

# Conceptualized and Unconceptualized Desire in Aristotle

THOMAS M. TUOZZO

## 1. INTRODUCTION

FOR ARISTOTLE, desire is a special sort of cognition. In this essay I shall be concerned to explicate and defend this claim, presenting first a discussion of the different kinds of predicative cognition Aristotle recognizes, and then showing how desire differs from other sorts of predicative cognition. I shall further be concerned to show how a fundamental difference between the two main kinds of Aristotelian cognition, sense-perception and thought,<sup>1</sup> grounds the distinction between the two main kinds of Aristotelian desire, *epithumia* (appetite) and *boulêsis* (wish).<sup>2</sup> This distinction is of crucial importance to many topics in Aristotle's ethics and moral psychology, on which the account given here, if correct, should cast considerable light. Therefore by way of confirmation of my account I shall turn briefly at the end of this essay to two such topics: weakness of will and moral education.

It will be useful, before we proceed to the main task, to contrast Aristotle's views on the nature of desire with a general view of desire shared by many

---

<sup>1</sup> *Phantasia* is in some sense an adjunct to either of these; hence its division into *phantasia aisthêtikê* and *logistikê* (DA 433b29). Compare Dorothea Frede, "The Cognitive Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle" in M. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's "De Anima"* (Oxford, 1992), 279–95: "*Phantasia* . . . does not have a faculty of its own but is 'