enemy” or “sign of the enemy” and the image of moving light arise together as a single experiential content.

Now, we can distinguish two ways of interpreting the phrase “thinking the forms in the images”: (a) *thinking* a form in an image, as opposed to being presented with the image but not thinking a given form along with it, and (b) thinking a form *in an image*, as opposed to thinking the form itself alone and without an image. For

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<sup>113</sup> I will suggest here that, ordinarily, our experience consists of a fairly confused apprehension on both sides: we do not think the intelligible forms in an explicit, clearly articulated way, nor do we attend perceptively to the sensory qualia. On the one hand, ordinarily, we observe “tree” or “that’s a tree” but cannot, or simply do not, articulate to ourselves what a tree essentially and ultimately is; and, on the other hand, we rarely savor the sensory perception, the many shades of green and brown, and the intricate shapeliness of the leaves and branches, the sound of the leaves blowing in the wind, and the other qualities that are presented to us perceptually. The point is of even greater moment when applied to our often inchoate awareness of what we are doing (e.g., destroying the environment, wasting precious time, developing destructive habits, violating our own professed values, etc.) To the extent that this is so, one fears that Heraclitus was referring to people such as ourselves when he said, “though present they are absent.” (DK 22B 34, trans. Richard McKirahan in *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 118)

<sup>114</sup> *DA* III.7, 431b 3: the first translation is by Joe Sachs, the second is by J. A. Smith (from the Oxford translation edited by Ross).

instance, on the one hand, (a) someone not informed about the significance of the moving fire would fail to perceive the fire as a sign of the enemy – would fail to think “enemy” or “sign of the enemy” at the sight of the fire. Were he expecting, say, a religious procession to take place in the relevant vicinity, he might instead perceive the moving light as a religious procession. Here he fails to think a certain form (enemy) with the image and thinks some other form (procession) instead.<sup>115</sup>

On the other hand, (b) a person might not be looking out for enemies or signs of enemies at the moment but may be thinking abstractly about what an enemy or a sign is. Even in this case, however, Aristotle insists that, in all human thinking, an image must be employed in the service of facilitating the contemplative act – whether a sensory image presently perceived or one drawn from memory (or one formed from images drawn from memory). For Aristotle, the only contemplative activity that is wholly independent of sensory experience and sensory imagery, and thus independent of the body, is the contemplative activity of the Divine Mind or God.<sup>116</sup>

Like Aristotle, Plato was also deeply concerned with the problem of disengaging one’s attention from the special objects of sensory perception in order to directly grasp the intelligible forms reflected in the perceived particulars – the emphasis of reading (b) of Aristotle’s statement above. In *Republic* VII such

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<sup>115</sup> At the end of *Republic* V (479B) Socrates analogizes the ambiguity or multiple interpretability sensible particulars with a riddle: “A man who is not a man saw and did not see a bird that was not a bird in a tree (*xulon*) that was not a tree; he hit (*ballein*) and did not hit it with a stone that was not a stone.” C. D. C. Reeve explains as follows: “The answer is that a eunuch with bad eyesight saw a bat on a rafter, threw a pumice stone at it, and missed. For ‘he saw a bird’ is ambiguous between ‘he saw what was actually a bird’ and ‘he saw what he took to be a bird,’ *xulon* means both ‘tree’ and ‘rafter’ or ‘roof tree,’ and *ballein* means both ‘to throw’ and ‘to hit.’” (C. D. C. Reeve, *Plato: Republic*, p. 174, n. 51)

<sup>116</sup> For example, see *Metaph.* XII.7, 1072b 18 (quoted below): “the thinking that is just thinking by itself is a thinking of what is best [i.e., God] just as itself.”

disengagement is represented allegorically as a “turning around” and ascension from the infamous cave. The following passage from *Republic V* will also help elucidate this distinction between attending to the reflections of intelligible forms in sensible particulars versus directly attending to the intelligible forms themselves:

“The lovers of listening and seeing are passionately devoted to beautiful sounds, colors, shapes, and everything fashioned out of such things. [That is, for them the thought “beauty” takes place in a confused form amidst their attention to the special objects of sense such as colors, shapes, etc.] But their thought is unable to see the nature of the beautiful itself or to be passionately devoted to it... On the one hand, won’t those who *are* able to approach the beautiful itself, and see it by itself, be rare? [That is, few are able to contemplate the form of beauty directly, without the mediation of sensory instances of beauty, and through a purely intelligible and articulate grasp of what beauty is in itself]... What about someone who believes in beautiful things but does not believe in the beautiful itself, and would not be able to follow anyone who tried to lead him to the knowledge of it? Do you think he is living in a dream, or is he awake? Just consider. Isn’t it dreaming to think – whether asleep or awake – that a likeness is not a likeness, but rather the thing itself that it is like? ... But what about someone who, to take the opposite case, does believe in the beautiful itself, is able to observe both it and the things that participate in it, and does not think that the participants are it, or that it is the participants – do you think he is living in a dream or is awake?” [Glaucón replies...] “He is very much awake.” (*Republic V*, 476B-D)<sup>117</sup>

Our ability to free our thinking from the images or appearances is of critical importance. This freedom might be an absolute aloneness of the intellect collected

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<sup>117</sup> Also see *Republic VII*, 534B, where Socrates states that anyone who cannot give an account of the form of the good is “dreaming and asleep throughout his present life [and] before he wakes up here, he will arrive in Hades and go to sleep forever.” See also *Republic VI*, 484C and *VII*, 523A. The allegory of the charioteer from Plato’s *Phaedrus* also provides relevant material, particularly where Socrates argues that it is through using present sensory impressions to “remind” oneself of the intelligible forms that one “undergoes a continual initiation into the perfect mystic vision” and “can become perfect [or complete] in the true sense of the word.” (*Phaedrus* 249C, trans. Hamilton) Similarly, Plotinus argues that people who cannot contemplate the forms directly seek to contemplate in a roundabout way by beholding themselves performing beautiful actions (*Enneads* III.8.6, quoted below in §3.3). This is comparable to *NE VII.13*, 1153b 29 where Aristotle states that in all our actions we pursue the pleasure of contemplation without knowing that this is what we are pursuing.



into itself and wholly withdrawn from sensible experience and its influence (e.g., as described by Plotinus, which corresponds, for Aristotle, to the activity of the Divine Mind), or it might be a relative freedom to conceptualize and understand the appearances in accordance with right reason and a virtuous mode of perception (which is the line of thought in Aristotle that we are working on here, that pertains to the human individual). More specifically, though, the two senses of Aristotle's claim that we think the forms in the images – senses (a) and (b) above – are relevant to our purposes here because, we will see, they indicate the relevance of functions in the living body to incidental perception and practical reasoning, and the relevance of incidental perception and practical reasoning to voluntary action and moral responsibility.

Regarding sense (a), seeing some sensible particular as exemplifying a certain intelligible content can make all the difference to the actions one undertakes and the responsibility one bears for those actions. For instance, seeing the moving fire as a sign that the enemy approaches may give rise to fear that forms the basis of my sounding the alarm, rushing to procure weapons and soldiers, etc. Failing to see the moving fire as a sign of the enemy but, rather, as the procession of a religious festival, I may ponder how wonderful the festivals are this time of year and calmly proceed in that direction (to a very unexpected fate).

Furthermore, as indicated above, we ourselves are responsible for how things appear, for ultimately we have the capacity to control how we conceptualize or interpret the circumstances in which we act. Although a great deal of spiritual struggle may be required to develop this capacity and to shape our modes of

perception in accordance with virtue, nevertheless we are responsible for which forms serve as the intelligible contents that structure our perception of the images.<sup>118</sup> The intelligible forms that constitute the content of our perceptual experience are a function of conditions within ourselves as much as, or to an even greater extent than, they are a function of the external objects that cause our perceptions.<sup>119</sup> Our responsibility for our modes of perception is integral to – perhaps the very most important element that accounts for – our capacity to act voluntarily, our bearing responsibility for our actions, and our attaining or failing to attain happiness.

Moreover, in regard to sense (b), both the contemplation and the perceptual presentation of intelligible forms depend upon sensory images. According to

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<sup>118</sup> I should emphasize that we have a *capacity* to control our thoughts and our modes of perception. Aristotle often distinguishes amongst (1) a capacity (*dunamis*), (2) an ability or active state of readiness (*hexis*) to perform a given activity, and (3) actively being-at-work (*energeia*). These three levels of potentiality and actuality are sometimes labeled, respectively, P1, P2/A1, and A2 (where P = potency or potentiality, and A = activity or actuality). (For an excellent discussion, see Aryeh Kosman’s “Aristotle’s Definition of Motion,” *Phronesis* 14 (1969), 40-62.) For example, Aristotle states that “there are varying degrees in which [a thing] may be potentially that which it is capable of being – it may be nearer to it or further removed from it (just as a sleeping geometer is at a further remove than one who is awake, and a waking one than one who is busy at his studies).” (*GA* II.1, 735a 9) Even further removed from geometrical contemplation is the child who has not yet studied geometry. The child is “far removed” from the activity of geometrical contemplation in that he is not presently able to perform this activity. However, he does possess a capacity for developing an ability to perform this activity in a way that a tree does not. (We will return to the notion of being nearer or further removed from an activity – particularly, the human good – in Chapter 3 with a nice passage from Aristotle’s *De Caelo*.) Applying this distinction to our capacity to control our thoughts and our modes of perception, until one *develops* this capacity into an ability that one actually puts to use, one is responsible for one’s modes of perceptions and actions only in a derivative sense, like the pilot who is responsible for the shipwreck because of his absence from the helm. (See *Physics* II.3, 195a 14 for assigning responsibility for the shipwreck to the absent pilot.) This responsibility-in-absence can be contrasted with autonomous moral responsibility in which one has mastered oneself. We will briefly return to this in the Epilogue of this dissertation.

<sup>119</sup> This is certainly true of the intelligible content presented in perception, and it is also true of the purely sensory qualities or proper perceptibles. Indeed, we are aware of the world through our awareness of the changes and conditions within our own bodies. George Stratton makes this related comment: “[In the process of perception,] the passive factor, the recipient of the action [i.e., the sense organ], has a part in the total process and demands our attention, quite as much as does the agent in perception [i.e., the stimulus]. The very fact that the same stimulus can have a variable effect according to the condition in which it finds our organs, convinces one that the scientist’s attention must be directed beyond the stimulus, the ‘object,’ the active feature in perception.” (*Theophrastus and the Greek Physiological Psychology Before Aristotle*, p. 20)

Aristotle, because these images are bodily, the inseparability of human thinking from images implies that conditions in the living body are integral to the processes of our contemplative and discursive reasoning, and to the presentation of intelligible contents in incidental perception.<sup>120</sup> These images undergo changes that take place within the body and are ultimately governed by the dispositional propensities of the body's lowest-level constituents.<sup>121</sup> Thus, the "proper symmetry" of the inward constituents of the body is not only integral to the functions of nutrition and reproduction (as described in Chapter 1), and voluntary self-motions (as described earlier in this chapter), but it is also critical to perception, imagination, and reason. Since these soul-powers are among the sources of moral responsibility, their somatic imminence has a direct bearing on moral psychology.

Let us illustrate this with respect to incidental perception. As mentioned above, the proper and incidental objects of perception are functions of ourselves as much as, or to an even greater extent than, they are functions of the supposed external stimuli that act upon our sense organs. This is a critical aspect of our moral responsibility for several reasons. The one I would like to dwell upon here is that this fact about perception gives us the capacity to alter our assessments and "master the appearances." In the process of gaining this mastery and altering one's mode of perception, one must strain to attend to certain intelligible contents as opposed to others.

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<sup>120</sup> Recall, once again, the following references: *DA* I.1, 403a 9; *DA* III.7, 431a 16; *DA* III.8, 432a 7; *On Memory and Reminiscence*, 1, 449b 31. See also *On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 453a 15.

<sup>121</sup> Among other places, see *On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 451b 10ff. We will return to this below.

As William James states, “Our moral effort, properly so called, terminates in our holding fast to the appropriate idea.” The preferred intelligible content of incidental perception is referred to here as the “appropriate idea,” which James also refers to as “the proper conception,” “the true head of classification,” and “the right name.” He writes, “the essential preliminary to every decision is the finding of the right *names* under which to class the proposed alternatives of conduct.” Moreover, “The effort by which [one] succeeds in keeping the right *name* unwaveringly present to his mind proves to be [one’s] saving moral act[!]” He refers to these acts of straining to hold the right idea as instances of “voluntary attention,” and calls them “the fundamental act of will.”<sup>122</sup> James writes, “*In action as in reasoning, then, the great thing is the quest of the right conception.* The concrete dilemmas do not come to us with labels gummed upon their backs. We may name them by many names. The wise man is he who succeeds in finding the name which suits the needs of the particular occasion best.”<sup>123</sup>

For example, in resisting temptation one might imagine and strain to attend to the health consequences of the proverbial cake as opposed to its delicious taste, or to the deleterious effects of the alcohol or one’s past drunken stupidity as opposed to the pleasures of intoxication. In an effort to drive away folly and laziness, one might focus intently on the fleeting nature of the opportune moment and the preciousness of

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<sup>122</sup> See *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*, pp. 81, 90-91, and *PBC*, p. 391-321 (all emphasis in original). I will continue to use “voluntary attention” in the above sense. Consider the following Aristotelian parallel: “Now the braggart seems to be someone who takes upon himself a reputation for things that do not belong to him, or exaggerated over those that belong to him, while the ironic person, on the contrary, seems to disown things that do belong to him or understate them, but the person at the mean, *being someone who calls each thing by its right name*, is apt to be truthful in his life as well as in speech, acknowledging the things that belong to him, and nothing greater or less, as his own.” (*NE* IV.7, 1127a 23, emphasis added)

<sup>123</sup> *PBC*, p. 297-8 (emphasis in original).

the time and resources one is squandering.<sup>124</sup> Practicing ethical virtue in accordance with the Socratic discourses of Plato’s dialogues, one might divert the impulse to take revenge by attending to the vengeful act one is inclined to perform as being more harmful to oneself than the unjust action done unto you, and to the perpetrator of this unjust act as having harmed himself more than he has harmed you. Such mindfulness is integral to the practice of transforming adversity into the opportunity to practice virtue. A sage such as Socrates or Buddha or Jesus – or any ordinary person with the relevant temperament – will no longer need to strain in this way; rather the perception will be “put together” with the appropriate content in the first instance.<sup>125</sup> As Aristotle states,

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<sup>124</sup> I borrow part of the above sentence from Heirocles (a Neoplatonic philosopher who, along with Syrianus, was a student of Plutarch of Athens), who states that “Pythagoras begins by the precepts of *active* virtue. Before all things, we ought to dissipate and drive away folly and the laziness that are in us and then apply ourselves to divine things.” (*Commentary on the Golden Verses*, in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavynys, p. 178.) The sentiment here could be expressed in Aristotelian terms by saying that the virtues of character are a necessary condition for the intellectual virtues. (See *NE* VI.13.) Plato also depicts this beautifully in his allegory of the cave; “here is what our present account shows about this power to learn that is present in everyone’s soul, and the instrument with which each of us learns: just as an eye cannot be turned around from darkness to light except by turning the whole body, so this instrument [the rational part of the soul] must be turned around from what-comes-to-be together with the whole soul [the appetitive, spirited, and rational parts of soul], until it is able to bear to look at what is and at the brightest thing that is – the one we call the good.” (*Republic* VII, 518C)

<sup>125</sup> One can compare such masters of moral and intellectual virtue with chess masters. As Douglas Hofstadter explains, “[The chess master] thinks *on a different level* from the novice; his set of concepts is different. Nearly everyone is surprised to find out that in actual play, a master rarely looks ahead any further than a novice does – and moreover, a master usually examines only a handful of moves! The trick is that his mode of perceiving the board is like a filter: he literally *does not see bad moves* when he looks at a chess situation – no more than chess amateurs see *illegal* moves when they look at a chess situation.” (*Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 286, emphasis in original.) Just as the chess master does not even see bad chess moves, so the developed sage does not even fathom ethically corrupt actions or the predications that motivate them. We should note that in spite of this fact, it is impossible to mechanically transplant the wisdom of a sage into another’s heart or mind by providing him or her with instructions or a sterile set of true propositions concerning how one should behave, for there can be no such set of instructions that is effective in all possible circumstances. This observation lays behind Plato’s many statements to the effect that wisdom cannot be transmitted through the written word, partly because the words of a written text remain the same whoever reads that text, whereas the true soul-guide must perceive the individual person before him and choose his words according to the characteristics of that particular

“Then to a person of serious moral stature, what is wished for would be what is truly good, but to a flighty sort of person it would be any random thing, just as, in the case of bodies, for the ones that are in good condition those things are healthy that truly are so, while for the ones that are sickly different things might be healthy, and similarly in the case of what is bitter or sweet or hot or heavy or of any other sort. *For the person of serious moral stature discerns each thing correctly, and in each kind of thing, the true instance shows itself to such a person.* For in accordance with each sort of active condition [or state of character (*hexis*)] there are special things that are beautiful and pleasant, and the person of serious moral stature is distinguished most of all, perhaps for seeing what is truly so in each kind, since such a person is like a rule and measure of what is beautiful and pleasant.”<sup>126</sup>

In the process of developing such enlightened modes of perception, however, practice and straining to voluntarily attend to certain features will be necessary. Now, what I want to point out about such examples of “mastering the appearances” is this: for Aristotle, the somatic imminence of the images through which intelligible contents are made manifest in our experience has the consequence that this straining of attention – so important to moral responsibility, and thus to moral psychology – involves physical “countermotions” (*antikinousin*) within the living body that enable

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person’s soul. (For example, see *Phaedrus* 271A-278D and .) The Sufi philosopher Al-Ghazali presented this point nicely when he wrote: “Were a physician to treat all of his patients with a single medicine he would kill most of them; and so it is with the Shaykh [that is, the “physician of the soul”], who, were he to charge all his aspirants with one kind of [spiritual] exercise, would destroy them and kill their hearts.” (From “An Exposition Detailing the Method Used in Refining the Character,” being §22.5 of *On Disciplining the Soul, Refining the Character, and Curing the Sickness of the Heart*, translated by T. J. Winter, p. 41) Recall the footnote in §0.2 about the lack of precision of ethical discourse, as opposed to the ultimate precision of virtue. We will return to this in Chapter 3.

<sup>126</sup> *NE* III.4, 1113a 25ff, emphasis added. The above passage concerns the virtuous person’s perception of particular circumstances. A corresponding point holds with respect to the abstract principles about what is best: “But that ‘eye’ of the soul [namely, practical wisdom (*phronēsis*)] does not develop its active condition without virtue... For demonstrative reasoning about things to be done has a starting point, ‘since such-and-such is the end and the best thing,’ ... *and this does not show itself except to a good person*; for vice warps someone and makes one be wrong about the sources that govern action. So it is clear that it is impossible to be possessed of practical judgment (*phronēsis*) without being good.” (*NE* VI.12, 1144a 30-35, emphasis added)

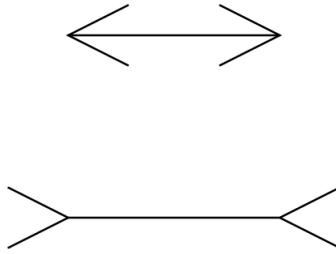
one to “gainsay” or “contradict” (*antiphêsi*) the appearances.<sup>127</sup> These counter-motions free one’s faculty of judgment or opinion from forces that blindly or irrationally construct the appearance.

As evidence that the faculty of appearance and that of judgment are distinct, Aristotle cites the fact that the image or appearance of the sun in our perceptual experience is only a foot in diameter, but judgment or opinion contradicts or says something contrary to (*antiphêsi*) this appearance.<sup>128</sup> In this instance, the faculty of judgment resists and holds its own ground in the face of the presentation, maintaining the judgment that the sun itself is large although its appearance is small. This is a case in which “there is a false appearance of things about which, at the same time, there is a true conception (*hupolêpsin alêthê*).” (*DA* III.3, 428b 3) The well-known Müller-Lyer Illusion (below) also illustrates this point: even after one measures the two horizontal lines in this image, and forms a true conception that they are the same length, the *appearance* that the bottom line is longer than the upper line typically persists nevertheless. Thus, one feels oneself exerting an effort to contradict and re-shape the appearance into conformity one’s judgment so that one sees them as being the same length (and does not only judge this to be the case).

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<sup>127</sup> See *On Memory and Reminiscence*, 2, 453a 27; *On Dreams* 2, 460b 16-20; *On Dreams* 3, 461b; *DA* III.3, 428b 3-10; and *De Sensu* 7, 448b 12.

<sup>128</sup> *On Dreams* 2, 460b 16-20; *DA* III.3, 428b 3-10; *Sense and Sensibilia* 7, 448b 12. For a description of a calculative process relating to this, see *On Memory and Recollection* 2, 452b 7ff.



This example is closely tied to visual qualia, which are objects of proper perception, but the same point applies to more conceptually complex and richly textured appearances of incidental perception and their corresponding judgments or conceptions. A chilling case in point is presented in Sartre's *Situations*, where French resistance against the German occupation is described in terms of an inner struggle to maintain a "true conception" in the face of Nazi propaganda and the appearances it was projecting:

"All around us on the walls, in the newspapers, on the screen, we met that foul and insipid image that our oppressors wanted us to accept as ourselves... Since the Nazi poison was seeping into our thinking, *each accurate thought was a victory*... alone and naked before torturers who were clean-shaven, well-fed, well-dressed, who regarded this wretched flesh with contempt – *torturers whose smug consciences and enormous social power gave every appearance of their being right.*"<sup>129</sup>

Exerting the countermotions within one's soul and body, sustaining the voluntary attention necessary to successfully contradict this appearance and to maintain the true conception of one's own human dignity in opposition to the politically weighted Nazi poison, was the most essential victory upon which all other

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<sup>129</sup> From *Situations* III, 11-13, quoted in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, edited with introduction by Robert Denoon Cumming, pp. 233-234 (my emphasis).



forms of outward victory depended.<sup>130</sup> The difficulty of holding onto a given mode of perception under the pressure of some alternative interpretation that is weighted by political power or widespread public approval is depicted nicely in *Republic VI*.

There Socrates states that it is not private individual sophists but public multitudes of people who corrupt the youth (particularly, those youths with natures suited for true philosophy)...

“...[w]hen many of them sit together in assemblies, courts, theaters, army camps, or any other gathering of a majority in public and, with a loud uproar, object excessively to some of the things that are said or done, then approve excessively of others, shouting and clapping; and when, in addition to these people themselves, the rocks and the surrounding space itself echo and redouble the uproar of their praise or blame. In a situation like that, how do you think – as the saying goes – a young man’s heart is affected? How will whatever sort of private education he received hold up for him, and not get swept away by such praise and blame, and go be carried off by the flood wherever it goes, so that he will call the same things beautiful and ugly as these people, practice what they practice, and become like them?” (*Republic VI*, 492A-C)

Now, the visual appearance of the sun as smaller than the earth has little or no power over our judgment as to the relative sizes of these planetary bodies: although presented with a false appearance, we easily maintain a true conception. The appearance that the upper arrow of the Müller-Lyer Illusion is shorter than the lower one weighs upon one’s judgment even after measurement has led one to form the true belief that they are equal in length. To the systematically marginalized victim of prolonged torture, the appearance that the well-dressed, smug, and socially powerful and publicly supported torturer is somehow in the right may be very overpowering indeed (although this false appearance loses all its power when the situation is viewed

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<sup>130</sup> Also see Victor E. Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (New York: Pocket Books, 1984).

from a clearer perspective). In these examples, though, the agent maintains a true conception in the face of false appearances.

However, much of the time, particularly when strong emotions are involved, the appearances dominate the faculty of judgment. Like the dreamer who takes the dream presentation for waking experience, in these cases we are “mere followers of the phantasms.” As Ross renders this idea, “sometimes [opinion or judgment] is inhibited and gives its allegiance to the image [that is, the appearance].”<sup>131</sup> To hearken back to Socrates’ profound words, in these cases of noetic passivity “the power of appearance makes us wander all over the place in confusion, often changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices...”<sup>132</sup> The active exercise of reason, calculation, or rational imagination saves us from being dragged around in this way by the power of appearance against the will of our true selves. In a related passage, Socrates notes that when people first began to exercise in the nude it appeared ridiculous to many, but “the laughter in the eyes faded away because of what the arguments had proved to be best.” (*Republic V*, 452D) Through the exercise of reason, then, certain intelligible contents fade away, and other contents become salient or vivid (*enargon*) in our incidental perception.

We should note that calculation or discursive reasoning is surely not the only method for influencing one’s mode of incidental perception, and may be ineffective without a host of other means for effecting this transformation and serving as aides to voluntary attention. Indeed, in the Platonic scheme of education presented in the

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<sup>131</sup> See *On Dreams* 1, 459a 8, and Ross’s paraphrase in *Aristotle: Parva Naturalia, A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary*, p. 267. Recall that “phantasms,” “images,” and “appearances” are all translations of the same word in Greek: *phantasmata*.

<sup>132</sup> *Protagoras* 356d, quoted above.

*Republic*, dialectic and mathematics are last in the program and are preceded by education in music, gymnastics, and poetry. Thus, the enlightened use of these arts is absolutely essential in the education of character and shaping one's mode of perception.<sup>133</sup>

Here we can note aphorisms such as those employed in the Pythagorean schools, referred to as "symbols" (*symbola*) or "sayings" (*akousmata*). In his *Protrepticus* or *Exhortation to Philosophy* Iamblichus presents thirty-nine of these symbolic sayings, which we can interpret as aids to voluntary attention and beneficial mechanisms of "perception management." For instance, one such saying is "One should not stir a fire with a knife." As Johan C. Thom notes, this is generally interpreted to mean "Do not increase someone's anger by arguing with him."<sup>134</sup>

Iamblichus elaborates on this saying as follows:

"This exhorts us to wisdom. For it excites in us an appropriate conception with respect to the propriety of not opposing sharp words to a man full of fire and wrath, nor contending with him. For frequently by words you will agitate and disturb an ignorant man, and will yourself experience things dreadful and unpleasant... [M]any by gratifying anger have changed the condition of their soul, and made death preferable to life."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> See *Republic* III. In the paragraphs that follow we will consider symbolic sayings of the Pythagorean school and their usefulness in the education of emotions and modes of perception. Our observations in this regard are also applicable to poetry and parables and so forth. Relevantly, in *The Happiness Hypothesis* Jonathan Haidt makes very perceptive remarks about "how the West was lost" when moral education became almost exclusively a matter of rational proofs and logical argumentation and ceased to make sufficient use of maxims and role models in its pedagogy. (pp. 158-166) Brief comments on the wordless transformational power of music will arise at the end of Chapter 3.

<sup>134</sup> Johan C. Thom, "The Passions in Neopythagorean Writings," in *Passions and Moral Progress in Greco-Roman Thought*, edited by John T. Fitzgerald (New York: Routledge, 2008), 71.

<sup>135</sup> *Iamblichus: The Exhortation to Philosophy*, translated by Thomas Moore Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1988), 100. As further rendering of the Greek terminology here: this symbol exhorts us to wisdom (*phronêsis*: practical wisdom), and it excites (*egeirei*: awakens, arouses, stirs up, raises from the dead) an appropriate conception (*tên ennoian tên prosêkousan*: fitting thoughts, reflections, ideas, intentions) in our incidental perception of the situation of action. (Cf. James on the "appropriate idea," "the proper conception," "the true head of classification," and "the right name.")

The symbolic saying establishes an analogical association between the metaphorical image (e.g., stirring a fire with a knife) and a perceived situation or possible action (e.g., using sharp words in response to another's anger). In doing so, it serves as a filter through which one re-conceptualizes the perceived situation or possible action; it superimposes features of the metaphor's content onto one's perception of the corresponding action or situation, and transfers a predication from the one to the other. In particular, by stirring a fire with a knife one will harm oneself (presumably the idea is that one's hand will get burned by getting too close to the fire or the fire will heat the knife as one grips it); similarly, by responding to another's anger with sharp words one will increase the other person's anger and harm oneself by gratifying and indulging one's own tendency toward anger, thereby disfiguring and altering the condition of one's own soul (for the worse).<sup>136</sup>

In this instance, the presence of the symbolic association transfers the predication that *this is not good to do* from the symbol to one's incidental perception or imagination of the possible action. It thus helps one to judge the situation correctly and, thereby, to hold back from the action.<sup>137</sup> As an aid to right action, the symbolic image functions as a sort of psychological switching device, redirecting the impulse to action through an alternative pathway of discharge. As an aid to right judgment, it

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<sup>136</sup> For further illustration, two additional Pythagorean *akousmata* or *symbola* are "Do not eat the heart," meaning "Do not wear yourself out by worrying"; and "Wipe out the marks of a pot in the ashes," meaning "One should not allow any trace of anger to remain after it is spent, but all remembrance of evil must be erased from the mind." (Thom, "The Passions in Neopythagorean Writings," *ibid.*)

<sup>137</sup> One additional feature of note that may be transferred from the symbol to one's perception of the action in question is the judgment that *I have the power to do this*. I feel myself to be entirely capable of holding back a knife from a fire, and the association of this content with the situation at hand may increase my sense that I can and will successfully resist the impulse to lash out in anger – and this sense will increase the likelihood that I do succeed in redirecting the impulse. Recall the importance of one's incidental perception of oneself as agent from the footnote in §2.2.

works like a psychological splint implanted into one's "imagination" (that is, the faculty for presenting appearances) when – as is often the case – calculation or reasoning has not been able to straighten out the measuring standard by which one judges what is good to do and what is bad, what is beautiful and what ugly.

“Reinforcements” of this kind are necessary when the measuring standard that informs one's judgments is being warped under the pressure of, say, poisonous political propaganda, popular opinion and the clamorous re-doubled praise or blame of the unenlightened masses, a manipulative and controlling relationship partner, advertisements carefully designed to lead you to want things that are not good for you, or one's own excessive desire for pleasure or other errant dispositions. In administering these correctives to itself, the soul is like a doctor doctoring himself.<sup>138</sup>

Now, in order to fully work this psychological medicine into one's soul, to push it beneath one's crowded thoughts and have it grow into one's character (echoing the fragment from Empedocles quoted in the introduction above), one must do more than meditate upon symbolic images and reason about what is best to do. One must also *act* and *set oneself in motion* to the intelligible music in these images and reasoned judgments about the good. Among other reasons, this physical movement gives the relevant intelligible content leverage in the functional structure of the psyche by altering the conditions in the inward parts of the body, for it is in

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<sup>138</sup> Aristotle compares nature with someone practicing medicine on himself at *Phys.* II.8, 199b 26. Compare the discussion above with Epictetus on “reinforcements” used against faulty habits of perception (*Discourses* I.27), Plato on “antidotes” for counter-acting psychologically poisonous appearances (e.g., *Republic* X, 595B), and the following reference to “aids” for maintaining proper judgment from Marcus Aurelius: “To the aids which have been mentioned let this one still be added:- Make for thyself a definition or description of the thing which is presented to thee, so as to see distinctly what kind of thing it is in its substance, in its nudity, in its complete entirety, and *tell thyself its proper name...*” (*Meditations*, III.11, my emphasis)

these conditions that one's mode of perception is based. As William James observes, "It is not in the moment of their forming, but in the moment of their producing motor effects, that resolves and aspirations communicate a new 'set' to the brain [and thereby to one's habits and character]." <sup>139</sup> On Aristotle's view, in struggling against false appearances one is involved in a psychosomatic struggle.

### 2.3.2 Dreams, Recollection, and Putting Together Perceptions

To get a clearer sense of the somatic dimension of this struggle to bring the appearances into harmony with truth and right reason, let us return to the trivial but helpfully simple example of one's perception of the tempting cake. Due to the somatic imminence of the images through which one perceives the cake as something good to eat, to contradict this appearance, and stabilize a perception of the cake as unhealthful (and therefore not to be eaten), one's effort of attention involves the production of counteremotions in the blood that alter and re-arrange the somatic images residing there. A brief look at Aristotle's explanations of dreaming and recollection will help to clarify the nature of these somatic counteremotions and the manner in which they can alter the appearances by making one intelligible content more vivid than another in one's incidental perception.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, for Aristotle, stimulation to the sense organs creates an impression that flows through the blood and into the heart, where awareness is centered in the living body. As Aristotle states, the heart has "supreme

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<sup>139</sup> *Talks to Teachers*, p. 35. James later notes that "When a resolve or a fine glow of feeling is allowed to evaporate without bearing practical fruit, it is worse than a chance lost: it works positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge." (p. 36) This is the road to *akrasia*.

control” since it is “the source both of the sensitive and nutritive soul,” and “the soul is, as it were, set aglow with fire in this part.”<sup>140</sup> Images or sense impressions linger in the blood, although we are typically unaware of them during waking consciousness because they are too faint in comparison to present impressions (just as the stars, although they are still present, are invisible during the sunlit hours of the day). As Aristotle states, “the movements which occur in the daytime [within the body] are, unless very great and violent, lost sight of in contrast with the waking movements, which are more impressive. In sleep the opposite takes place, for the even trifling movements seem considerable.” (*On Prophesying by Dreams*, 1, 463a 7; brackets by Beare)

According to Aristotle’s explanation of dreaming, upon falling asleep the sense organs become inactive and these faint residual impressions come to be noticed. As they flood into the heart the dreamer mistakes them for actual perceptions. Aristotle states, “when one is asleep, in proportion as most of the blood sinks inwards to its fountain [the heart], the internal [sensory] movements... accompany it inwards.” (*On Dreams*, 3, 461b 11; brackets by Beare.) Furthermore, the relative disorder of the presentations in dreams is explained, from this perspective, on the grounds that the residual impressions get distorted and re-arranged in comparatively random combinations as the blood moves toward the heart. Consider this passage, which I quote at length since similar principles account for our perceptual experience while we are awake:

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<sup>140</sup> *On Youth and Old Age* 3, 469a 4; and 4, 469b 16.

“From this it is manifest that the stimulatory movements based upon sensory impressions, whether the latter are derived from external objects or from causes within the body, present themselves not only when persons are awake, but also then, when [asleep], with even greater impressiveness. For by day, while the senses and the intellect (*dianoias*) are working together, they (i.e., such movements) are extruded from consciousness or obscured, just as a smaller is beside a larger fire, or as small beside great pains or pleasures, though, as soon as the latter have ceased, even those which are trifling emerge into notice. But by night [i.e. in sleep] owing to the inaction of the particular senses, and their powerlessness to realize themselves, which arises from the reflux of the hot from the exterior parts to the interior, they [i.e., the above ‘movements’] are borne in to the head quarters of sense-perception, and there display themselves as the disturbance (of waking life) subsides. We must suppose that, like the little eddies which are being ever formed in rivers, so the sensory movements are each a continuous process, often remaining like what they were when first started, but often, too, broken into other forms by collisions with obstacles. This [last mentioned point], moreover, gives the reason why no dreams occur in sleep immediately after meals, or to sleepers who are extremely young, e.g. to infants. The internal movement in such cases is excessive, owing to the heat generated from the food. Hence, just as in a liquid, if one vehemently disturbs it, sometimes no reflected image appears, while at other times one appears, indeed, but utterly distorted, so as to seem quite unlike the original; while, when once the motion has ceased, the reflected images are plain and clear; in the same manner during sleep the phantasms, or residuary movements, which are based upon the sensory impressions, become sometimes quite obliterated by the above described motion when too violent; while at other times the sights are indeed seen, but confused and weird, and the dreams [which then appear] are unhealthy, like those of persons who are atrabilious, or feverish, or intoxicated with wine. For all such affections, being spirituous, cause much commotion and disturbance. In sanguineous animals, in proportion as the blood becomes calm, and as its purer are separated from its less pure elements, the fact that the movement, based on impressions derived from each of the organs of sense, is preserved in its integrity, renders the dreams healthy, causes a [clear] image to present itself, and makes the dreamer think, owing to the effects borne in from the organ of sight, that he actually sees, and owing to those which come from the organ of hearing, that he really hears; and so on with those also which proceed from the other sensory organs.” (*On Dreams* 3, 460b 27 – 461a 31; brackets by Beare)

Like many other passages in Aristotle’s biologically based works, this passage is packed with important elements, including clues to Aristotle’s explanation of voluntary attention, *akrasia* or weakness of will, incidental perception, practical



reasoning, the relationship between the activity of the Divine Mind and that of the individual human mind, and more. We will return to some of these features later. For now I want to elucidate the somatic aspects of incidental perception and the efforts of attention through which one voluntarily masters and structures the appearances. It is through efforts such as these that one takes possession of oneself and becomes an autonomously responsible being.

Recall that the “proper symmetry” (*rhuthmon*) of the body’s constitution provides for the natural growth and unfolding development of the “fetation,” and for the developed animal’s voluntary self-motions. Likewise, the symmetry of active and passive powers in the organism’s sense organs, blood, and heart provides for (a) the absorption of the stimulus in the form of a sense impression, (b) the propagation of the impression through the blood and into the heart, and (c) the association of the present impression with the residual impressions of past experiences lingering in the blood. In this way, the stimulus triggers a process through which the image that manifests the intelligible content of incidental perception comes to be present in the heart and apprehended in the soul.

Taking on the impression depends upon both the stimulus itself and the condition of the sense organ that receives it. The propagation of the impression through the blood re-awakens and accumulates the faint associated residual impressions of past experience. The explicit or subliminal presence of these faint impressions alters how one is likely to apprehend the presently perceived particular, and thus alters the content of incidental perception. For example, past experiences of eating pastries leave residual impressions of their pleasurable taste. Upon seeing a

pastry, if these residual images of the taste of pastries are re-awakened, the pastry appears to me as pleasurable to eat.

Now typically one does not consider these residual images of the pastry's taste as likenesses of past pastry-eating experiences – that is, there is not an explicit episode of remembering how some particular pastry tasted. Rather, the subliminal re-presentation of the residual images of what pastries taste like, combined with the present perception of what the pastry looks like, establishes an expectation that structures the incidental perception of the pastry one is about to eat. Thus, I perceive the pastry as a tasty treat and am disposed to eat it. On other hand, if the blood is more fully saturated with associated residual images of the sight of myself overweight, and the unpleasant bloated feeling and toothaches that accompany stuffing oneself with sweets, or if images of this kind are not as faint as the pleasant associations, I will perceive the pastry as fattening and will be disposed to avoid it. When I am straining to attend to the fact that the pastry is fattening, and to fight against the desire for its pleasurable taste, I am straining to produce counteremotions that re-awaken residual images that will associate the pastry with things I want to avoid. I am trying to alter the symmetry of powers within the body (like the toy cart steering itself by altering the sizes of its wheels: recall §2.1 above).

The ways in which these associations influence the content of incidental perception will be considered later (e.g., §2.3.4). For now I want to emphasize that the propagation of the present sense impression through the blood, and the process of “putting together” the image in which I think the form that is the content of the incidental perception, both take place *mechanically*, in accordance with the

“symmetry” of the active and passive powers in the body. Our capacity to alter and shape our habitual mode of perception – to exploit the mechanical powers of the body with rational intelligence – is based in the plasticity of our organic material, the malleability of the symmetry of active and passive powers.

Aristotle’s account of recollection provides helpful clues here.<sup>141</sup> In *On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, Aristotle describes the way that nature (*physis*) and habit (*ethos*) combine in the processes through which associated psychosomatic movements trigger one another in a sequence that leads from a mnemonic token to a sought-for memory: “Recollections result because this or that motion naturally comes about after this or that other one; if this is by necessity, it is clear that whenever one is set in motion in that way, one will be set in motion also in this way, but if it is not by necessity but from habit, one will be set in motion this way for the most part.” (*On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 451b 10; trans. Sachs)<sup>142</sup> In some instances we recollect without effort and without intentionally searching. As Beare notes, “The train of ideas is part of the mechanism of nature, which the will avails itself of, but which may lead to recollection without an effort of will.”<sup>143</sup>

Additionally, we should note, the mechanisms of nature may operate *against* the will and compel the prolongation of irrational passions or discursive reasoning that the agent cannot discontinue. The following passage is critical:

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<sup>141</sup> I should note that the subliminal association I have been referring to above is not the same process as recollection. The latter is an explicit and intentional “searching” (*zetêsis*) for a residual image in the body that is the likeness of some past experience that one cannot presently remember. Here I am comparing the principles that govern the somatic elements of this intentional process and those that govern the spontaneous processes that structure incidental perception in ordinary circumstances.

<sup>142</sup> Also see *Topics* VIII.14, 163b 24ff.

<sup>143</sup> Note in Beare’s Oxford translation at 451b 24. See Ross (ed.) *Student’s Oxford Aristotle* Vol. III.

“That the affection is corporeal, i.e. that recollection is a searching for an ‘image’ in a corporeal substrate, is proved by the fact that in some persons, when, despite the most strenuous application of thought (*dianoian*), they have been unable to recollect, it [that is, the effort at recollection] excites a feeling of discomfort, which, even though they abandon the effort at recollection, persists in them none the less; and especially in persons of melancholic temperament. For these are most powerfully moved by presentations. The reason why the effort of recollection is not under the control of their will is that, as those who throw a stone cannot stop it at their will when thrown, so he who tried to recollect and ‘hunts’ [after an idea] sets up a process in a material part, [that] in which resides the affection. Those who have moisture around that part which is the center of sense-perception suffer most discomfort of this kind. For when once the moisture has been set in motion it is not easily brought to rest, until the idea which is sought for has again presented itself, and thus the movement has found a straight course. For a similar reason bursts of anger or fits of terror, when once they have excited such motions, are not at once allayed, even though the angry or terrified persons [by efforts of will] set up counter motions, but the passions continue to move them on, in the same direction as at first, in opposition to such counter motions. The affection resembles also that in the case of words, tunes, or sayings, whenever one of them has become inveterate on the lips. People give them up and resolve to avoid them; yet again and again they find themselves humming the forbidden air, or using the prohibited word.”<sup>144</sup>

Just as a sequence of images may form an explicitly entertained “train of ideas,” so the accumulation of images may subliminally come together and structure and accentuate certain aspects of the immediate apprehension of some perceived object. Thus, on the one hand, the original impression conveys the proper objects of perception: what something looks like, smells like, sounds like, feels like, or tastes

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<sup>144</sup> *On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 453a 15 – 453b 11 (brackets by Beare). It is noteworthy that Aristotle uses the very same metaphor concerning the stone in connection with the formation of character: “[An unjust person can not] stop being unjust and become just merely by wishing to do so; any more than a sick man can get well by wishing, although it may be the case that his illness is voluntary, in the sense of being due to intemperate living and neglect of the doctors’ advice. At the outset then, it is true, he might have avoided the illness, but once he has let himself go he can do so no longer. When you have thrown a stone, you cannot afterwards bring it back again, but nevertheless you are responsible for having taken up the stone and flung it, for the origin of the act was within you. Similarly the unjust and profligate might at the outset have avoided becoming so, and therefore they are so voluntarily, although having become unjust and profligate it is no longer open to them not to be so.” (*NE* III.5, 1114a 14-24) See also *Eudemian Ethics* II.8 1224a 17 for a relevant mention of the motion of a stone.

like. On the other hand, particularly when judgment passively follows appearance, the perception's intelligible content is put together mechanically as the impression flows inward toward the heart. The appearance of the proper perceptibles is determined by the stimulus and by the relevant sensory organs. However, in this passive state, the additional question of what the perceived object *is* is also all-but-answered by the symmetry of powers in one's body and the blind mechanical forces of non-rational potency.

Dorothea Frede presents a similar view of *phantasia* as "synthesizing" present and residual impressions, thereby being the faculty responsible for the overall gestalt of one's perception and bridging the gap between our awareness of proper perceptibles and our capacity for abstract thinking (which has its nascent starting point in incidental perception). However, her account seems to overlook the importance of the somatic imminence of the images (*phantasiai*) through which this synthesizing function is performed. She writes, "Since there is no control, no special faculty in the soul, that 'keeps [*phantasiai*; images, presentations, appearances] in order', *phantasiai* can become mere appearances that drift in and out of consciousness, reappear in dreams, or delude us in a state of fever."<sup>145</sup> It is my contention that (a) we re-arrange and set the images in order when we exercise voluntary attention and discursive reasoning (*logismos, syllogismos, dianoia*), and (b)

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<sup>145</sup> "The Cognitive Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle," in *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Nussbaum and Rorty), 285-286. Also compare her statement that "Free-floating items that come to my mind when I contemplate, say, sunsets in general are mere images, while memories are images that are likenesses of something retained from the past with the association of the time-lapse." (p. 285) Whether the images in question are vehicles of contemplation, memory, daydreaming, or practical reasoning, as we have seen, they do not float freely in some frictionless immaterial space but move and "float" in the material medium of the body (specifically, the blood), like eddies in a river (see *On Dreams* 3, quoted above). Therefore, their motion is governed according to the symmetry of non-rational active and passive powers in the body.

whether or not we are intentionally concentrating our attention in these ways, the powers that keep the images in order are *bodily* powers (ultimately, the hot, cold, moist, and dry).

We will consider (a) discursive reasoning (more specifically, practical reasoning) in the next chapter. To get a glimpse of (b) the role of the body in structuring the content of our perception independently of reason, recall Aristotle's use of the automata metaphor and the three parallels between their functioning and ours: (1) in one sense the source of motion is external, (2) in another sense the source of motion is internal, (3) the motion is a necessary sequence of events. Here too Aristotle provides a similar example: the residual sense impressions and the active impressions of present sensory experience "are so related [in general] that if anything move the blood, some one sensory movement will emerge from it, while if this perishes another will take its place; while to one another also they are related in the same way as the artificial frogs in water which severally rise [in fixed succession] to the surface in the order in which the salt [which keeps them down] become dissolved." (*On Dreams* 3, 461b 12; brackets by Beare) Thus, images drift in and out of consciousness, reappear in dreams, or become deranged through fever on account of their somatic imminence. And their instrumental role in synthesizing the contents of incidental perception is grounded in the same bodily causes.

Now, let us re-connect this discussion to the six particular circumstances of the action mentioned in the previous section of this chapter: the agent, the action, the patient, the instrument, the purpose, and the manner. For an action to be voluntary, Aristotle says, the agent must have each of these factors in view as he acts (and have

the power to refrain from the action). We have been speaking thus far of the incidental perception of trees and pastries and so on. But one's recognition of the six features of action is also an instance of incidental perception. The way in which one conceives of oneself, the action, the patient, and so on, are also put together in accordance with the same principles as have been described above. This is true of our perception of the circumstances of our own actions and of the actions of other people.

Recall from above that individuals who have established the mode of perception integral to virtue generally have the incidental perception of the situation put together in a way which accords with virtue right from the moment of apprehending the situation. The rest of us must establish countermotions to alter our perception so that it harmonizes with the right set of considerations. Others do nothing to counteract or re-assess the appearances and simply follow them unthinkingly. In this sense, the problem with those who are morally corrupt, weak-willed, or practically inept is that their perceptions are absorbed into a network of all the wrong predicates, and / or they do nothing to counteract this condition. The reason this takes place is that the bodily medium through which sense data are transmitted to the center of awareness has been habituated to automatically associate, say, pastry with tasty things, alcohol with good times, etc. The required countermotion is a willful act of voluntarily searching out, re-vivifying, and re-arranging the faint residual sense impressions. Acts of voluntary attention, like processes of "searching" (*zetêsis*) such as recollection and deliberation, are intentional acts as opposed to the usual passive submission to the happenings that mechanically construct one's perception.

In this section we have seen that, for Aristotle, the somatic imminence of the “images” through which we apprehend intelligible contents is instrumental in determining our modes of incidental perception. This is important for several reasons, among them being the fact that our incidental perception of the six factors of action is essential to the voluntariness of what we do, and to the actions we tend to take. In the next section we will further investigate the nature of *phantasia* (“imagination”) and the ways in which sheer presentation and incidental perception or interpretation are related.

### 2.3.3 *Phantasia* and Incidental Perception

*Phantasia* has an important role in Aristotle’s explanation of the voluntary actions of human beings and non-human animals, the experience of emotions, perception, and a variety of cognitive activities involving rational thought – deliberation, contemplation, and recollection to name a few. However, Aristotle’s account of *phantasia* also gives rise to many questions. Typically translated as “imagination,” *phantasia* is the faculty in virtue of which “images” or “appearances” or “presentations” (*phantasmata*) occur to us. (*DA* III.3, 428a 1) These “images” are instrumental in discerning and deciding upon a course of action, initiating and guiding action, enabling us to remember and to recollect the past, and in facilitating contemplative thought.

Here we are concerned with how *phantasia* is related to incidental perception. How does the sheer presentation of a thing relate to our perception or recognition of what it is? Is the “what it is” to be included as an element of the “presentation” or



“appearance”? Furthermore, exactly what content is involved in incidental perception? Does incidental perception involve explicit predication (or only implicit recognition)? These questions are important because they concern the mechanics of how our perceptions are put together. As was stated above, if we do not see things correctly, if we do not recognize the true significance of the circumstances of our actions, we may fail to act intelligently and instead act in complete opposition to our deepest values in the pursuit of ends that are entirely idiotic.

Recall from Chapter 1 the two senses of being, employed in singling out *this thing here* and identifying *what it is* – e.g., “This thing here is a horse” or “Socrates is a man.” These are the elements of acts of predication or categorization (*katégorien*). As Porphyry notes at the opening of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categories*, this Greek term originally referred to the accusation phase of a trial (as opposed to the *apologia* – the defense speech).<sup>146</sup> Heidegger makes an interesting connection between predication (*katégoria*) and the public market place (*agora*). He writes,

“We translate *katégoria* as a ‘statement about something’... but even then we do not at all capture the full Greek meaning. *Kata-agoreuein* means to accuse someone to his face in the *agora*, the open court, of being ‘the very one who...’ From that comes the broader meaning: to speak about something as this or that, so that in and through our speaking the thing we speak about is put forth into the public view, into the open, as manifest. *Katégoria* is the naming of what something is: house, tree, sky, sea, hard, red, healthy. The philosophical ‘term’ ‘category,’ on the other hand, means a *special* kind of speaking-about. We are able to speak about a present thing *as* a house or a tree only insofar as we have already beforehand wordlessly addressed what

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<sup>146</sup> *On Aristotle’s Categories*, 55, 3, translated by Steven K. Strange (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992), 29. See also Jeffrey Barnouw’s *Propositional Perception: Phantasia, Predication, and Sign in Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics* (Lanham, MD: University of America Press, 2002), 119.

we encounter – i.e., have brought it into our open field of ‘vision’ – as something standing-on-its-own, a thing.”<sup>147</sup>

Heidegger’s “wordless addressing of what we encounter as something standing-on-its-own” corresponds to singling out this thing here, while speaking about it – saying something about what it is – corresponds to identifying what it is. It may be necessary to identify something as a *thing* in order for it to be presented as a thing of a certain kind. Nevertheless, in ordinary experience these do not happen in succession but occur as one event of “being appeared to.” I do not first perceive “thing,” then “blue rectangular thing,” then “book.” I perceive a book immediately, and only next notice its being blue, if I take any special notice of its color at all. To perceive a thing directly, purely, and simply as “thing” or “being” (in the primary sense), to apprehend the intelligible content “being” or “thinghood” apart from any further characterization of this particular being – this is the object of metaphysics, the science of being *qua* being.<sup>148</sup> Here we are concerned with the perceptual predication

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<sup>147</sup> “On the Being and Conception of  $\Phi\Upsilon\Sigma\Upsilon$  in Aristotle’s Physics B, 1” (*Man and World*, 9, No. 3, 1976), 232.

<sup>148</sup> There are different modes of apprehending being *qua* being. Aristotle’s is one of an intelligible contemplation that is not an analysis that distinguishes concepts, or a synthesis that combines concepts into propositions, but a contemplative act of “touching” in which the mind realizes its identity with what it knows. For instance, note the following: “And the thinking that is just thinking by itself is a thinking of what is best just as itself, and especially so with what is so most of all. But by partaking in what it thinks, the intellect thinks itself, for it becomes what it thinks by touching and contemplating it, so that the intellect and what it thinks are the same thing.” (*Metaph.* XII.7, 1072b 18; see also *Metaph.* IX.10, 1051b 17ff; *DA* III.5, 430a 23ff; *DA* III.6, *NE* VI.8, 1142a 25). In this view, pure being is exemplified by the thought of the Divine Mind. Although discursive reason may be necessary to approach this illumination, the thinking Aristotle is here referring to is non-discursive. A different mode of apprehending being *qua* being is more phenomenological. Here one is reminded of Sartre’s description of the direct perception of being in *Nausea*, which begins as follows: “So I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn’t remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things, their methods of use, and the feeble points of reference which men have traced on their surface. I was sitting, stooping forward, head bowed, alone in front of this black, knotty mass, entirely beastly, which frightened me. Then I had this vision...” (*Nausea*, p. 126-127) While Sartre sees pure being as a

of things as things of certain kinds, or perceiving them – in the first instance – under certain descriptions.

Now one problem that arises is whether or not the content of incidental perception is a function of imagination (i.e., appearance, presentation, *phantasia*). Does the presentation of the appearance involve only the proper objects of perception or does it include the incidental objects of perception as well? Let us enter into a brief, but perhaps obligatory, eristic digression to dispute this point. Throughout this chapter I have spoken as if the content of incidental perception is linked with the appearances or presentations. This is particularly true when the faculty of judgment “merely follows” or “gives its allegiance” to the images or appearances. But even when one fights against the appearances, one does not fight against, say, the appearance that the pastry is brown (an object of proper perception). Rather, one fights against the appearance that the pastry would be pleasurable to eat or that eating it would be a good thing to do, and these are not matters of proper perception but of incidental perception.

Another way to put the interpretation here is to say that imagination or appearance (*phantasia*) presents proper objects of perception combined with predications involving incidental objects of perception. Richard Sorabji concurs with this view. He writes that an animal’s perception of a scent that it has learned to follow “already involves *predication*,” perception of the common sensibles (motion, rest, etc.) “already involves perceiving a proposition, in other words *that* something is the case;” “a perceptual appearance is typically an appearance *that* something is the

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“monstrous” and “obscene nakedness,” Aristotle sees it as the immortal and undifferentiated noetic luminosity of the Divine Mind.

case, or, as we would sometimes prefer to say, an appearance *as of* something's being the case." Additionally, "There is not merely an appearance of whiteness, but of whiteness as belonging to something [e.g., a loaf of bread] or as being located somewhere."<sup>149</sup> Also in harmony with this view, Joe Sachs writes "the things that we perceive are already organized in accordance with something intelligible, and one of the things the intellect thinks is the perceptible thing in its wholeness."<sup>150</sup>

However, the position I have taken here has been argued against. For instance, John F. Heil Jr. contends that *phantasia* encompasses only the proper object of perception and not the incidental object of perception. In connection with *DA* III.3, 428a 24, Heil writes "Thus, for this bread to appear white is for me to perceive the bread and believe the bread is white... So, beliefs I hold about an incidental object (Kate's bread) are not beliefs at work in the appearance of the perceptual object (the loaf of bread in front of me)."<sup>151</sup> Heil's analysis here is flawed because, like "Kate's bread," "the loaf of bread in front of me" is an *incidental* object of perception, not "the perceptual object" (i.e., the object of proper perception). The proper perceptual object is "white" or "the white patch." So the first sentence of Heil's in the quotation above should be re-written as: for this white patch to appear to be bread is for me to perceive the white patch and believe it is bread (or to conceive of it as being bread).

In the passage under discussion here, Aristotle is considering the view that *phantasia* is a combination of perception and belief, and he is asking whether

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<sup>149</sup> "Intentionality and Physiological Processes: Aristotle's Theory of Sense-Perception," in Nussbaum and Rorty (ed.s), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 195-225. (The above quotations are from pp. 196-198.)

<sup>150</sup> *Aristotle's On The Soul and On Memory and Recollection* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 2001), 141 n. 13.

<sup>151</sup> "Aristotle's Objection to Plato's 'Appearance': *De anima* 428a24-b9" in *Ancient Philosophy* vol. 23, 2003, p. 326.

*phantasia* involves perception and belief *about the proper objects of perception*: the appearance of white and the belief “that looks white” or “there is something white.” Aristotle answers this question in the negative: when I perceive the white patch I typically do not also form an explicit belief “There’s white” or “I see white.” Rather, I perceive the white patch, but the belief content of my perception is, e.g., “Bread” or “That’s bread.” Note how Heil translates the relevant passage from Aristotle’s *De Anima* III.3, 428a 28: “I mean, [on the view I am criticizing] appearance will be the combination of the belief about, and perception of, something white.” Heil illustrates this with the example of a loaf of bread: I perceive white bread and form a belief about it, namely that it was baked by Kate.

Again, the example and the translation are confused. On the view Aristotle is criticizing, *phantasia* is the combination of a perception of a proper object of perception and a belief about that proper object of perception, e.g., a perception of white, or this white patch, and a belief about its being white. “Something white” in Heil’s translation invites, and is taken in his example, as *something to which whiteness belongs* – the bread – which distorts the meaning. Note Sachs’s translation, with the next few lines of text: “I mean that [on the opposing view] imagination would be an intertwining of the opinion and the perception that something is white, but not of the opinion that it is good with the perception that it is white. In that case the imagining would be the having an opinion of the very thing one perceives [e.g., this white patch], and not one incidentally related to it [e.g., bread or good].” The inclusion of “white” in the “that clause” describing the content of both the perception and the belief ties them both, as it should, to the proper object of sense perception.

This is the view Aristotle is describing and denying. Hamlyn's translation also supports this reading: "I mean [on the view being criticized] that it will be the blend of the belief in white and the perception of white that will be imagination..."

So, in the passages in question, Aristotle is not denying that appearance can include predications involving the objects of incidental perception. He is denying that the belief component of appearance concerns the proper objects of perception. Again, typically the intelligible content of my perception is not "white thing" or some other observation about the qualia. Rather, in the first instance, prior to any conscious scrutiny over what the presented object is, the content of my perception includes the predicative, interpretive, intelligible content of incidental perception. The intelligible content of incidental perception may include an implicit conception of what the perceived object *is*, or the appearance that this object has some other characteristic that goes beyond the relevant qualia. Unlike qualia such as "red" or "warm," which are proper objects of perception, contents such as "good" or "to be pursued" are contents of incidental perception: you do not see that something is good in the same sense that you see that something is red. The present point is that, while these intelligible contents may be thought or contemplated in their own right through the power of intellect (*nous*), they are also be rendered implicitly, in an unarticulated form, through the power of appearance (*phantasia*) – hence, e.g., Aristotle's use of the term "the apparent good." (*phainomenou agathou*, e.g. at *NE* III.4, 1113a 20)

#### 2.3.4 Memory, Association, and Incidental Perception

I have argued for the connection of appearance and incidental perception, but we must ask how the intelligible content of incidental perception can show forth and grow in the presentation of raw sense-data or proper perceptibles. Above I characterized the content of incidental perception as being “put together” as the sense impressions seep through the blood and into the heart. In this process, the present object of proper perception is associated with residual sensory impressions of past experience that linger in the blood. These associations accentuate certain modes of conceptualizing the present particular. To borrow the phrase from William James (quoted in §2.3.1 above), these associations determine the “head of classification” under which the present particular is perceived.

If you want to show this sports car as a source of happiness, you do not show it stuck in a traffic jam, nor do you show the owner writing out the exorbitant payment check (the likely future of most would-be owners); rather, you show this car driving down a winding, curvy road through an exotic mountain landscape (where, as a matter of fact, the tempted potential owner will never go). The context in which the car is presented alters what it is presented as being – e.g., something that will not, or something that will, make me substantially happier. If you want to portray Socrates as a sage, you do as Plato did; if you want to display him as a sophist, you do as Aristophanes did. Contextual cues, playing off of ingrained associations, change how the thing in question comes to be regarded – e.g., as a boon to the city-state or a pestilence. If you want to control the voting public’s perceptions, just show yourself in a hardhat on a sunny day at the plant shaking hands with all-American steel

workers, and tell the world you are best friends with Joe the plumber; next, combine darkly tinted images of your opponent with scenes of violent, stormy seas, sounds of ominous music, and threatening messages spoken in tremulous tones of warning (the latter being an actual add by John McCain's campaign against Barack Obama).

With such examples of corrosive “perception management” we see how the passivity of the faculty of judgment in submission and mechanical allegiance to carefully manufactured appearances can be deadly (although, as it turned out, in the last case the good prevailed). On the other hand, we can also see how uncovering these tactics of perception management, and contradicting the appearances they project, empowers the viewer against their noxious influences. Such political smear campaigns, particularly when they become too transparent, tend to backfire and are perceived as shameful attempts to manipulate public opinion for the sake of political power.<sup>152</sup>

Now, there are surely differences between examples such as those just presented and more basic judgments / appearances such as “that is a table.” But, fundamentally, I am suggesting, the principles through which the appearances manifest intelligible content are similar, with the contextual cues – in both the basic and more complex cases – finally being provided by habitually ingrained associations amongst residual sensory impressions in the body.

Of course, these residual impressions also serve as the basis for memory, and memory, as we should expect, and as Aristotle argues, is central to incidental

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<sup>152</sup> As mentioned above, I will take up this theme in later work, and will consider philosophical methods of perception management that serve as “antidotes” to corrupted modes of perception. (Plato has insightful things to say here e.g. at *Republic* X, 595B, among other places.)



perception (not to mention to other higher cognitive abilities). We must note that the simple persistence of a sense impression is not identical with remembering. To remember is to behold or consider a residual image as a likeness of some past experience. Actively searching for a residual image that one cannot recall is the process of recollection. Nevertheless, for Aristotle, memory and recollection are crucial bridges from pure sense experience to intelligible thinking.

In *Posterior Analytics* II.19 and *Metaphysics* I.1, Aristotle describes how sensory activity provides us with a capacity for intelligible thinking. In both of these accounts, Aristotle describes a progression from sensation, through memory, to experience and the formation of universal concepts. In short, sense-data is stored in the body and as this mass of stored data is ordered and arranged into coherent categories, universal concepts are grasped. Experience ensues as the perception of particular entities is accompanied by the recognition that the particular at hand belongs to a certain category. In other words, the particular is “perceived as” a thing of a certain kind. As Aristotle puts it, “although it is the particular that we perceive, the act of perception involves the universal; e.g., ‘man,’ not ‘a man, Callias’.” (*Post. An.* II.19, 100a 16) This feature of the act of perceiving particulars is critical to our overall concern – moral responsibility and moral psychology – in that choice and action involve one’s incidental perception of the particulars, and those universals which are salient in one’s perception of particulars essentially controls the manner in which one acts in those circumstances.

Aristotle presents the following analogy regarding the cognitive starting-points that enable us to reason:

“[such starting-points] arise from sense perception, just as, when a retreat has occurred in battle, if one man halts so does another, and then another, until the original position is restored. The soul is so constituted that it is capable of the same sort of process.” (*Post. An.* II.19, 100a 10)

I interpret this analogy as follows. A military unit such as a troop of soldiers or a squadron counts as a *unit* – that is, a single entity, a unified whole, one thing (as opposed to a mere multitude of many things) – to the extent that each member plays a particular functional role in relation to the others, e.g., general, scout, front-line fighter, etc. When a retreat occurs, each member gives up his role as a soldier and retreats for his own personal safety. When the functional roles that unify the squadron and make it a whole have been abandoned, there is no longer a military unit – one squadron – but a mere collection of individuals.<sup>153</sup> However, when a retreating individual “halts” and reclaims his position and role as general or scout or front-line fighter, we might say that he is no longer “merely himself,” but is a general or a scout or a front-line fighter. One by one, then, such successive “haltings” restore the original fighting force and the mere collection of individuals once again becomes a unified whole, one thing – a squadron.

Similarly, successive perceptions of particular objects supply one with a collection of sensory impressions stored in the body. These impressions are sorted out into coherent sub-collections of data that constitute wholes rather than mere heaps of individual memories. Such a sub-collection of data is an interconnected network of associations that represents one’s conception of a certain category or universal

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<sup>153</sup> In various places Aristotle makes much of the distinction between a “unified whole” and a “mere heap” e.g. a house versus a mere pile of wood, a living organism versus a mere collection of organ-like parts, and so on.

concept. When such a unified network of residual sense impressions has crystallized, a universal concept has “made a stand.” As Aristotle says, “memories, though numerically many, constitute a single experience. And experience, that is the universal when established as a whole in the soul – the One that corresponds to the Many, the unity that is identically present in them all – provides the starting-point of art (*technê*) and science (*epistêmê*).” (*Post. An.* II.19, 100a 6)

When this has occurred, a perceived individual is not “merely itself,” e.g. *this furry thing here*, but is recognizable as representative of a whole category, e.g. it is recognizable as *a cat*. As the halting of the soldiers restores the unified whole which was present before the retreat, so when many sense impressions halt or come to rest in a single category as members of a kind, the soul has “restored” or “recreated” within itself the intelligible form (universal) present in each of the sensible particulars of the kind. Mind is then able to “think the forms in the images” – that is, to apprehend universals through particular sense-images stored in memory or perceived at the moment.

### 2.3.5 Passions, Appearances, and Judgments

In various places Aristotle points to the fact that passions influence the appearances of things and, consequently, our judgments about them. For instance,

“[W]e are easily deceived respecting the operations of sense-perception when we are excited by emotions, and different persons according to their different emotions; for example, the coward when excited by fear, the amorous person by amorous desire; so that, with but little resemblance to go upon, the former thinks he sees his foes approaching, the latter, that he sees the subject of his desire; and the more deeply one is under the influence of the emotion, the less similarity is required to give rise to these illusory impressions. Thus too, both

in fits of anger, and also in all states of appetite, all men become easily deceived, and more so the more their emotions are excited. This is the reason too why persons in the delirium of fever sometimes think they see animals on their chamber walls, an illusion arising from the faint resemblance to animals of the markings thereon when put together in patterns; and this sometimes corresponds with the emotional states of the sufferers, in such a way that, if the latter be not very ill, they know well enough that it is an illusion; but if the illness is more severe they actually move according to the appearances.” (*On Dreams* 2, 460b 3-15)<sup>154</sup>

Also relevant is the following passage where Socrates says to Glaucon:

“A passionate man should not forget that *all* boys in the bloom of youth somehow manage to sting and arouse a passionate lover of boys, and seem to merit his attention and passionate devotion. Isn’t that the way you people behave to beautiful boys? One, because he is snub-nosed, you will praise as ‘cute;’ another who is hook-nosed you will say is ‘regal;’ while the one in the middle you say is ‘well proportioned.’ Dark ones look ‘manly,’ and pale ones are ‘children of the gods.’ As for the ‘honey-colored,’ do you think that this very term is anything but the euphemistic coinage of a lover who found it easy to tolerate a sallow complexion, provided it was accompanied by the bloom of youth? In a word, you people find any excuse, and use any expression, to avoid rejecting anyone whose flower is in full bloom.” (*Republic* V, 474D)

Stephen R. Leighton has perceptively commented on Aristotle’s view of the influence of the passions on incidental perception in his paper “Aristotle and the Emotions.” To borrow an example from Leighton, at the sound of a distant backfiring car, the coward hears the loud sound (the proper object of perception) as being gunfire (the object of his incidental perception), whereas another person may interpret the same sound correctly as a backfiring car.<sup>155</sup> Leighton states that Aristotle nowhere explicitly reports what explains such changes of judgment involving

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<sup>154</sup> Aristotle also describes the distortion of judgment that is sometimes produced by extreme emotions in the *Rhetoric*, where he compares the arousal of the jurors’ emotions and its distortion on their judgment to the warping of a measuring stick. See *Rhetoric* I.1, 1354a 25ff and I.2, 1356a 16.

<sup>155</sup> Stephen R. Leighton, “Aristotle and the Emotions,” (1982), reprinted in *Essay’s on Aristotle’s Rhetoric* (Rorty, 1994), 214.

emotion.<sup>156</sup> However, this is not the case since there are a variety of passages in which the somatic imminence of both the passions and the appearances is given this explanatory role: passions influence appearances, and consequently judgments, because both passions and appearances are embodied in the same physiological medium. As Aristotle states, “And because imaginings remain within [the body] and are similar to perceptions, many animals act in accord with them, some, the beasts, because of not having intelligence, but others, humans, because their intelligence is sometimes clouded by passion, disease, or sleep.” (*DA* III.3, 429a 5)

For example, the coward’s disposition to be afraid has him expecting danger because he is already in a physiological condition similar to the one that corresponds to being afraid (namely, an excessive chill in the blood), and the residual images of past fearful experiences are either exceptionally numerous or vivid (or both) in his body. Thus, the backfiring sound will be received into a system of perceptual organs already saturated with images of sights, sounds, and bodily “feels” of frightful experiences, and this sound will thus be associated with danger.<sup>157</sup> The subject’s awareness of chilling and tightening sensations in the body will contribute to the automatic classification of the perceived sound among things to be feared. Aristotle says as much in the following important passage:

“But all the attributes of the soul seem also to be with a body – spiritedness, gentleness, fear, pity, boldness, and also joy, as well as loving and hating – for

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>157</sup> As a further indication that Aristotle takes such bodily conditions to underlie states of character and the corresponding modes of perception, note the following: “[Older people] are cowardly and afraid of everything before it happens, since their [bodily] constitution is the opposite of that of the young: they are chilled while the latter are heated, so that the old age paves the way to cowardice because fear is also a kind of chill.” (*Rhetoric* II.13, 1389 29; trans. Sachs)

together with these the body undergoes something (*paschei*). This is revealed when strong and obvious experiences (*ischurôn kai enargôn pathêmatôn*)<sup>158</sup> do not lead to the soul's being provoked or frightened, while sometimes it is moved by small and obscure ones, when the body is in an excited state and bears itself in the way it does when it is angry. [That's the key line.] And this makes it still more clear: for when *nothing* frightening is happening there arise among the feelings of the soul those of one who is frightened. But if this is so, it is evident that the attributes of the soul have materiality in the very statements of them, so that their definitions would be of this sort: being angry is a certain motion of such-and-such a body or part or faculty, moved by this for the sake of that." (*DA* I.1, 403a 18-27, emphasis in original)

When one's faculty of judgment merely follows the irrational cues of an uneducated, physiologically grounded habit of perception, what ought to be one's ruling faculty has been "melted into and mixed with the poor flesh so as to move

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<sup>158</sup> Hicks (1907) translates *ischurôn kai enargôn pathêmatôn* as "violent and palpable incentives." (Also compare the use of *ischura hupolêpsis* – "strong conception" – at *NE* VII.2, 1145b 36.) According to Liddell and Scott (*Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 556), the abstract noun *enargeia* refers to clearness, distinctness, vividness; clear and distinct perception; or a vivid description. The adjective *enargês* thus means visible, palpable, manifest in bodily shape (the last sense, as Liddell and Scott note, especially pertains to the gods when they appear in their own forms, undisguised). The basic notion is thus one of a quality or attribute making a vivid appearance in one's perception (proper or incidental). We will return to this in Chapter 3 in connection with the constitutive means to the good being either vividly manifest as such in one's perception of the concrete conditions of action or disguised by a veil of apparently "squalid particulars" (borrowing a phrase from William James). It is worth stressing that vividness of presentation is not only to be taken in terms of proper perceptibles (as displayed, for instance, by keen visual perception or representations in the visual arts); *enargeia* is also attainable in words and had a central position in ancient Greek literary criticism. As Ian Kidd notes, while historical judgment and handling of evidence are surprisingly ignored by Plutarch, "The prime virtue which Plutarch singles out for the great Athenian historian Thucydides is vivid presentation (*enargeia*)." (Ian Kidd in Robin Waterfield's *Plutarch: Essays*, 149.) Regarding Plutarch's style and his use of vivid presentation, Kidd elaborates that "It is a style of illustration rather than of argument, modeled to create mental images fixed by human examples, by anecdote and simile." (153) As intimated above in connection with the Pythagorean symbolic sayings, the use of narrative in addition to argument – *mythos* in addition to *logos* – is particularly relevant for presenting vivid impressions that alter one's mode of perception and are serviceable in the process of moral development. As Werner Jaeger writes, "The myth is a natural corrective influence, even when examples and parallels are not deliberately chosen from it. It acts as a pattern for life... [and] a collection of authoritative instances." (*Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, vol. 1, pp. 40-41) Throughout this work Jaeger stresses the educational power of the *parageigma*, the example for imitation: "The chief characteristic of every variety of didactic speech is the introduction of an instructive example." (p. 27) For instance, in advising Telemachus to grow up and to take on the manly role of the home in his father's absence, Athena employs the example of Orestes, who had recently won glory for avenging the death of his father, Agammemnon. Jaeger comments, "Lacking the example of Orestes, Athena's advice would have no standard to give it weight and conviction." (p. 33)

together with it.”<sup>159</sup> We will need to say more about exactly how the bodily conditions pave the way for one’s being susceptible or not susceptible to the experience of terror and the other passions. However, we should emphasize the explanatory leverage of the physiological conditions by noting that these conditions are not only essential to explaining how the passions arise but are also essential to explaining how they fade away. Thus, bursts of anger or fits of terror are difficult to dissolve because the moisture around the heart has been set in motion in accordance with these passions and cannot easily be stopped in spite of one’s countermotions against them. For this reason, people with excessive moisture around the heart will have greater difficulty ridding themselves of these emotions. (*On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 453a 15-32)

## **2.4 Conclusion**

So, in this chapter we have seen that (a) incidental perception of the circumstances of action is essential to the voluntariness of action, and to the courses of action one is likely to take in those circumstances; and (b) incidental perception, and our efforts to shape our modes of incidental perception, is crucially influenced by

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<sup>159</sup> This powerful image is presented by Marcus Aurelius in his *Meditations* X.24. Additional insights relevant to the issues here are presented throughout the *Discourses* of Epictetus, who frequently refers to our “power to make correct use of external impressions” (essentially being what I have called “mastering the appearances”). Note the following relevant passage: “As was fitting, therefore, the gods have put under our control only the most excellent faculty of all and that which dominates the rest, namely, the power to make correct use of external impressions, but all the others they have not put under our control. Was it indeed because they would not [put these others faculties under our control]? I for one think that had they been able they would have entrusted us with the others also; but they were quite unable to do that. For *since we are upon earth and trammled by an earthy body and by earthy associates*, how was it possible that, in respect of them, we should not be hampered by external things?” (*Discourses*, I.1, emphasis added)

conditions in the living body; therefore, (c) conditions in the living body are central to moral responsibility and moral psychology.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> I should note that *Physics* VII.3 is overflowing with material of great relevance to the issues presented here.



## Chapter 3

### Practical Reasoning and the Physiological Causes of *Akrasia*

#### 3.1 Introduction: Turning Reasons Into Causes

Ultimately, we do all that we do for the sake of one thing – happiness (*eudaimonia*) or the human good. However, this end is as elusive as it is desired. Therefore, we ought to attend very carefully to what it is and how to attain it. When we do this we are engaged in the process of practical reasoning, the process of figuring out what to do – what to do with one’s life on the whole, and what to do with oneself here and now. In this chapter we will study Aristotle’s understanding of practical reasoning and the ways in which it sometimes succeeds, and sometimes fails, to turn our reasons to act into causes that move us in action.

In outline, Aristotle’s view on this matter has four main parts: (1) deliberation turns wish into choice (that is, deliberation turns one’s desire for some end into a desire to do things that promote the end); (2) deliberation brings about this transference of desire by altering or “marking” the appearances of incidental perception for pursuit or avoidance (see *DA* III.7, 431b 2); (3) this perceptual and affective alteration takes place along with, and partly on account of, specific physiological processes in the living body; and (4) these bodily processes physically necessitate the voluntary self-motions that set us off in the pursuit of our envisioned ends. In this way, reasons to act become the causes of action.

However, there are occasions when our reasoning about what to do does not move us to act, and, instead, we are moved against our better judgment by errant

desires. This condition, weakness of will or lack of self-restraint (*akrasia*), is often described as a clash between reason and desire. However, it is *always* desire that moves us: “the intellect alone obviously does not cause motion without desire.” (*DA* III.10, 433a 24) Thinking alone never causes motion, only thinking that is “for the sake of something” and is thus charged with desire for that something. (*NE* VI.2, 1139a 35) Thinking that is for the sake of something – namely, deliberation – originates from rational wish, and transfers desire from the object of wish to the object of choice. Choice is thus “deliberate desire” – a fusion of intellect and desire – and is the source of action (*praxis*). We will see that, on Aristotle’s view, when deliberate desire is overpowered by irrational desires, the one desire overpowers the other *physically*. In many ways, the following passage from William James encapsulates this entire chapter:

“A tendency to act only becomes effectively ingrained in us in proportion to the uninterrupted frequency with which the actions actually occur, and the brain ‘grows’ to their use. When a resolve or fine glow of feeling is allowed to evaporate without bearing practical fruit it is worse than a chance lost; it works so as positively to hinder future resolutions and emotions from taking the normal path of discharge. There is no more contemptible type of human character than that of the nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer, who spends his life in a weltering sea of sensibility and emotion, but who never does a manly concrete deed... But every one of us in his measure, whenever, after glowing for an abstractly formulated Good, he practically ignores some actual case, among the squalid ‘other particulars’ of which that same Good lurks disguised, treads straight on [the path of that most contemptible character]. All Goods are disguised by the vulgarity of their concomitants in this work-a-day world; but woe to him who can only recognize them when he thinks them in their pure and abstract form!”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> William James, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, p. 14-15. On the “nerveless sentimentalist and dreamer” we can compare Socrates’ description of “those lazy people who make a banquet for themselves of their own thoughts when they are walking alone. People like that, as you know, do not bother to find out how any of their appetites might actually be fulfilled, so as to avoid the trouble of deliberating about what is possible and what is not. They assume that what they want is available, and

### **3.2 Eudaimonia – The Overarching Aim and Its Realization**

“[The true good, as opposed to the merely apparent good,] is what every soul pursues, and for its sake does everything. The soul has a hunch that the good is something, but it is puzzled and cannot adequately grasp just what it is or acquire the sort of stable belief about it that it has about other things, and so it misses the benefit, if any, that even those other things may give.” (*Republic* VI, 505D-E)

*Eudaimonia* – happiness, wellbeing, human flourishing – is the ultimate target or focal point (*skopon*) of all our endeavors. As C. D. C. Reeve points out, the prescriptive force of every choice originates in our wish for this end.<sup>162</sup> We can understand this more clearly by looking at the kind of end or goal that Aristotle takes *eudaimonia* to be. In the second sentence of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that some ends are products or works (*erga*) resulting from activities, while other ends are simply certain activities or ways of being at work (*energeiai*) undertaken for

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then proceed to arrange all the rest, taking pleasure in going through everything they will do when they get it – thus making their already lazy souls even lazier.” (*Republic* V, 458A) These are the people who are attracted by the “idea” of a certain action or endeavor, but quickly become disenchanted when facing the apparently “squalid particulars” attendant to actually realizing the end. As for the effects of failing to identify the nature of happiness and its relevant particulars, note also the following profound stanzas from the Buddhist sage Shantideva: “[B]eings long to free themselves from misery, but misery itself they follow and pursue. They long for joy, but in their ignorance destroy it, as they would their foe... If things could be according to their wish, no suffering would ever come to anyone of all embodied beings, for none of them wants pain of any kind. Yet carelessly, all unaware, they tear themselves on thorns; And ardent in pursuit of wives and goods, they starve themselves of nourishment.” (*The Way of the Bodhisattva*, 1.28; 6.34-35). And in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Zeus proclaims: “Well now, how indeed mortal men do blame the gods! They say it is from us [gods] evils come, yet they themselves, by their own recklessness have pains beyond their lot.” (*Od.* 1.32-4, quoted and discussed in Jeffrey Barnouw’s *Odysseus: Hero of Practical Intelligence*, p. 37) The so-called “Golden Verses of Pythagoras” also insightfully touch upon this theme: “Men shall you find whose sorrows they themselves have created, wretches who see not the Good that is too near, they hear nothing; Few know how to help themselves in misfortune. That is the Fate that blinds humanity; in circles, hither and yon they run in endless sorrows; For they are followed by a grim companion, disunion within themselves...” (quoted in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy* ed. Algis Uzdavinys, p. 37)

<sup>162</sup> “Aristotle on the Virtues of Thought,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (2006), p. 203. Also see Sarah Broadie’s *Ethics With Aristotle*, p. 182.

their own sake. (*NE* I.1, 1094a 1) For example, one generally performs activities such as building a ship or shopping for groceries for the sake of the ship or acquisition of groceries that will result from these activities. On the other hand, more often than not we engage in activities such as philosophical contemplation or, say, swimming for their own sake, without any goal beyond the performance of these activities.

Of course, one might simultaneously go swimming for the sake of its health benefits as well for its own sake, so that some ends are pursued both for their own sake and for their consequences. According to Aristotle, happiness is a way of being at work that is pursued for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else, with the additional feature that, ultimately, all other actions are undertaken for the sake of it. In this sense, *eudaimonia* is the all-encompassing endeavor that unifies the whole of life into a single action. As Aristotle states, “it is equally a mistake to place inactivity (*apraktein*) above action (*prattein*), for happiness is action (*praxis*), and the actions of the just and the wise are the realization of much that is beautiful (*kalôn*).”<sup>163</sup>

But in what sense is *eudaimonia* an action? In order to answer this we need a clear sense for how a multitude of comparatively basic actions can be unified into a single overarching action. Consider a simple example such as going to the post office. In performing this action I stand up, walk to my car, turn the key, turn left, turn right, and so forth. And yet, throughout this sequence of many distinct basic actions, I am also performing one action the entire time – going to the post office.

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<sup>163</sup> *Politics* VII.3, 1325a 30. As we will see below, the ending of this passage has an important relationship to Aristotle’s view of what *eudaimonia* finally consists in (namely, contemplation), and has implications that undercut and dissolve the dispute between “inclusivists” and “exclusivists” as to the role of contemplation in the good life.

When I am walking to my car, I am going to the post office; when I am turning left on Route 1, I am going to the post office, etc. My basic actions change, but my overarching action remains the same.

In an analogous way, from Aristotle's point of view, happiness is an action (*praxis*) and way of being at work (*energeia*) that encompasses all of our undertakings over the course of life and unifies them into a whole. We are always trying to "live well" – this is the one thing we try to be doing in all that we do. We can gain insight into this aspect of action by looking at the methods of imitation (*mimêsis*) through which the poet represents actions. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle states that a tragedy is an imitation of a single action that is complete and of serious magnitude. (*Poetics* 7, 1450b 23) The action of a tragedy is represented by the story or plot (*mythos*), which consists of a combination or arrangement of incidents (*sunthesin tôn pragmatôn*). (*Poetics* 6, 1450a 3) The distinction between an overarching action and its basic constituents is presented here in terms of the single action (*praxis*) represented by the tragedy's plot, and the many incidents (*pragmatôn*) that the plot arranges into a unity.

For example, in Chapter 17 Aristotle notes that although epic poetry involves more incidents or episodes (*epeisodia*) than are presented in a tragedy, even the overarching action of an epic can be stated briefly. Thus, although the *Odyssey* includes many incidents or episodes, its plot is not long and can be stated as follows:

“A certain man is absent from home for many years; he is jealously watched by Poseidon, and left desolate. Meanwhile his home is in a wretched plight - suitors are wasting his substance and plotting against his son. At length, tempest-tossed, he himself arrives; he makes certain persons acquainted with him; he attacks the suitors with his own hand, and is himself preserved while

he destroys them. This is the essence of the plot; the rest is episode.” (*Poetics* 17, 1455b 17-23)

In formulating the *Odyssey* as a single action we might prefer to say that the action that this epic represents or imitates is “the homecoming (*nostos*) of Odysseus.” Nevertheless, the passage above illustrates the distinction between the *Odyssey*’s plot and the particular incidents of which the poet sings. The poet does not say a certain man has been absent from home for many years; he says that Odysseus, whose home is in Ithaca, has been held captive on Calypso’s island for seven years, and so forth. He sings of particular incidents through which he tells a certain story. As in art, so in life: the agent performs his overarching action (*praxis*) by performing a variety of basic actions (*pragmata*). Through the performance of these basic actions, the overarching action is realized. The realization of the overarching action is unchanging and complete throughout the changing and incomplete course of basic actions. I am unvaryingly “going to the post office” over a span of time throughout which I am performing a variety of basic actions.

Now, an overarching action and its basic constituents are related as form and material (respectively). Recalling our discussion from Chapter 1, material is not to be equated with the corporeal *per se*, but with raw material that is arranged so as to become something (other than merely the material that it is). Thus, the material causes of an action are not simply its physical causes; rather, its material causes are the incidents that are combined and arranged into its realization. The material causes of going to the post office are the more basic actions that constitute its realization on a given occasion: getting into the car, turning left on some particular street, turning

right on another, and so on – this is the stuff of which the act of going to the post office is made. The central question of practical reasoning is: what is the stuff of which my happiness or flourishing is to be made?

There are at least two important features of the hylomorphic relationship between an overarching action and its basic constituents: multiple realizability and the relativity of material and form. Just as two objects can be composed of different material and yet have the same form, and two plays may concern different people, present different incidents, and yet have essentially the same plot (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Westside Story*), so overarching actions can be realized in various ways. Thus, I may go to the post office by turning left, then right, whereas someone coming from the opposite direction will do the same thing by doing opposite things – will go to the post office by turning right, then left. As we will see below, when this same principle of multiple realizability is applied to *eudaimonia* and living well it is of great consequence.

Secondly, the relativity of form and material is pertinent here as well. Walking to my car is a basic action relative to my trip to the post office, but is an overarching action relative to moving my left leg forward, then the right, and so on. Ordinarily it is not necessary to attend to such basic actions as the motion of the legs (unless, of course, one stumbles, has an injury, or has not yet learned to walk). The competent driver who knows her way generally does not pay careful attention to turning left here, turning right there on her way to the post office. Once one has mastered a certain basic action, it is possible to look straight to a more overarching action without concerning oneself with the “material” constituents through which the

overarching action is realized. While the novice must attend carefully to each successive motion over the keyboard (“play an A, now a C”), throughout his entire performance the virtuoso can simply attend to “playing Beethoven’s ‘Tempest.’”<sup>164</sup> Likewise, the person who exercises ethical and intellectual virtue is a virtuoso at living as a human being, and can keep his eye on the realization of his overarching aim and can see this good through the particular actions and conditions that constitute his life.<sup>165</sup>

Now, going to the post office is not an action of “serious magnitude.” In stating that tragedies imitate actions that are of serious magnitude, Aristotle links the overarching action of a tragedy with the happiness or wretchedness of the lives of the agents in the tragedy. Actions of serious magnitude pertain to the whole of one’s life,

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<sup>164</sup> A similar observation is made by Amélie Rorty in her excellent paper “The Place of Contemplation in Aristotle’s *NE*.” (p. 381)

<sup>165</sup> The issues raised here are related to the notion of “action identification” as described by Daniel Wegner. He writes, “The central idea of [the theory of action identification] is that whereas people may think about any action in many ways, they typically think about an action in just one way. Although the person could be said to know the action through all its various descriptions, the theory proposes that the person’s *effective knowledge* of the action at any one moment is limited to one identity – usually the identity that the person has in consciousness or has most recently held in consciousness. The person’s conscious identification of the action can range, then, along a dimension from low-level identifications that indicate *how* the action is done (“I’m waving my hand”) to higher-level, *more encompassing* identifications that indicate *why or with what effect* the action is done (“I am signaling the waiting to bring on the cheese dip”). This flexibility in the *naming* of actions suggests that they might be undertaken under one identity and later recognized under others.” (*The Illusion of Conscious Will*, p. 159, emphasis added) Vallacher and Wegner (1987) describe experimental results that support three theoretical principles of their theory of action identification: (1) action is maintained with respect to its prepotent identity, (2) when both a lower and a higher level act identity are available, there is a tendency for the higher level identity to become prepotent, and (3) when an action cannot be maintained in terms of its prepotent identity, there is a tendency for a lower level identity to become prepotent. (pp. 4-5) Aristotle makes a similar observation when he states that sometimes one does not need to consider the minor premise of the practical syllogism since experience and the ability to immediately recognize how to accomplish the task at hand make this additional consideration (the minor premise) unnecessary. (For example, see *MA* 7, 701a 26.) As we will see later in this chapter, the notion of one’s prepotent identification of an action is also related to *akrasia*. For example, the akratic knows that the cake fattening and thus unhealthy to eat, and he knows that it is sweet and thus pleasant to eat. It is the latter identification that constitutes his prepotent identification or, in Aristotle’s terms, effective knowledge. He identifies his action as “eating something sweet” and not “eating something unhealthy.”



and one's life as a whole is itself the one action of greatest and most serious magnitude. Happiness is performing that action – i.e., living one's life – well. As Aristotle states, “*eudaimonia* is a kind of action (*praxis*), namely doing well (*eupraxia*).” (*Physics* II.6, 197b 5) Additionally, “Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life (*praxeôn kai biou*), of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of action (*praxis*), not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions – what we do – that we are happy or the reverse.”<sup>166</sup>

The multiple realizability of overarching actions and the relativity of the overarching / basic action distinction have important consequences here. First, in the “function argument” (*NE* I.7), Aristotle argues that the nature of human happiness is determined by human nature and the human *ergon*. Happiness is therefore one and the same thing for all human beings. We do not simply use the same word for a multiplicity of aims, but fundamentally we all want exactly the same thing – activity of the soul in accordance with the highest and most perfect virtue over the course of a complete life. As Aristotle states,

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<sup>166</sup> *Poetics* 6, 1450a 16-20. Note the following from the commentary of Gerald Else: “Why must the characters [in a tragedy] reach the stage of happiness or unhappiness at all; why must they ‘succeed or fail’? Because... tragedy is an imitation of an action, and ‘action’ means ‘complete action,’ action carried through to a natural goal in happiness or unhappiness.” (*Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957), 241) Else also notes that *praxis* has the connotation of completeness, and *prattein* (“to do,” the infinitive verb from which *praxis* derives) originally has the sense “to get through, complete’ (a journey, an intended result).” (p. 241, n. 73) Similarly, Sarah Broadie comments: “‘*Praxis*’, often a weightier word than our ‘action’, indicates a doing in light of which a person’s life is seen as going well or not.” (Broadie and Rowe, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 261) Thus, *praxis* involves embarking upon an overarching action and carrying it all the way through to the end. Compare also *NE* I.7, 1198a 19, where, after defining *eudaimonia* as a being-at-work (*energeia*) of the soul in accordance with virtue, Aristotle adds that “this must be in a complete life, for one swallow does not make a Spring, nor one day, and in the same way one day or a short time does not make a person blessed and happy.”

“But since [animals and human beings] do not all have the same nature or the same best active condition (*hexis*), nor even seem to, they do not all pursue the same pleasure either, though they all pursue pleasure. But perhaps it is even the case that people [all of whom do have the same nature] pursue not what they think they do or would say they do, but [we all pursue] the same pleasure, since all things have in their nature something divine [and this is what they pursue].” (*NE* VII.13, 1153b 29)

Because we all have the same nature, ultimately we all pursue the same thing – namely, the fulfillment of the divine part of our nature in its complete being-at-work (*energeia*) in accordance with virtue or excellence (*aretê*). This fulfillment encompasses possessing, and putting ourselves to work in accordance with, intellectual virtue (which also presupposes physical health and ethical virtue). Now, the uniform and objective nature of happiness makes it possible for people to fail to understand what happiness truly is and to pursue it through the wrong means. However, it does not imply that there is some one prescribed life-course that must be followed in order for a person to flourish or be happy.

To understand this, imagine a classroom of students who each begin an exam by writing their names. In one sense they all do the same thing – each one writes down his or her own name – but in another sense they all do something unique – each one writes down a unique name. Likewise, our nature moves us all to do the same thing – to live well by exercising our souls in accordance with virtue – but we each have to do something unique to realize that overarching aim.<sup>167</sup> Spelling a word is not something one deliberates about, because it is always done in a fixed way. (*NE* III.3,

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<sup>167</sup> Compare the following from Shunryu Suzuki’s *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*: “There is no way set up for us. Moment after moment we have to find our own way. Some idea of perfection, or some perfect way which is set up by someone else, is not the true way for us. Each one of us must make his own true way, and when we do, that way will express the universal way. This is the mystery.” (p.136)

1112b 2) However, there can be no set prescription for spelling out *eudaimonia* in the actions that one takes in life since the circumstances in which these actions must take place are particular and vary intractably.

In its turn, this consequence of multiple realizability underlies the features of virtue as Aristotle defines it: “an active condition (*hexis*) of the soul that makes one apt at choosing, consisting in a mean condition in relation to us, which is determined by a proportion and by the means by which a person with practical judgment would determine it.” (*NE* II.6, 1106b 35) In particular, multiple realizability plays a critical part in the fact that virtue is an active condition of the *agent* and is not an attribute of the *action per se*. This is because, even if we generally consider a certain action type to represent virtuous actions, it is not the case that every possible token of that action type is virtuous. For example, telling the truth and paying your debts are generally just actions, but they are not just actions if you are dealing with a madman who asks you to return his weapon and to tell him the location of his next victim.<sup>168</sup>

And so, a basic action that is just when done unto one person is not necessarily just when done unto another. What was courageous yesterday may be rash today because the tides of battle have turned. In saying that courage is a mean between the extremes of cowardice and rashness, Aristotle is not saying that the recipe for courage is equal parts confidence and fear. There can be no pre-established recipe since what is courageous depends on the circumstances. The mean is determined with reference to the circumstances at hand and the agent acting. One can consider staying on target and choosing the mean as analogous to maintaining a set

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<sup>168</sup> See *Republic* I, 331B for this example, where it is used to show that “telling the truth and paying your debts” is not an adequate definition of the Form of justice.

speed while riding a bicycle on uneven terrain. As the road changes from flat, to uphill, to downhill, and so forth, one must sometimes pedal more or less vigorously, sometimes coast, and sometimes apply the brakes all in order to maintain a constant speed. Likewise, holding onto the mean in regard to one's actions and affections will involve a fluctuating degree of intensity along the spectrum of confidence and fear. As Aristotle states, in regard to the active conditions of the soul, "there is some target to which the one who has a rational understanding looks off as he tightens or loosens his grip, and there is some boundary marking the mean conditions which we claim are between excess and deficiency, a boundary in accord with right reason." (*NE* VI.1, 1138b 23-6)

It is therefore necessary to develop an active condition (*hexis*) of the soul that is both stable and versatile. Often translated as "state of character," the term *hexis* derives from the verb *echein* meaning to take possession of a thing, to make something one's own. A *hexis* in the soul is not a passive, inert, static "state," but a dynamic and attentive condition that one makes one's own through an "effortful holding on."<sup>169</sup> In this context, one is holding on to a certain mode of perception, thought, and attentiveness in which one is prepared to bear oneself well in relation to feelings and actions. As an active condition, virtue involves willfully "bearing ourselves well or badly" in relation to passions (*pathê*), which we passively experience and undergo. (*NE* II.5, 1105b 27)

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<sup>169</sup> This phrase, and the translation of *hexis* as "active condition," are drawn from the phenomenal work of Joe Sachs. See his *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics*.

Poignant here is the connection between *hexis* and the stance of a wrestler, which is adopted in preparation for the impact of the opponent.<sup>170</sup> Analogously, we take on a certain state of character by willfully adopting an inner stance, making ourselves attentive and ready for either the impact of an excessively intense passion or a deficit of some passion when a greater intensity is fitting. This is the psychological “tightening and loosening” through which we keep our eyes fixed on the moving target of the mean. Just as the defensive football player aims to tackle the ball carrier, and not Walter Payton or O. J. Simpson *per se*, so the virtuous person aims to hit the mean, not to muster the confidence to fight in battle or the strength to resist a possible pleasure (since in some circumstances these are not courageous or temperate actions). Because the mean is a moving target, it only through such dynamic, versatile stability that one can take hold of it. As Marcus Aurelius fittingly remarks, “The art of life is more like the wrestler's art than the dancer's, in respect of this, that it should stand ready and firm to meet onsets which are sudden and unexpected.”<sup>171</sup>

The foregoing considerations suggest that we have to engage in practical reasoning in order to attain our aim – the human good – largely because that aim must be realized by a multiplicity of actions performed amidst unpredictably changing and varying conditions. These matters (and more) are very beautifully encapsulated in the following critical passage from Aristotle’s *De Caelo* (*On the Heavens*). Because of

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<sup>170</sup> See Debra Hawhee’s *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

<sup>171</sup> Marcus Aurelius *Meditations* VII.61; see also the opening of *NE* III.8. One can recall the comparison of masters of ethical and intellectual virtue to chess masters presented in the previous chapter. They are each poised to take in the presented circumstances in such a way that their hearts and minds spring back and interpret the situation in terms of the right set of considerations.

its importance to these issues, as well as the fact that I have not encountered this passage in any of the literature on practical reasoning, I quote it at length:

“For it is natural that the best-conditioned of all things should have its good without action, that that which is nearest to it should achieve it by little and simple action, and that which is farthest removed by a complexity of actions, just as with men’s bodies one is in good condition without exercise at all, another after a short walk, while another requires running and wrestling and hard training, and there are yet others who however hard they worked themselves could never secure this good, but only some substitute for it. To succeed often or in many things is difficult... In action, again, when *A* has to be done to get *B*, *B* to get *C*, and *C* to get *D*, one step or two present little difficulty, but as the series extends the difficulty grows... [O]n our earth it is man that has the greatest variety of actions – for there are many goods that man can secure; hence his actions are various and [sometimes] directed to ends beyond them – while the perfectly conditioned has no need of action, since it is itself the end, and action always requires two terms, end and means. The lower animals have less variety of action than man; plants perhaps have little action and of one kind only [i.e., self-nourishment / reproduction]. For either they have but one attainable good (as indeed man has), or, if several, each contributes directly to their ultimate good. One thing then has and enjoys the ultimate good, other things attain to it, one immediately by few steps, another by many, while yet another does not even attempt to secure it but is satisfied to reach a point not far removed from consummation. Thus, taking health as an end, there will be one thing that always possesses health, others that attain it, one by reducing flesh, another by running and thus reducing flesh, another by taking steps to enable himself to run, thus further increasing the number of movements, while another cannot attain health itself, but only running or reduction of flesh, so that one or other of these is for such a being the end. For while it is clear best for any being to attain the real end, yet, if that cannot be, the nearer it is to the best the better will be its state.” (DC II.12, 292a 23 – b 20)<sup>172</sup>

In spite of the fact that we aim to sustain one overarching action throughout the whole of life (namely, living well), a complex variety of basic acts are demanded

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<sup>172</sup>Also note: “We may take it as agreed, then, that each person has just as much happiness as he has virtue, practical wisdom, and the action that expresses them. We may use God as evidence of this. For he is blessedly happy, not because of any external goods but because of himself and a certain quality of his nature.” (*Politics*, VII.1; 1323b20. Also see 1325b25, *NE* VII.14, 1154b 27, and *Metaphysics* XII.7, 1072b 26.)

of us if this aim is to be realized. To decipher which particular sequence of basic actions I myself must perform to sustain the overarching aim is the job of practical reasoning, to which we turn next.

### **3.3 Practical Reasoning – Its Origin, Its Object, and Its Efficacy**

The distinction between our overarching aim and the basic actions that constitute its realization gives rise to the need for practical reasoning: the process of achieving a clear conception of our target (*skopon*) – namely, happiness (*eudaimonia*) – and identifying the basic actions to be performed here and now in the realization of that aim. These dual faces of practical intelligence may have roots in the Homeric sense of *noos*, which Kurt von Fritz describes as entailing “a clearly conceived aim and a vision of a way to its attainment.”<sup>173</sup> As Aristotle states, “And intellect is directed at what is ultimate on both sides, since it is intellect (*nous*) and not reason (*logos*) that is directed at both the first terms and the ultimate particulars, on the one side at the changeless first terms in demonstrations, and on the other side, in thinking about action, at the other sort of premise, the variable ultimate particular...” (*NE* VI.11, 1143a 35)

Even though our aim is one overarching action, we must enact a vast multiplicity of particular basic actions to realize this aim – an unpredictable maze of pathways and possibilities for action going every which way. We need a still and unshakable remembrance of our aim, combined with the versatility of the “many

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<sup>173</sup> Kurt von Fritz, “*Noos* and *Noein* in the Homeric Poems,” *Classical Philology*, 38 (1943), 82.

turning” (*polutropos*) mind of Odysseus – “hero of practical intelligence.”<sup>174</sup> One may enter a labyrinth knowing that the exit is northward without knowing where to turn left and where to turn right within the labyrinth so as to emerge at the northern exit. Knowing the general direction in which your destination is located, and knowing how to get there are two different things. Likewise, I may know *what* I want to do (e.g., to uninsultingly explain to you why I am rejecting your proposal), without knowing *how* I am going to do it (e.g., without knowing exactly what I am going to

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<sup>174</sup> I borrow this phrase from Jeffrey Barnouw’s *Odysseus: Hero of Practical Intelligence* (University of America Press, 2004). On the remembrance of one’s overarching aim, Jean-Pierre Vernant recounts an ancient legendary practice: “[B]efore writing was available, the institution of the *mnênôn* (the figure who is responsible for the remembering of the past for the sake of legal decisions) was based on trust in the individual memory of a living ‘recorder.’ Only later did the term come to refer to the magistrates responsible for the preservation of written records. But the role of the *mnênôn* was not restricted to the legal context. Gernet points out that it derived from a religious practice. According to legend, the *mnênôn* acts as a servant to a hero. His function is to remind his master constantly of a divine task, the forgetting of which would lead to death (Plutarch, *Greek Questions*, 28).” (*Myth and Thought Among the Greeks*, p. 427, n. 3) On the versatility of the many-turning mind and its capacity to identify “the way” amidst the intractable variations of particular circumstances, we can note the famous opening of Lao Tzu’s *Tao Tê Ching*, which Arthur Waley translates: “The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way.” Waley’s accompanying note reads: “The Realists demand... an ‘unvarying way’ of government, in which every act inimical and every act beneficial to the State is codified and ‘mated’ to its appropriate punishment or reward. The Taoist replies that though there does exist... ‘an unvarying Way’, it cannot be grasped by the ordinary senses nor described in words... The whole doctrine of Realism was founded on the conviction that just as things which issue from the same mould are mechanically identical, ‘cannot help being as they are’, so by complete codification, a series of molds (*fā*), can be constructed, which will mechanically decide what ‘name’ (and consequently what reward or punishment) should be assigned to any given deed.” (*The Way and Its Power*, p. 141-142) The Zen Master Zhaozhou (Joshu) is said to have presented a relevant metaphor: “A clay Buddha cannot cross water; a bronze Buddha cannot get through a furnace; a wooden Buddha cannot get through fire.” (Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind*, p. 75) Whatever set teaching or pre-established prescription for action you possess, in some circumstances it will not work. This is essentially Aristotle’s point that there is limited precision to be attained in ethical discourse since action is concerned with particulars and the particulars are variable. Socrates makes a related point at *Republic IV*, 426E ff where he compares the futility of creating individual laws for every situation to cutting off the Hydra’s heads: as soon as one situation is covered by law, some exception or variation requiring a new law will sprout up (the only ultimate and set laws that must be given, he says, being those that come from Apollo concerning sacred matters). As mentioned above, this is why virtue is something inhering in the agent and not the action. Thus, after presenting Joshu’s metaphor, Suzuki later adds “Joshu’s statement about the different Buddhas concerns those who direct their practice towards some particular Buddha [that is, some particular image and formulation of Buddhist teaching]. One kind of Buddha will not serve your purpose completely. You will have to throw it away sometime, or at least ignore it. But if you understand the secret of our practice, wherever you go, you yourself are ‘boss.’ No matter what the situation, you cannot neglect Buddha, because you yourself are Buddha. Only this Buddha will help you completely.” (p. 84)



say).<sup>175</sup> More generally, we may intend to live a good and happy life, and may even formulate some abstract conception of what such a life would consist in, but, submerged in the particularities in relation to which we must act, we may still lack the perceptual insight required for wisely choosing what to do. As Aristotle states in a related context, “such things are in the particulars, and the judgment is in the perceiving.” (*NE* II.9, 1109b 25) Practical reasoning – more specifically, deliberation – is the intellectual process of searching for the way to move through that maze of possible actions so that one lives a good and happy life.

Now, Aristotle characterizes the object of deliberation more narrowly and specifically. As Aristotle describes in *NE* III.3, one does not deliberate about eternal things (e.g., the organization of the cosmos or the incommensurability of the diagonal and the side of the square), or about things that always happen in the same way (e.g., solstices and the rising of the stars), or about irregular occurrences that sometimes happen in one way and sometimes in another (e.g., draughts and rain), or about things

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<sup>175</sup> This problem of knowing *what* you want to do but not knowing *how* to do it raises profound issues when applied to the case of articulating one’s own thoughts. Through his characteristic method of examination (*elenchos*), Socrates continually shows his interlocutors that they have mistaken their sense of what they want to say for clear knowledge of how to actually say it. Hence, after numerous frustrated attempts to articulate a definition of holiness, Euthyphro finally tells Socrates “I have no way of telling you what I have in mind.” (*Euthyphro*, 11B) Because Socrates awakens his interlocutors by bringing them into this strange condition – simultaneously being aware of (a) what you mean to say and (b) your inability to say it – Meno compares Socrates to a stingray that numbs its victim, and, amidst his own floundering attempts to define virtue, says “My mind and my lips are literally numb, and I have nothing to reply to you.” (*Meno* 80A) Meno intensifies our appreciation of this predicament by asking “But how will you look for something [e.g., a statement that captures the essence of virtue] when you don’t in the least know what it is? How on earth are you going to set up something you don’t know as the object of your search? To put it another way, even if you come right up against it, how will you know that what you have found is the thing you didn’t know?” Socrates elaborates: “Do you realize that what you are bringing up is the trick argument that a man cannot try to discover either what he knows or what he does not know? He would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is to look for.” (80D-E) Socrates addresses this so-called “trick argument” by introducing the Platonic doctrine that learning is recollection of innate knowledge, so that we do already possess what we are looking for in one sense but not in another.

that come about by chance (e.g., finding treasure), or about actions performed by another (e.g., a Spartan would not deliberate about the governing of the Scythians), or about things that one does oneself but are always done in the same way (e.g., the spelling of a word), or about particulars (e.g., whether a particular item is a loaf of bread or whether it has been sufficiently baked, things of this kind falling under sense perception). Instead, Aristotle assigns three characteristics to the objects of deliberation: they are actions that (i) promote our ends, (ii) are within our power, and (iii) are not always undertaken in the same way. (*NE* III.3, 1112a 22ff) It is these actions that are chosen.<sup>176</sup>

Here we are concerned with the distinction between the source of deliberation and that in which deliberation terminates, namely wish and choice (respectively).

With regard to this distinction Aristotle states,

“[W]ishing is rather for an end, while choice is of things that are related to the end; for example, we wish to be healthy, but we choose those things by means of which we will become healthy, and we wish to be happy and say so, while it would not fit the meaning to say we choose to be happy, since, universally, choice seems to be concerned with things that are up to us [that is, basic actions that we have the ability to perform “straightaway”].” (*NE* III.2, 1111b 28)<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> The above three features of the object of deliberation are related to a vast array of issues that I cannot go into here. In short, the first involves to the distinction between constitutive and productive means to an end; the second is related to Aristotle’s distinction between degrees of power (*dunamis*) (referred to in Chapter 2 with Aristotle’s example of the sleeping, inactive, and active geometers); and the third is connected to Aristotle’s view that ethical philosophy is necessarily limited in its precision (referred to in the introduction above, and touched upon briefly above in connection with Lao Tzu, et al.).

<sup>177</sup> Confusion over this distinction leads people to yearn for the fulfillment of their wishes without directing themselves toward the relevant basic actions that are within their power, the seemingly “vulgar concomitants” and “squalid particulars” that are the very means to their ends (borrowing James’ terms from the opening of this chapter). As mentioned in the “Golden Verses of Pythagoras,” they fail to see “the Good that is too near.” As the Confucian philosopher Mengzi (Mencius) notes, “The Way lies in what is near, but people seek it in what is distant; one’s task lies in what is easy, but people seek it in what is difficult. If everyone would treat their parents as parents and their elders as elders, the world would be at peace.” (4A11.1, *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional*

So wishing is a desire for some apparent good, while choice is a desire for doing what is related to that apparent good as productive or constitutive means to its realization. It is through deliberation that we identify those basic actions, and our desire for the end is transferred to those actions as means. The latter desire – deliberative desire – is choice.

But what sort of process is deliberation? How does deliberation enable us to identify the means to our ends, and to transfer our desire from the former to the latter, resulting in choice, which, according to Aristotle, is the moving cause of action? Like recollection, deliberation is a process of “searching” (*zetêsis*) that involves images.<sup>178</sup> Whereas recollection involves moving through a mnemonic sequence of images, or a “train of thought,” that terminates in a sought-for memory, deliberation

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*Commentaries* (Hackett, 2008), Bryan W. Van Norden, p. 95; see also 6B21ff). World peace is the higher-level description of what is wished for, which is constitutively understood here as filial piety among human beings. Instead of exhibiting filial piety in their relations to individual persons by treating parents as parents and elders as elders, people seek to establish world peace through other, more difficult means that are not specified in terms of relevant basic actions (e.g., re-organizing society). In effect, they “think globally” but do not know how to “act locally.” They all wish and no choice. In this way we become the nerveless sentimentalists and dreamers, the lazy people who make a banquet for themselves when thinking about their wishes, but do not deliberate about and perform the “manly concrete deeds” that must be done to realize those wishes (as mentioned in the quotations at the opening of this chapter). Such a failure to identify the appropriate concrete bases for action is intimated in the following passage from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*: “A worker in 1830 is capable of revolting if his salary is lowered, for he easily conceives of a situation in which his wretched standard of living would be not as low as the one which is about to be imposed on him. [That is, his present experience gives him knowledge that is referenced to concrete particulars that constitute a higher standard of living than the one about to be imposed upon him (although even now he could surely abstractly formulate the thought “I could be in even better conditions than I am in at present”).] But he does not represent his [present] sufferings to himself as unbearable; he adapts himself to them not through resignation but because he lacks the education and reflection [and experience] necessary for him to conceive of a social state [in terms of concrete particulars] in which these sufferings would not exist [although he can surely abstractly formulate the concept “perfect city-state”]. Consequently *he does not act*. Having gained control of Lyon after a riot, the workers at Croix-Rousse do not know what to do with their victory; they return home bewildered, and the regular army has no trouble overcoming them.” (p. 435, emphasis in original)

<sup>178</sup> See *NE* III.3, 1112b 15-24; *NE* VI.9, 1142a 32; *On Memory and Recollection*, 2, 453a 14.

involves a rationally governed sequence of images that terminates in a sought-for means to one's end. Deliberation amounts to the construction of an implementation hierarchy, a sequence of necessary and sufficient conditions for the fulfillment of the aim.

Aristotle compares deliberation with the use of a geometrical diagram, where “what comes last in an analysis is what comes first in the synthesis.” (*NE* III.3, 1112b 23)<sup>179</sup> Likewise, the last step of deliberation coincides with the first step of action, and the series of necessary conditions is recapitulated in the reverse order by a series of actions or necessary consequences of action. For example, Aristotle outlines the deliberative process through which a physician brings about health as follows:

“The healthy subject is produced as the result of the following train of thought:- since *this* is health, if the subject is to be healthy *this* must first be present, e.g. a uniform state of the body, and if this is to be present, there must be heat; and the physician goes on thinking thus until he reduces the matter to a final something which he himself can produce. Then the process from this point onward, i.e. the process towards health, is called a ‘making.’... The heat in the movement [of the physician’s hands rubbing the patient’s flesh] caused heat in the body, and this is either health, or a part of health, or is followed by a part of health, or by health itself. And so it is said to cause health, because it causes that to which health attaches as a consequence.” (*Metaph.* VII.7, 1032b 5-28; trns. Ross)

Recall from Chapter 2 that, for Aristotle, our discursive thinking is necessarily facilitated by the use of images. When the deliberator has hit upon something that is within his power to do (and to do without further preparations or investigation into how it is to be done), his deliberation has resulted in the “deliberative image.” In this

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. *DA* III.10, 433a 16. In natural contexts, as well as in cases of conscious deliberation, Aristotle states that “what is last in the order of time is first in the order of being.” Among other places, see *PA* II.1, 646a 25ff, *GA* II.5, 741b 17-24, and *DA* III.5, 430a 21. This will return in the Epilogue below.

way, his deliberation “marks” what is perceived or imagined for pursuit or avoidance. (*DA* III.7, 431b 2) The deliberative image shows the particular in the aspect or under the description that makes it serviceable as a means to one’s end.

For example, I may frequent a park in which I ordinarily perceive the stones simply as stones or as decorative items. However, if I am being attacked in this park I may perceive the same stones as potential weapons: for I wish to protect myself and, deliberating about how to fulfill this wish, the usefulness of the stones as weapons will become apparent to me, will become a vivid (*enargon*) intelligible content in my incidental perception of the stones. The stones are thus perceived as a means to my end and the perceptual image is “marked” as something desirable. Alternatively, when, through the deliberative process described above, the physician arrives at the idea of rubbing the patient, no further deliberation into how to do this is required because rubbing is a basic action that he can perform straightaway. At that point, because of its relationship to health, the image or thought of rubbing the patient is “marked” as something desirable to do.

As the deliberative process unfolds, the agent and his affective state are undergoing alteration. Bergson makes this observation nicely: “all the time that the deliberation is going on, the self is changing and is consequently modifying the... feelings that agitate it.”<sup>180</sup> By analogy, consider yourself deciding how much alcohol to drink: when you decided to drink three glasses of wine, you were not in the same state of mind that you will be in when you have finished your third glass. The state of mind that formed the original decision is no longer in place, and one may go on to

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<sup>180</sup> *Time and Free Will*, p. 171.

glass number four and then five. In this example one resolves *not* to do something, but with each successive drink one becomes less and less inclined to stay true to the original intention. Deliberation is a similar but inverse process. One starts with an abstractly formulated resolution to *do* or bring about something, and with each successive step toward the object of deliberation, one becomes more and more inclined to do those particular “manly concrete deeds” that will realize one’s original intention (quoting James again from the opening of this chapter).

Contrary to the widespread idea that reason and desire are fundamentally opposed to one another, reason and desire fuse into one another. The conflict is not between reason and desire but between one desire and another – namely, one generated by reasoning and one not. As Aristotle states, “desires come to be opposite to one another, which happens whenever reason and impulses are opposed.” (*DA* III.10, 433b 7)<sup>181</sup> Rather than being inherently opposed, desire catalyzes reasoning and reason gets into desire and directs its motion. Reason uses desire as the craftsman uses fire, as an instrument that is employed rationally for a particular end. Irrational desire is like a fire left to burn at random. The cook makes use of the fire; he does not simply throw the ingredients into a fire and leave it to the fire to determine what to do.<sup>182</sup> Likewise, given one’s capacity to master the appearances and take hold of the virtuous active condition (*hexis*), one ought to exercise reason to

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<sup>181</sup> This passage and its point are discussed nicely by Jeffrey Barnouw in *Propositional Perception: Phantasia, Predication, and Sign in Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics*. Barnouw writes, “the conflict of reason and desire is always a conflict between competing desires or objects of desire, one of which involves reasoning.” (p. 77)

<sup>182</sup> Recall the passage from [*On Breath*], 9 quoted in Chapter 1.

steer the fire of passion toward those basic actions that promote your long-term interest.

In its essence, then, practical reasoning is not inherently anti-desire – quite the contrary. Practical reasoning intoxicates you with desire to perform the ingeniously devised basic actions that were formerly “disguised” in predicates and incidental perceptions that made them out to be mere “vulgar concomitants” and “squalid particulars” (drawing, once again, from the William James quote from the opening of this chapter). Deliberation unmasks the good lurking amidst the circumstances that we are in here and now, and an entirely different network of predicates and intelligible contents becomes vivid (*enargon*) in one’s incidental perception. One thus recognizes the constitutive elements of the good as such, as opportunities to realize the good. They are available and completely exposed, so to speak, but they are often disguised by a veil of unenlightened predicates and appear to be mere lowly, pedestrian, insignificant, boring particulars. When this disguise falls away, they become salient and are vivid as the constitutive elements of the good, just as, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, Athena appears to Telemachus as the old man Mentor, and later manifests herself to him in her true form.

This unveiling of the intelligible good amidst the particulars of perception is itself a crucial feature of *eudaimonia*. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* is finally identified with contemplation (*NE X*). When the beautiful becomes fully manifest in one’s perception of the particulars, and of the actions that are realized within them, action becomes a means to contemplation. This is described insightfully by Plotinus:

“Action, then, is for the sake of contemplation and vision, so that for men of action, too, contemplation is the goal, and what they cannot get by going straight to it, so to speak, they seek to obtain by going round about. For, again, when they reach what they want [through successful action], the thing which they wished to exist, not so that they should not know it but so that they should know it and see it present in their soul, it is, obviously, an object set there for contemplation. This is so, too, because they act for the sake of a good; but this means, not that the good arising from their action should be outside them, or that they should not have it, but that they should have it. But where do they have it? In their soul. So, action bends back again to contemplation, for what someone receives in his soul, which is rational form – what can it be other than silent rational form? And more so, the more it is within the soul.” (*Enneads* III.8.6)

In beholding the beauty of the action, one’s action becomes contemplation of the beautiful.<sup>183</sup> To push this contemplation all the way through action’s manifestation in the particulars directly into the Divine Mind, to the Beautiful Itself, is complete fulfillment. But because we are compound beings, we cannot be in this condition at all times, but we share in the Divine Mind’s activity in our highest moments (See *NE* X.7-9). We sustain our vision of the beautiful by performing beautiful actions and beholding the beautiful actions of others – *and recognizing them as such*. This recognition is an intrinsically pleasurable *contemplative act*.<sup>184</sup>

In Plato’s *Symposium*, Diotima presents the “Ladder of Love” through which one is said to intellectually ascend to the Beautiful Itself – first through attraction to the beauty of one particular lover’s body, then through successively learning to appreciate the beauty of bodies generally, the beauty of the soul, the beauty of laws

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<sup>183</sup> Although I will not enter into this issue here, the observation above undercuts the longstanding dispute on the issue of whether Aristotle takes the good life to consist solely in contemplation (argued for by “exclusivists”) or whether he also takes it to include the life of action (supported by the “inclusivists”). The entire dispute rests on a misunderstanding of the way in which action is a form of contemplation.

<sup>184</sup> For instance, see *Poetics* 4, where Aristotle describes recognition – the act of beholding an imitation of someone and apprehending it as such, realizing “that’s who this is” – is an inherently pleasurable contemplative act.



and institutions, the beauty of knowledge, and finally one comes face to face with the Beautiful Itself and is initiated into “the Greater Mysteries of Love.” Diotima describes this “final revelation” as a “wondrous vision,” “an everlasting loveliness which neither comes nor goes, which neither flowers nor fades, for such beauty is the same on every hand, the same then as now, here as there, this way as that way, the same to every worshiper as it is to every other.” And whoever had opened his eyes to this vision would gaze upon it “in true contemplation until it had become his own forever...” Furthermore, “it is only when he discerns beauty itself through what makes it visible that a man will be quickened with the true, and not the seeming, virtue...”<sup>185</sup> And when he has brought forth and reared this perfect virtue, he shall be called the friend of god, and if ever it is given to man to put on immortality, it shall be given to him.” (*Symposium*, 209E-212A)

These lines themselves are very beautiful, and are radiant with the very “Form” about which they speak. From Aristotle’s point of view, though, the fact that human beings are compound beings – that is, comprised of body and soul – entails that it is impossible for us as human beings to unendingly maintain the pure vision of the Beautiful Itself alone. For human beings, the pure vision – if it comes at all – “comes and goes,” “flowers and fades.” Unlike the Divine Mind, we grow “weary,” and our contemplation is “intermittent.” So we hold onto the contemplative vision of the Beautiful both through pure contemplation and through the apprehension of

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<sup>185</sup> Compare Aristotle’s claim that the beautiful is the end or goal of virtue. (*NE* III.7, 1115b 12-25)

beautiful particulars *as such*. To adapt a phrase from Wittgenstein, for Aristotle Diotima's Ladder of Love is *not* one we can kick away after ascending it.<sup>186</sup>

Now, above we have seen how practical reasoning involves a use of images that alters our desires. As we discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, for Aristotle, images and desires inhere in the body. Thus, processes involving images and desires involve the body, and have necessary consequences based upon the symmetry of the body's physical constitution. Recollection is a psychosomatic process of searching for an image in a part of the body. (*On Memory and Reminiscence* 2, 453a 14 – b 8) Likewise, deliberation involves the manipulation of images and thus involves physiological processes. Exactly what processes? Aristotle does not say specifically, but we can see that from his perspective these processes, like those of voluntary attention discussed in Chapter 2, would involve the intentional re-arrangement of images in the body producing an alteration in the incidental perception of the particular circumstances of action. In this case, the sought for content is some basic action understood as a means to the fulfillment of rational wish. As mentioned above, the image that conveys this content is constructed, according to Aristotle, in a manner similar to the construction of a geometrical diagram that presents the truth of some geometrical proposition for intellectual apprehension through an image.

As mentioned above, when the deliberative image has been constructed (that is, when the means to one's end has been found out), this results in deliberative desire – that is, choice – and this desire – like all desire and all affections of soul – being partly constituted by physical processes, has a physical power to move the body in

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<sup>186</sup> See *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.54.

pursuit of what is relevantly “marked.” As Aristotle states, “the instrument by which desire cause motion is already part of the body.” (*DA* III.10, 433b 19) These facts concerning Aristotle’s understanding of the causes of deliberate action overturn an important line of interpretation advanced by various scholars concerning the practical syllogism.

### **3.4 The Practical Syllogism**

As mentioned above, intellect (*nous*) is directed at first principles and at particular facts, “what is ultimate on both sides.” Aristotle sometimes represents the sources of action in terms of these two poles of the intellectual or noetic spectrum in the form of the so-called “practical syllogism.” The practical syllogism organizes the description of the agent’s action and its sources on the model of the theoretical syllogism. Like the theoretical syllogism, a practical syllogism is rendered in terms of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. In a practical syllogism, the major premise expresses the agent’s wish for some good, the minor premise expresses the agent’s recognition of a possible means to realize his wish, and the conclusion is the agent’s performance of the relevant action (note: not his judgment that he ought to act in some particular way). This conclusion is said to follow the premises “necessarily” or “straightaway.”

There are a variety of interpretations of just what the practical syllogism signifies. Carlo Natali describes the practical syllogism as “a formal representation of the psychic process that generates action.”<sup>187</sup> However, it must be noted that the

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<sup>187</sup> *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, p. 67.

process of practical reasoning – surely part of the psychic process that generates chosen actions – is not actually displayed in a practical syllogism. The major premise represents practical reasoning’s stimulus (a wish for some end), and the minor premise represents practical reasoning’s terminus (a possible means to that end). The inferential process through which one *discovers* the means and constructs the minor premise is not part of the syllogism. As John Cooper points out, “the practical syllogism is not for the most part conceived of as a form of reasoning at all, but is only a way of expressing the content of the intuitive perceptual act by which the agent recognizes the presence and availability for action of the ultimate means previously decided upon.”<sup>188</sup>

If practical syllogisms do not display practical reasoning, then what sort of relationship holds between the premises and the conclusion in such a syllogism? M. T. Thornton claims that “The relationship of premises to conclusion [in a practical syllogism] is, then, simply this: they [the premises] show what is good about the action [the conclusion] (as the agent sees it).”<sup>189</sup> A similar account is given by Anthony Kenny (1966), who construes the relation between premises and conclusion in the practical syllogism in terms of a “logic of satisfactoriness”: from the premises one infers that a certain action will satisfy one’s desire for the good represented in the major premise. Nussbaum also treats the relationship between the components of the practical syllogism as logical or conceptual: “The relationship between premises and conclusion is, as we have already said, a conceptual and logical one: the aim of Aristotle’s discussion is to elucidate the logical relationships among the concepts of

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<sup>188</sup> *Reason and the Human Good in Aristotle*, p. 46-47; also see p. 55, n. 72.

<sup>189</sup> “Aristotelian Practical Reasoning,” 72.

desire, belief, and action. It is part of what it *means* to want an end that one takes action towards it in certain circumstances; it is of the nature of action that it is determined by a desire and a belief.”<sup>190</sup>

These accounts have much to offer with respect to understanding the intricacies of practical reasoning. However, they all fail to provide any real account of the practical syllogism because, in fact, they are concerned only with the *premises* of such syllogisms. As mentioned above, the inferential process of practical reasoning originates in the major premise and goes no further than the minor premise. That is when one stops thinking about what to do and starts doing it. It is the relationship between *the premises* that shows “what is good about the action (as it appears to the agent).” What is good about walking is that it promotes health, what is good about picking up this stone (right now) is that doing so will threaten my attacker. It is only after deliberation has shown what is good about the action that the agent desires to perform the action and does it. My inclination to walk for the sake of health and my thought that it would be a good idea to pick up this stone to threaten my attacker are representative of the syllogism’s premises, not its conclusion. The conclusion is my act of walking or picking up the stone. These accounts have said nothing about the relationship between the premises and the conclusion, between the content implicit in my impulse to act and my action.

So, in a “practical syllogism,” the transition from the premises to the conclusion is not an inference (either on the part of the agent or someone trying to explain the agent’s behavior). Contrary to the interpretations described above, the

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<sup>190</sup> Aristotle’s *De Motu Animalium*, 188.

relationship between premises and conclusion in a practical syllogism is not logical or conceptual. Instead, when Aristotle states that the conclusion follows the premises “necessarily” or “straightaway,” he means to say that the conclusion – that is, the agent’s action – follows immediately as a result of *physical necessity* when the psychosomatic conditions described in the premises – which are the sources of the action – obtain. As Aristotle states, “when, because of sense-perception [that is, to use Cooper’s phrase from above, the “intuitive perceptual act”], the area around the origin [the heart] is altered and changes, the adjacent parts change also, expanding and contracting, so that by these means animal motion necessarily comes about.” (MA 9, 702b 20) Aristotle presents this view more explicitly and extensively in the following passage:

“Hence it is with good reason that the inner regions and those around the origins of the organic members are fashioned as they are [exhibiting the “proper symmetry” referred to in previous chapters], so as to change from solid to liquid and from liquid to solid, from soft to hard and *vice versa*. Since these processes happen this way, and since the passive and active have the nature which we have often ascribed to them, then whenever it happens that there are both active and passive elements, and neither falls short in any respect of the account we give them, at once one acts and the other is acted upon. *That is why it is pretty much at the same time that the creature thinks it should move forward and moves*, unless something impedes it. For the affections (*pathê*) suitably prepare the organic parts, desire the affections, and *phantasia* the desire; and *phantasia* comes about either through thought or through sense-perception. The rapidity and simultaneity result from the fact that the active and passive are naturally relative to each other.” (MA 8, 702a 7 – 21; my emphasis)

Some of the desires that move within us and actuate our voluntary physical motions are born through a rational use of the imagination, while others originate

from the semi-rational “sensitive imagination.”<sup>191</sup> The former are deliberative desires – that is, choices – and through them our reasons to act become the causes of our actions. At times, however, our deliberative desires are overpowered by desires originating in sensitive imagination. In these instances we know or believe that a certain action is to be avoided (or performed), and yet we find ourselves performing (or avoiding) that very action nevertheless. Here our reasons fail to cause our action because they fail to awaken a strong enough desire to enact the means to our ends. This is the condition of *akrasia*, to which we now turn.

### **3.5 Akrasia: Its Description and Explanation**

To understand any phenomenon we must observe it and explain it. Careful observation leads to a description of the phenomenon, and explanation identifies its causes. For example, it is one thing to discover *that* your car is not working, and another thing to figure out *why* it is not working. On the one hand we “set forth the appearances (*phainomena*)” (*NE* VII.1, 1145b 2), and on the other we uncover the sources (*archai*) and causes (*aitiai*) of those appearances. In the remainder of this chapter, we will consider Aristotle’s description and explanation of *akrasia*. As there is no sustained discussion of the physiological causes of *akrasia* in Aristotle’s extant works, we must put together an Aristotelian explanation of *akrasia* from passages spread throughout the corpus of his writings.

In short, *akrasia* – translated variously as weakness of will, incontinence, and lack of self-restraint – signifies a lack of control or command over oneself that results

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<sup>191</sup> Recall the distinction between rational and sensory imagination from §2.1 above.

in acting against one's own better judgment. Does the akratic or unrestrained person *know* that his action is wrong, or does he only *believe* it to be wrong? Does he know or believe that his action is wrong *while he is acting*, or only before and after the relevant action? These are questions that concern an adequate *description* of *akrasia*. The *explanation* of *akrasia* must go on to identify *through what causes* this phenomenon comes about. Aristotle's description of *akrasia* is often mistaken for his explanation of it. He describes *akrasia* in terms of actions and psychological functions, but for its explanation – as one translator renders the passage – Aristotle tells us to “go to physiology.” (*NE* VII.3, 1147b 6)

Aristotle's description of *akrasia* makes use of two important epistemological distinctions: (1) knowledge possessed versus knowledge in use, and (2) abstract knowledge of universals versus perceptual knowledge of particulars. Each of these distinctions plays a critical role in Aristotle's account of what is taking place when a person acts contrary to his or her own reasoned judgment about what it is best to do. In short, the person's perceptual knowledge of the particular circumstances of his or her action is possessed but not active or at work because it is temporarily overpowered by irrational desires.

In Chapter 2 we encountered Aristotle's distinction between a capacity (*dunamis*), an ability or active condition of readiness (*hexis*) to perform a given activity, and actively being-at-work (*energeia*). (These were labeled P1, P2/A1, and A2, respectively. I will refer to them as the graduated phases of being-at-work.) We considered the examples of a sleeping geometer, one that is awake, and one that is actively working on geometry. Now, as Aristotle notes, “it is not every sort of



judgment that pleasure and pain destroy and warp, such as that a triangle does or does not have a sum of two right angles, but judgments that concern action.” (*NE* VI.5, 1140b 15) This passage goes on to discuss judgments concerning the ends for the sake of which one ought to act (which, in the practical syllogism, are represented by the major premise), the destruction of which leads to moral depravity. In the case of the akratic, on the other hand, it is judgments concerning the particular circumstances of action (represented by the minor premise) that are warped by desire for pleasure.<sup>192</sup>

Take the often-repeated example of the akratic person who indulges in sweets although he knows that he should not do so because they are unhealthy. In terms of the distinctions above, the akratic’s knowledge that this pastry is unhealthy does not spring into action – from knowledge possessed or ready to use, to knowledge that is actually in use (from P2/A1 to A2). Rather, it is temporarily impeded and moves backward in the other direction – from knowledge possessed and ready to use to knowledge possessed only in the weakest sense, like the beginner who struggles to figure out his geometry. So the akratic’s knowledge that the pastry is sweet (and therefore has a pleasurable taste) is blindingly vivid and overpoweringly active in the akratic’s perception of the pastry, being charged with the heat of desire.

This last point concerning the relationship between the akratic’s minor premise and his effective desire is actually worth elaborating since it seems to have

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<sup>192</sup> Aristotle’s view that ignorance of the first principles of action (the major premises) makes one morally depraved was discussed in Chapter 2.2 above. There we were contrasting this form of ignorance with the ignorance of particular circumstances that makes an action involuntary (like Aeschylus’s reported ignorance of the fact that he was revealing secrets). How, one might ask, is the akratic’s failure to know the relevant minor premise at the time that he acts different from that of a person who acts involuntarily? (That it is, in Aristotle’s view, follows from his view that the akratic acts voluntarily though not by choice. See *EE* II.7.) The difference is that the one who acts involuntarily does not possess the relevant knowledge at all, while the akratic possesses it but it has been knocked out of place by irrational desire.

been misunderstood by certain commentators. For there are two different practical syllogisms – more exactly, two different minor premises – that contend with one another in the akratic’s psyche. We must be clear about which of the two minor premises is at play in our discussion, and some commentators seem to have gotten this wrong. Consider this example of Filip Grgic’s: “Thus, for instance, from ‘I should not smoke cigarettes’ and ‘This is a cigarette’ she either does not infer ‘I should not smoke this’ or, on the alternative interpretation, she does infer this conclusion but acts against it. In either case, the explanation of her failure is her epistemic deficiency: her knowledge of the minor, or particular, practical-syllogistic premise is weaker than knowledge of a nonakratic.”<sup>193</sup>

One problem with this example is that it has the akratic *inferring* (or not inferring) the conclusion of the syllogism. However, as we discussed above, the conclusion of the practical syllogism must be an *action*. The conclusion comes about precisely when the agent *stops* inferring what to do and starts *doing* it.<sup>194</sup> A second problem with this example, though, concerns the akratic’s minor premise. The minor premise in Grgic’s syllogism is “This is a cigarette.” It is surely not *this* minor premise that is knocked out of place by desire when the akratic smoker gives in to his habit! He knows all too well that the thing before him is a cigarette, and it is his perceptual recognition of this as a cigarette that is pleasurable to smoke that ignites

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<sup>193</sup> “Aristotle on the Akratic’s Knowledge,” (*Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 47, Number 4, 2002 , pp. 336-358), 337.

<sup>194</sup> In “Some Rational Aspects of Incontinence” (*Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. XXVII, Supp., 1988), Irwin also falls into this problem about the practical syllogism’s conclusion by repeatedly referring to the conclusion as “the third proposition” of the syllogism (e.g., “taste this sweet thing,” p. 53).

his desire to smoke it!<sup>195</sup> As Aristotle mentions in connection with a similar example involving sweets, the akratic's recognition that this thing here is sweet "is at work on him" or "comes into operation" (*autê de energei*), and it is this that rouses his desire. (*NE VII.3, 1147a 31*)<sup>196</sup> To grasp the situation more clearly, let us construct the two practical syllogisms between which the akratic smoker fluctuates. I will call the syllogism that reflects the akratic's actual behavior the "effective syllogism," and the one that he struggles but fails to follow I will call the "ineffective syllogism."

**Table 4: The Akratic's Alternative Syllogisms**

<i>The Akratic's Effective Syllogism</i>	<i>The Akratic's Ineffective Syllogism</i>
Major premise: Pleasurable things should be pursued.	Major premise: Unhealthful things should be avoided.
Minor premise: This is a cigarette (=something pleasurable to smoke).	Minor premise: This is a cigarette (=something unhealthful to smoke).
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Conclusion/Action: [Cigarette smoked]	Conclusion/Action: [Cigarette not smoked]

The four premises in these syllogisms express things that the akratic knows or believes. In particular, the akratic possesses knowledge of both premises in the ineffective syllogism. If he simply did not know or did not believe the major premise that he should avoid unhealthful things, then he would be a depraved individual and

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<sup>195</sup> Cooper presents a similar example in *Reason and the Human Good* that makes the same mistake. He describes the akratic's ineffective syllogism as having the premises "Avoid chocolate (sc., because it upsets the bowels). This is chocolate." He then writes, "appetite intervenes to prevent the necessary minor premise ("This is chocolate") from being tacked on [to the syllogism, thus leading to the akratic's failure to avoid the chocolate]." (p. 50) Again, this certainly cannot be correct. The akratic is well aware that this is chocolate. His appetite does not *interfere* with his awareness of this minor premise, but is catalyzed by and unified with it! The minor premise with which his appetite interferes is *another* minor premise (namely, something of the sort expressed by "This chocolate is unhealthful to eat").

<sup>196</sup> The first translation is by Sachs (2002) and the second is by Kenny (1966, p. 182).

not an akratic. If he simply did not know or believe the minor premise that this cigarette is unhealthful, then his unhealthful action would be involuntary and not an instance of *akrasia*.<sup>197</sup> Why, then, does his action turn out to accord with the one syllogism rather than the other?

In short, his failure is one of voluntary attention (discussed in Chapter 2), and is a failure to produce relevant psychosomatic “countermotions” to restructure his perception and resist his irrational impulses. The akratic perceives the cigarette as pleasurable to smoke rather than perceiving it as unhealthful to smoke (indicated in the syllogisms above by the parenthetical descriptions under which the akratic perceives the cigarette, which shifts back and forth like one’s perception of the duck / rabbit image). His knowledge or belief that the cigarette is pleasurable to smoke is active in structuring his incidental perception of the cigarette. This intelligible content is amplified by his physiology and becomes vivid (*enargon*) in his perception. As a result, his knowledge of the other syllogism’s minor premise – that the cigarette is unhealthful – is ineffective. The ineffectiveness of this knowledge is largely based on the fact that it is not sufficiently grounded in particulars.<sup>198</sup> In Aristotle’s physiology of perception, what this insufficient particularity of the knowledge means is that the images or residual sensory impressions through which the akratic knows the given fact are too scarce, too faint, or not properly associated to render the relevant intelligible content vivid. As was shown in Chapter 2, these processes are

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<sup>197</sup> Recall our discussion in Chapter 2.2 concerning the different kinds of ignorance that make one depraved versus making one’s action involuntary.

<sup>198</sup> In spite of the problems I have just pointed out with Grgic’s analysis of the akratic’s practical syllogism, his account of the ways in which the akratic’s knowledge lacks an adequate basis in experience of particulars is very perceptive and clarifying.

governed by physiological causes. We will turn now to Aristotle's explicit statements that *akrasia's explanation* is to be found through the natural philosophy of the living body.

### **3.6 Aristotle's Physiological Explanation of Akrasia**

At *NE* VII.3, 1147a 24, Aristotle refers to looking into the cause of *akrasia* "from the standpoint of nature (*phusikôs*)." And just below this, Aristotle states that, with regard to the critical aspect of *akrasia*, "the explanation, which one needs to hear from people who study nature (*dei para tôn physiologôn akouein*), is the same as in the case of someone who is drunk or asleep, and is not peculiar to this experience."<sup>199</sup> These passages have been interpreted in various ways. The central question here is exactly what kind of explanation is Aristotle pointing to in this passage? Grgic interprets this passage as referring to the possession or loss of rationality. He writes that what the student of nature will have to answer is "How does the akratic retain her rationality?" (p. 352) He writes, "[The student of nature] sees the akratic eating sweets [and seeming to know that she should not do so] and what he wants to know is whether she is behaving rationally." (p. 355)<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> *NE* VII.3, 1147b 6-9. "Go to physiology" is Rackham's translation of the critical phrase (*dei para tôn physiologôn akouein*). Technically, the earlier part of this passage refers to the transition from ignorance back to knowledge that takes place after the akratic succumbs to his weakness. However, it is undoubtedly the case that the earlier transition from knowledge to ignorance that accounts for the akratic's behavior comes about through the same physiological causes. Given that this temporary ineffectiveness of knowledge is the heart of *akrasia* as Aristotle describes it, the physiological explanation of this ineffectiveness is the explanation of *akrasia*, as Aristotle understands it. We will discuss this below.

<sup>200</sup> In *The Wisdom of Aristotle*, Natali notes a few interpretations of *phusikôs* at 1147a 24 that have been proposed: "more specifically" (Cooper), "starting from appropriate principles" (Guathier), "starting from facts relating to (human) nature" (Hardie, Wiggins, Etheridge). Natali himself agrees with Burnet and Dirlmeier that Aristotle is referring to psychology, i.e. "that branch of physics that studies the human psyche." (See Natali, p. 213 n. 111)

However, it is evident from various passages that this is not the sort of question that the student of nature asks (and that the other interpretations in the previous footnote are also faulty readings of the passage). For Aristotle is clear that the student of nature is one whose job is to inquire into both the formal and material causes of things. As he states,

“But the one who studies nature and the logician would define each attribute of the soul differently, for instance what anger is. The one would say it is a craving for revenge, or some such thing, while the other would say it is a boiling of the blood and heat around the heart. Of these, the one gives an account of the material, the other of the form and meaning. For the one is the articulation of the thing, but this has to be in a certain sort of material if it is to be at all. In the same way, while the meaning of a house is of this sort, a shelter that protects from damage by wind, rain, and the sun’s heat, another person will say that it is stones, bricks, and lumber, and yet another that the form is in these latter things for the sake of those former ones.” (*DA* I.1, 403a 29 – b6)

Aristotle’s discussion goes on to indicate that the true student of nature is concerned with things in the last way mentioned: in terms of both form and material. This interpretation is also confirmed by Aristotle’s claim that, because nature is “twofold,” the student of nature must inquire into both form and material. (*Physics* II.2, 194a 12ff) He illustrates this with the examples of the doctor and the housebuilder. The one must know both the form of health and the material in which it is realized (e.g., bile and phlegm), and the other must know both the form and function of houses and the materials in which they are realized (e.g., bricks and lumber). Additionally, in *Metaphysics* VI.1, Aristotle contrasts the objects studied by metaphysics and those studied by natural philosophy with the examples of concavity

and snubness (that is, concavity in a nose), which differ because “snub” is bound up with material. Thus, he states

“If then all natural things are analogous to the snub in their nature – e.g., nose, eye, face, flesh, bone, and, in general, animal; leaf, root, bark, and, in general, plant (for none of these can be defined without reference to movement (*kinêsis*) – they always have material), it is clear how we must seek to define the ‘what’ in the case of natural objects, and also that it belongs to the student of nature to study even the soul in a certain sense, i.e. so much of it as is not independent of material.” (*Metaph.* VI.1, 1025b 35)

These passages show that, from Aristotle’s point of view, the student of nature is one who studies forms in their material embodiment. But is this notion what Aristotle has in mind in the passages about the explanation of *akrasia* at *NE* VII.3, 1147a–b that we are discussing? To see that this is what he has in mind, let us look at the surrounding text. Just before suggesting we look into the cause of *akrasia* from the standpoint of nature (*phusikôs*, 1147a 24), Aristotle notes that people who are in states of passion are in a condition similar to those who are asleep, insane, or drunk since, like sleep, madness, and alcohol, passions such as rages and sexual desires “obviously also derange the body.” (1147a 17)

The fact that passions derange the body leads him to suggest we look into the causes of *akrasia* from the standpoint of nature. (1147a 24) He then differentiates the practical from the theoretical syllogism on the grounds that the latter involves necessarily *inferring* the conclusion whereas in the case of the former the agent necessarily *performs the relevant action* “at once.” We have already seen that this immediate and necessary transition to the conclusion / action in a practical syllogism is explained in terms of the symmetry of the active and passive powers in the body

(critically supported by *MA* 8, 702a 7 – 21, discussed above). That this same principle applies to *akrasia* is also presented explicitly in the concluding lines of *On the Motion of Animals*: “As for the fact that as a result of the same thoughts there is sometimes an irrational movement in the parts, sometimes not, the reason for this is that sometimes the passive matter is present in the right quantity and quality, and sometimes not.” (*MA* 11, 703b 36)

Next in our *NE* text Aristotle illustrates these principles with his “sweets” example, which ends by noting that, “while one premise says to avoid [eating the sweets], the desire [to eat the sweets] takes the lead, *since it is able to set in motion each part of the body.*” (1147a 35, my emphasis) This desire is able to set the body in motion because “the instrument by which desire causes motion is already part of the body” (*DA* III.10, 433b 19), and “at one time this desire wins out and knocks away that one, and at another time that one wins out and knocks away this one, like a ball.” (*DA* III.11, 434a 16)<sup>201</sup> Having noted that irrational desire overtakes the *akratic* because it moves within his body, Aristotle then tells us to seek the explanation of *akrasia* “from people who study nature,” because that explanation “is the same as in the case of someone who is drunk or asleep, and is not peculiar to this experience [i.e., *akrasia*].” (1147b 8)

These observations show conclusively that Grgic, Cooper, Guathier, Hardie, Wiggins, Etheridge, Natali, Burnet, and Dirlmeier severely misinterpret Aristotle’s direct statements as to where we should look for the explanation of *akrasia*. Anthony

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<sup>201</sup> Here one thinks of Hesiod’s description of Eros as “the most beautiful among the immortal gods, who loosens the limbs and overpowers the intentions and sensible plans of all the gods and all humans too.” (*Theogony* line 120, translated by Richard McKirahan in *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 9.)



Kenny's interpretation of these passages is closer to what Aristotle must mean, but Kenny interprets Aristotle as holding that physiology explains *akrasia* only in exceptional cases of madness or the "pathological inability to conform to one's moral professions."<sup>202</sup> Such cases do not seem to be genuine instances of *akrasia*, he says, and it is only in these cases that we ought to listen to those who study nature (*dei para tōn physiologōn akouein*). For the explanation of ordinary cases of *akrasia* proper, Kenny suggests we look back a number of lines to 1147a 24 where Aristotle speaks of looking into the cause of *akrasia* "from the standpoint of nature (*phusikōs*)."<sup>202</sup> Kenny takes this to refer to the "natural cause" of *akrasia*, namely desire (*epithumia*), as opposed to its unnatural causes such as madness. He further motivates his differentiation of *akrasia* proper from madness and other pathological forms of behavior that resemble *akrasia* by stating that if the incontinent person is like a madman, then the appropriate response would seem to be not punishment but treatment. (176) In this sense consulting the natural scientist (*physiologōs*) would be necessary.

Kenny's analysis here is flawed. There are surely differences between the lunatic and your run-of-the-mill dieting akratic who succumbs to the tempting cake. However, Aristotle is not talking about their differences; instead, he is explicitly pointing to a similarity between them – namely, the causes of their conditions are physiological. In addition, Aristotle makes no such differentiation between ordinary *akrasia* and madness. He simply states that "surely people who are in states of passion are disposed [in a way similar to someone asleep, insane, or drunk], since

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<sup>202</sup> Anthony. Kenny, "The Practical Syllogism and Incontinence," *Phronesis* 11, pp. 163-184 (1966), p. 176.

rages and sexual desires and some other such states obviously also derange the body, and even make *some* people insane.” (*NE* VII.3, 1147a 14; my emphasis) Like an insane, sleeping, or drunken person, an incontinent person’s knowledge is impaired and rendered ineffective due to conditions in the body.

Furthermore, in a sense Kenny is right that madness warrants treatment while *akrasia* deserves punishment. However, Aristotle is explicit that punishment is itself a specific form of treatment: “Punishments indicate this too, since they come about by means of [pleasure and pain], for they are a certain kind of medicines, and medicines by their nature work through opposites.” (*NE* II.3, 1104b 18) While punishment is not medicine in the literal sense (a physical substance through the ingestion of which our body is directly altered), it does produce its medicinal effects through its influence on the body. For example, like all affections of the soul, the painful experience of humiliation that often accompanies punishment is imminent in the body.<sup>203</sup> Aristotle takes this to be indicated by the fact that those who are ashamed blush. (*NE* IV.9, 1128b 16) Such visible signs of shame on our faces rise up from physiological changes in the inward parts of the body, and it is these inward changes that effect the recovery of those who are punished.

More specifically, the experience of pleasure or pain involves heating and chilling in the heart and other viscera. (*MA* 8, 701b 36) These episodes of heating and chilling cause alteration in the inner organs in accordance with their active and passive dispositional propensities. This is the process through which the inward parts of the body expand and contract, change size and shape, change from liquid to solid

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<sup>203</sup> See *DA* I.1 and Chapter 1 above.

(and vice versa), and change from hard to soft (and vice versa).<sup>204</sup> In this way, the affections “prepare the organic parts.” (*MA* 8, 702a 17) When repetitions of these changes and “preparations” in the body leave enduring traces in the symmetry of its constituents, one’s mode of perception changes. It is through such a change in one’s mode of perception that character is shaped and the wrongdoer reformed.<sup>205</sup> Thus, even punishment influences the akratic through changes in the body. Therefore Kenny’s restriction of physiology’s relevance to exceptional cases of madness rather than to both those cases and ordinary cases of *akrasia* does not reflect Aristotle’s view.<sup>206</sup>

Thus, it is clear that Aristotle takes the explanation of *akrasia* as being physiological in nature. But exactly how do physiological causes lead the *akratic* to

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<sup>204</sup> See *MA* 7, 701b 1-32 and *MA* 8, 702a 7, discussed in §2.1 above.

<sup>205</sup> Recall that Chapter 2 presented a detailed account of how the symmetry of the inward parts and powers in the body effect one’s mode of perception. That alteration in the soul is brought about through alteration in the body is argued extensively in *Physics* VII.3.

<sup>206</sup> Like punishment, reward influences character in a similar way through the use of pleasure rather than pain. The arts also have the power to influence character, and they too produce their effects in the soul through their influence on the body. For instance, music produces subtle muscular tensions and relaxations according to the qualities of its rhythms and its harmonic “modes.” As a form of imitation (*mimēsis*), music mimics emotions and states of character by stimulating the body in ways that simulate the physiological conditions that underlie the relevant emotions and states of character. Paraphrasing J. G. Warry’s *Greek Aesthetic Theory* (p. 109), Debra Hawhee writes “learning from music takes place through the production of tension and relaxation at muscular and nervous levels and is thereby more direct, more powerful than learning through other means.” (*Bodily Arts*, p. 139-140; although it does not concern music specifically, a relevant passage on the effects of being in the bodily state that corresponds with a certain affection is *DA* I.1, 403a 22, quoted above in §2.3.5). It is in this way that musical rhythms and harmonies “penetrate into [the soul’s] inmost regions and there hold fast.” (*Republic* IV, 401D) A similar account would also apply to the mechanisms through which tragedy produces *katharsis* by evoking pity and fear. Consider the following passage regarding catharsis by W. W. Fortenbaugh: “In watching and responding to a tragedy the spectator is not only stimulated intellectually. He is also purged in so far as his bodily condition is altered. He undergoes a quasi-medical treatment (cf. *Pol.* 1342a10) which improves his disposition in regard to the everyday emotions of fear and pity.” (*Aristotle on Emotion*, 22) On the artist generally, once again Bergson has an insightful comment: “The artist aims at... enabling us to experience what he cannot make us understand. This he will bring about by choosing, among the outward signs of his emotions, those which our body is likely to imitate mechanically, though slightly, as soon as it perceives them, so as to transport us all at once into the indefinable psychological state which called them forth.” (*Time and Free Will*, p. 18)

succumb to his temptation against his better judgment? In fact, we have already had a glimpse of this in Chapter 2.3.2 in discussing *On Dreams* and how the content of our incidental perception is put together. Like a strong wind disrupting reflections on the surface of a lake by creating violent currents and waves in the water, the fumes that arise from the heat accompanying passions disrupts the “images” (*phantasmata*) that structure our incidental perception, which is just what happens to those who are intoxicated. (*On Dreams*, 3, 461a ff, see §2.3.2 above)

## Epilogue

### Moral Development as Psychosomatic Transformation

“And, indeed, the union of the soul with the body strikes us as being very much such a punishment. For, as the Etruscans are said often to torture prisoners of war by chaining human carcasses face to face with living men, matching part with part, so also the soul seems to be stretched throughout the body as well as tied to the sensitive parts of the body.”<sup>207</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction

The above passage from Aristotle’s lost work *Protrepticus* may express our philosopher’s sympathies for the Orphic view, espoused by Pythagoras and by Plato, that the body (*sôma*) is the tomb (*sêma*) of the soul. (See Plato’s *Cratylus* 400B-C.) This notion recurs in Plato’s *Gorgias* (492E), and is expounded at length in the *Phaedo*. In the latter work, Socrates states that “each pleasure or pain nails [the soul] as with a nail to the body and rivets it on and makes it corporeal, so that it fancies the things are true which the body says are true.” (83D) Moreover, the soul comes to be “interpenetrated... with the corporeal which intercourse and communion with the body have made a part of its nature because the body has been its constant companion and the object of its care.” (81C) As a result of this process, the soul is “dragged by the body [from the changeless realm of intelligible Forms] to things which never remain the same [namely, sensible particulars], and it wanders about and is confused and dizzy like a drunken man because it lays hold upon such things.” (79C)

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<sup>207</sup> A fragment from Aristotle’s lost work *Protrepticus* (preserved in the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus), translated in *Aristotle: Protrepticus – A Reconstruction*, by Anton-Hermann Chroust, p. 43

In the preceding chapters we have seen how these metaphorical images of the soul's imprisonment in the body do indeed capture something of Aristotle's view of the condition of most human beings (and of all human beings in their earliest stages of development). In particular, the mechanical structuring of incidental perception (Chapter 2), and the overthrow of reasoned insights into what is good to do (Chapter 3), are governed by the non-rational powers of the body. While our nutritive and sensitive natures are alive and well in our bodies, in many ways our human nature is left there for dead – but it is left there for dead *by us!* As we will see, the problem is not our embodiment *per se*: on the contrary, it is through our human embodiment that, as individuated human beings, we are alive, aware of the world through sensory experience, and endowed with a capacity for rational intelligence.<sup>208</sup> But our capacity for rational intelligence must be developed and held onto through our own efforts. What keeps us dead in our bodies is our relative lack of that “care for the soul” – namely, ethical philosophy – that Socrates encouraged us to practice and to be concerned with above all else.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Recall that, from Aristotle's perspective, not any random soul can be clothed in any random body, so that our specifically human psychological powers are inseparable from our specifically human bodies. See §1.3 on the hierarchy of powers, propensities, and capacities in the human being's composition, particularly the discussion of *DA* I.3, 407b 21 and II.2, 414a 19-24, and the footnote in §1.2 on the “blend” (*krasis*) of our material constituents and its relationship to intelligence.

<sup>209</sup> On care for the soul see e.g. *Apology* 29D-30B and *Timaeus* 89D-90D. It should be clear from the above statement, and from the discussion of ethical philosophy in §0.2 above, that here ethical philosophy includes, but is not limited to, discourse on ethical subjects. When a person recognizes that a possible action is beautiful and does it on account of that fact – that is ethical philosophy. Ethical discourse empowers one to recognize beautiful actions as such, and this is its function. At *Politics* I.9, 1257a 8, Aristotle mentions that a man who wears a shoe uses it as a shoe (in its proper and primary sense), whereas the man who sells the shoe does not. Likewise, I would add, ethical discourse is used in its proper sense – like the shoe worn on the foot – when it is used for the sake of improving the soul, whereas when it is used for some other end – like the shoe being sold – it is not used in its proper sense. Plato's dialogues are powerful depictions of ethical discourse thriving in its natural habitat and practiced in its capacity as an instrument of ethical philosophy. The *Euthyphro* and *Apology* are exemplary cases in point. The central question of the *Euthyphro* is “What is piety or holiness?” As

What is called for, then, are actions and ways of being at work that transform the body from the tomb of a dead human soul into the temple of a living human soul in communion with the divine. In this chapter I will show the sense in which Aristotle views moral development as just such a process of psychosomatic transformation. For Aristotle, moral development is continuous with biological development and simply constitutes the completion of the person's coming into being. Certain mechanisms of character formation lead this developmental process to

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Plato makes clear through the dialogue's setting, this question does not arise out of mere curiosity, as an exercise in disputation, or simply as an attempt by Socrates to mock Euthyphro's limited clarity on this concept. Socrates and Euthyphro meet at the court of the Archon, and Plato has them ask one another what they are doing there. It turns out that Euthyphro is there to accuse his father of impiety, and Socrates is there because he is being accused of impiety. Everything that has led up to this situation – which is of “serious magnitude” on both sides – has come to pass on account of judgments that people have made involving the concept of piety. Thus, Plato is displaying the examination of piety as essential to the conditions of life, and not as an academic exercise. As Socrates ironically states to Euthyphro, “if you didn't know with full clarity what the pious and the impious are, you'd never have ventured to prosecute your old father for murder on behalf of a day laborer.” (15D) Incoherent conceptions of piety kill people – e.g., the Athenians' confused conception of piety killed Socrates. The discourse on piety thus organically grows from the conditions in which those discoursing find themselves. Plato is also skillfully priming his readers for the presentation of Socrates as the embodiment of piety in the *Apology*. The discourse with Euthyphro yields as its clearest approximation to the form of piety that it is the part of justice that involves service to the gods (worked out from 11E-13D). Socrates asks, “at what result does service to the gods aim?,” and he later adds, “If you had given the answer [to that question], I'd already have been adequately instructed by you about piety.” (14C) While the *Euthyphro* does not see an answer to this question, the next work in the Platonic corpus – the *Apology* or *Socrates' Defense* – Plato presents Socrates himself as the answer in a living image. In his defense speech Socrates describes his philosophical activity as “assistance” and “service” to Apollo, the god of the Temple at Delphi. (23A-B) He later characterizes himself as having been stationed and commanded by the god to live practicing philosophy, examining himself and others. (28D) Finally, after a moving exhortation to his fellow Athenians to care for their souls, he states “This, you may be sure, is what the god orders me to do. And I believe that no greater good for you has ever come about in the city than my service to the god [and we must remember here that it is *Plato* who has written these words]. You see, I do nothing else except go around and trying to persuade you, both young and old alike, not to care about your bodies or your money as intensely as about how your soul may be in the best condition.” (30A-B) In this way, the *Socrates' Defense* of Plato is Plato's defense of Socrates, and in it Plato presents Socrates' discourse on ethical philosophy in light of the sources of its motivation – to serve the god by caring for his soul and helping his fellow citizens to do the same. (Although I will not pursue the matter here, I take this interpretation to provide insight into the process of definition and the grasping of Forms by combining dialectical argument – as in the *Euthyphro* – and the vivid presentation of a paradigm example – as Socrates is presented as a paradigm example of piety in the *Apology*. Whereas the dialectical phase of definition draws a relatively precise conceptual borderline at the circumference that differentiates between A's and non-A's, putting forward a perfect example of an A vivifies and anchors the definition by identifying the exact center of the circle.)

get mired and trapped in its early stages. Ethical philosophy is a transformative practice aimed at moving one out of this stasis and into being one's "true self." (See *DA* II.5, 417b 6.) This transformation in the soul comes about through the psychosomatic transmutation of material elements in the living body.

#### **4.2 Moral Development, Biological Development, and Human Development**

There are three basic ways of being at work (*energeiai*) that display life: reproduction and self-nourishment, sensory perception, and the exercise of rational intelligence.<sup>210</sup> The three corresponding potencies (*dunameis*) are the nutritive, sensitive, and rational parts or powers of the soul. The distinctions amongst these potencies play a critical role in Aristotle's "function argument." (*NE* I.7, 1097b 22 – 1098a 22) In this argument Aristotle seeks to define the human good – happiness (*eudaimonia*) – by identifying the work or characteristic function (*ergon*) peculiar to human beings, the way of being at work in which our humanity is most distinctly evident.

All species of living things nourish themselves and reproduce, and animals share with us the power of sensory perception. Among mortals, Aristotle states, only human beings possess full-blown rational intelligence or insight (*nous*). He thus concludes that the exercise of rational intelligence is the life-activity "peculiar" (*idion*) to human beings as such. In Book X he adds that, "each person would even

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<sup>210</sup> Aristotle considers self-nourishing to be a species of reproduction: self-reproduction – the reproduction and replenishment of one's own bodily form through the assimilation and re-organization of the bodies of other living things. See *DA* II.4.



seem to *be* this part [of the soul (namely, *nous*)].”<sup>211</sup> Happiness or the human good, then, is a life that puts rational intelligence and insight – one’s true self – to work in accordance with virtue or excellence (*aretê*), and this is the goal (*telos*) of moral development. Let us approach the idea that moral development is continuous with biological development by examining the following passage.

“It is while they develop [in the womb, through the active exercise of nutritive soul] that they acquire sentient soul as well, in virtue of which an animal is an animal – I say ‘while they develop,’ for it is not the fact that when an animal is formed at that same moment a human being, or a horse, or any other particular sort of animal is formed, because the end of completion is formed last of all, and that which is peculiar (*idion*) to each thing is the end of its process of formation. That is why it is a very great puzzle to answer another question, concerning [rational intelligence or insight (*nous*); significantly, Aristotle’s term here does not refer to discursive reasoning (*dianoia*, *logismos*, *sylogismos*)]. At what moment, and in what manner, do those creatures which have this principle of [*nous*] acquire their share of it, and where does it come from? This is a very difficult problem which we must endeavor to solve, so far as it may be solved, to the best of our power.” (*GA* II.3, 736a 35 – 736b 9)

To begin, note that the nutritive, sensitive, and rational soul-powers do not arbitrarily coincide in the human organism but form a functionally interconnected hierarchy in which the exercise of one provides for the capacity for another. Recalling Aristotle’s distinctions amongst the graduated phases of potency and being-at-work (P1-A2), a biologically human organism comes into being through *exercising* (*energeia* = A2) the power to reproduce and nourish the human body – on account of this it is alive. Reproduction generates sensory organs that give this living thing the *ready power* (*hexis* = P2/A1) of sense perception – on account of this it is an animal.

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<sup>211</sup> *NE* X.7, 1178a 3. The connection between what is peculiar to a thing and its being is stated by Aristotle at *Metaphysics* VII.13, 1038b 7: “the substance [or being (*ousia*)] of each thing is that which is peculiar (*idion*) to it, which does not belong to anything else.”

The human organism's constitution endows it with the natural tendency to absorb sensory perceptions and form from them networks and patterns of association based on the presence of intelligible forms in the sensible particulars that it encounters, and this tendency gives the animal a *capacity* (*dunamis* = P1) for understanding and rational thought – on account of this it is a biologically human being.<sup>212</sup> The individual human being's capacity for rational intelligence is integrated with the soul functions that it shares with other living things.

How this capacity becomes a developed power (*hexis* = P2/A1), and how it moves into the active exercise (*energeia* = A2) of rational intelligence, are difficult theoretical and practical problems. That is, constructing a theoretical explanation of the transition of this capacity through the graduated phases of being-at-work is very difficult (which Aristotle mentions in the passage above); additionally, the actual advancement of one's own capacity for rational intelligence into its complete realization in activity – which I intend here to encompass rational intelligence in thought and contemplation (“intellectual virtue”), and the display of rational intelligence in one's actions and passions (“virtue of character”) – is a difficult practical problem which the practice of ethical philosophy, and human nature itself, is aimed at achieving.<sup>213</sup> Here we are treating the practical problem.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Compare *DA* II.5, 417b 17: “In the potency for perception, the first change [from *dunamis* = P1 to *hexis* = P2/A1] comes about by the [reproductive] action of the parent, and when the living thing is born it already has what it takes [i.e., the *hexis* = P2] to perceive, just as it has the capacity [*dunamis* = P1] for knowledge.” Concerning the capacity for rational intelligence, above I am referring to the networks of association discussed in §2.3.4 on memory, association, and incidental perception, which centered on Aristotle's analogy about retreating soldiers who stop and make a stand. (*Post. An.* II.19, 100a 10) The tendency to organize residual sensory perceptions into such networks, recall, is grounded in the symmetry of powers in the living body, and the establishment of such networks are the starting-points of our capacity to reason and understand.

<sup>213</sup> On distinguishing intellectual virtue and virtue of character see *NE* VI and II.5-6 (respectively).

Now, we might say that at birth the human being is not yet being human – not yet actively functioning in its capacity as a rationally intelligent being. Above Aristotle intimated that, at the completion of embryonic development, the human organism is *actively* nourishing itself, *able* to perceive, and *capable* of developing rational intelligence. At birth, then, the soul-power that is most peculiar to and definitive of our being is the furthest from being actively realized, and the one that is least definitive is most fully at work. Recalling *De Caelo* II.12, 292a 23ff (quoted above in §3.2), when our lives begin we are “far removed” from our good and can only attain it through “a complexity of actions.” Virtue empowers one to both discover and to choose those actions. (*NE* II.6, 1107a 7; see §0.2 above)

Moreover, virtue also grows from these same insightful discoveries and chosen actions. Aristotle links moral development and the graduated phases of being-at-work in *NE* II.1. There he states that, from the very beginning of our existence as human beings, we are naturally endowed with a developed functional capacity (P2/A1) for sensory perception. However, the intellectual virtues and virtues of human character are not provided for us by nature, but must be developed and perfected through disciplined practice and experience:

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<sup>214</sup> Concerning the theoretical problem, shortly after indicating the difficulty of determining how we come to possess our share of *nous* (quoted above), Aristotle states that “It remains, then, that *nous* alone enters in, as an additional factor, from outside, and that it alone is divine, because physical activity has nothing whatever to do with the activity (*energeia*) of *nous*.” (*GA* II.3, 736b 27) What Aristotle is referring to here is not our capacity for discursive reasoning, but the activity of non-discursive “insight.” In saying that this noetic luminosity “enters in from outside” Aristotle is not saying that one’s thoughts enter into one’s body from outside the physical world. Rather, he is saying that luminous insight “enters into” human experience from beyond the human individual (the “individual possessor of *nous*”) and originates in “*Nous* itself,” that is the Divine Mind. (See *DA* I.4, 408b 18ff; *DA* III.5, 430a 25; etc.)

“...with those things that come to belong to us by nature, we are provided with the potencies (*dunameis*) for these beforehand, and we produce the being-at-work (*energeia*) of them in return. (This very thing is obvious in the case of the senses, for it was not from repeatedly seeing or repeatedly hearing that we took on the senses, but on the contrary, having them, we used them – we did not get them by using them.) But we do take on the virtues by first being at work in them, just as also in other things, namely the arts; the things that one who has learned them needs to do, we learn by doing, and people become, say, housebuilders by building houses or harpists by playing the harp.” (*NE* II.1, 1103a 27 – b 1)

So by nature we are given a ready capacity for sense perception, but it is only through our own efforts and disciplined practice of the virtues that we bring what is peculiar to us as human beings into its full realization. In this sense, *nature makes us animals; we have to make ourselves human!* Furthermore, for Aristotle this process of becoming fully human is the process of becoming a *good* human being, a *virtuous* human being, a *virtuoso at being human*. Aristotle advances this view in *Physics* VII.3, where he states that “each thing is said to be complete when it takes on its excellence (*aretê*) – for it is then most in accord with its nature – just as a circle is perfect when it has most of all become a circle and when it is best.” (246a 12)<sup>215</sup> In short, moral development is both continuous with biological development and is the completion of human development.

Although I can only briefly allude to the matter here, there are three factors that lead this process to get stalled or run off course: (1) Character and action are reciprocally interdependent – one’s character expresses itself in one’s actions, and

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<sup>215</sup> Note also the following from the commentary of Simplicius: “...anything not having its own perfection [*teleiôtês*] is not in the strict sense that which it is spoken of as, for a thing which is imperfect [or incomplete, *ateles*] with respect to form does not admit the definition of the form either.” (*Simplicius: On Aristotle’s Physics* 7, 1065, 21, p. 44, (brackets by Hagen); compare the conversation of Socrates and Thrasymachus in *Republic* I, 340Dff, alluded to in §0.2 above.)

one's actions impress themselves back into one's character; (2) we are inattentive to the ways in which our active conditions or states of character "add to themselves" through their reciprocal relationship with action; and (3) once an active condition is formed and an acquired set of dispositional propensities has been accumulated through action, we cannot simply abandon those active conditions by choice but must overcome them through strenuous effort. The attainment of virtue comes about by making our "ways of being at work" – that is, our modes of thinking, perceiving, action, and passion – be of certain sorts.

The previous chapters of this dissertation set the groundwork for showing that the process of attaining virtue is psychosomatic in nature. A crucial bridge leading from that groundwork to a full account of this issue (which I will undertake in future work) is Aristotle's distinction between two kinds of alteration (the second of which is more properly called coming-into-being): (1) the extinction and replacement of one condition by its contrary, and (2) a thing's "development into its true self or actuality," or one's "passing over into being oneself, namely into being-at-work-staying-oneself (*entelecheia*)." (*DA* II.5, 417b 6; trans. Smith and Sachs, respectively) In *Physics* VII.3, Aristotle argues that it is through alteration of the first kind, based in the body, that alteration of the second kind takes place in the soul. Moral development is thus a process of psychosomatic transformation over the course of which alteration in the symmetry of material powers in the body leads to the full coming-forth of the soul in its natural condition.

### 4.3 The End of Moral Development

So, logically and “in the order of being,” a human being is defined first and foremost by rational intelligence at work in both thought and action; in the temporal process of development, however, “in the order of time,” rational intelligence is the last power to be developed and to come into activity. Recall from above that “the end of completion is formed last of all, and that which is peculiar (*idion*) to each thing is the end of its process of formation.” (*GA* II.3, 736b 4) This is elaborated upon elsewhere:

“Now the order of things in the process of formation is the reverse of their real and essential order; I mean that the later a thing comes in the formative process the earlier it comes in the order of Nature, and that which comes at the end of the process is at the beginning in the order of Nature... Thus, the matter and the process of formation must come first in time, but logically (*tô logôî*) the real essence (*ousia*) and the form of the thing comes first.” (*PA* II.1, 646a 25 – 646b 2)<sup>216</sup>

From Aristotle’s perspective, then, through the practice of ethical philosophy – understood as a way of life – we are transformed (in time) into what we already are (in being). We thus become human beings who are actively being human (that is, actively exercising *nous* – rational intelligence and creative insight into the true, the good, and the beautiful – and displaying this in our actions and passions). In this sense, throughout moral development – as with all natural processes of coming-into-being – one is “headed toward [one’s] origin” (*Phys.* VIII.7, 261a 14), and is on a

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<sup>216</sup> Compare the following passage concerning the operation of nutritive potencies in the bringing-into-being and passing-away of the living body: “[W]e find universally that what [body part] is the last to be formed [in the process of reproduction] is the first to fail, and the first to be formed [namely, the heart] is the last to fail. It is as though Nature were a runner, covering a double course there and back, and retracing her steps towards the starting-point whence she set out. The process of formation, genesis, starts from not-being and advances till it reaches being; that of decay starts from being and goes back again till it reaches not-being.” (*GA* II.5, 741b 17-24)

road or path (*hodos*) that leads from one's nature into one's nature (*Phys.* II.1, 193b 12).

From Aristotle's point of view, then, active insight or rational intelligence is both the source or origin (*archê*) and the end or goal (*telos*) of human action and human being. Aristotle points to this as the origin of human action in the opening line of the *Metaphysics*: "All human beings by nature desire to know." Insight or rational intelligence gives birth to wonder and amazement, and therewith lures itself toward its own full realization in an articulate understanding of the manifest structure of phenomenal reality and direct noetic union with ultimate being. As Aristotle states, "[B]y way of wondering, people both now and at first began to philosophize... But someone who wonders and is at an impasse considers himself to be ignorant... So if it was by fleeing ignorance that they philosophized, it is clear that by means of knowing they were in pursuit of knowing..." (*Metaph.* I.2, 982b 12-21) The yearning of each thing is simply to fully and actively be itself. Although we are compound beings, our ultimate identity is rational insight in pursuit of itself. This nature of the human being as such is fulfilled when it is made manifest in beautiful actions, and most paradigmatically when it reaches itself and sees itself as itself in the immortal and undifferentiated noetic luminosity of the Divine Mind. Accordingly Aristotle writes,

"So if intellect (*nous*) is something divine as compared with a human being, the life that is in accord with the intellect is divine as compared with a human life. But one should not follow those who advise us to think human thoughts, since we are human, and mortal thoughts, since we are mortal, but as far as possible one ought to be immortal and to do all things with a view toward living in accord with the most powerful thing in oneself, for even if it is small in bulk, it rises much more above everything else in power and worth. And

each person would even seem to *be* this part, if it is the governing and better part...” (NE X.7, 1177b 30 – 1178a 3)

Here Aristotle is directly in line with Plato, according to whom the aim of philosophy is to think godlike thoughts (*Theatetus*, 176B) – not to think thoughts *about* the divine and the immortal, but to think thoughts that *are* divine and immortal.<sup>217</sup> Plato beautifully elaborates upon this in his *Timaeus*, and it is Plato to whom we shall give the last word:

“We should think of the most authoritative part of our soul as a guiding genius (*daimon*) given by god – that part which we say dwells in the summit of our body and lifts us from earth toward our celestial affinity, like a plant whose roots are not in earth, but in the heavens; for we are creatures not of earth but of heaven, where the soul was first born, and our divine part attaches us by the head to heaven. If therefore a man’s attention and effort are centered on appetite and ambition [ambition being a function of the ‘spirited’ element of the soul (*thumos*)], all his thoughts are bound to be mortal, and he can hardly fail, in so far as it is possible, to become entirely mortal, as it is his mortal part that he has increased. But a man who has given his heart to learning and true wisdom and exercised that part of himself is surely bound, if he attains to truth, to have immortal and divine thoughts, and cannot fail to achieve immortality as fully as is permitted to human nature; and because he has always looked after the divine element in himself and kept his guardian genius

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<sup>217</sup> It is clear from this statement that “thinking,” for Plato and for Aristotle, is not to be identified with mere analytical, discursive cogitations (however complex they may be), but with a non-discursive mystical awakening to and union with ultimate reality. Although we cannot pursue the matter here, except for the sophists (who, by Plato’s account, hardly deserve to be called philosophers at all), virtually all ancient Greek philosophers are mystics. In no way does this conflict with the fact that most of these philosophers are also empirically minded scientists and seekers of truth for whom the exercise of rational argumentation and discursive reasoning is indispensable. The nature of their mysticism is summed up nicely by Philip Merlan: “By definition we take [mysticism] to mean a doctrine teaching that the highest moments of man’s existence are those of his absorption into whatever he takes the divine to be, and that this absorption, usually called ecstasy, is an experience *sui generis*, distinct from the ordinary human experiences.” (Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, and Metaconsciousness: Problems of the Soul in the Neoplatonist and Neoplatonic Tradition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1963), 1.) An additional comment of relevance is the following, from John Burnet: “To anyone who has tried to live in sympathy with the Greek philosophers, the suggestion that they were ‘intellectualists’ must seem ludicrous. On the contrary, Greek philosophy is based on the faith that reality is divine, and that the one thing needful is for the soul, which is akin to the divine, to enter into communion with it. It was in truth an effort to satisfy what we call the religious instinct....” (*Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato* (London: MacMillan & Co: repr. 1962), 12.)



(*daimon*) in good order he must be happy (*eudaimon*) above all men... When that is done we shall have achieved the goal set us by the gods, the life that is best for this present time and for all time.” (*Timaeus*, 90A-D)

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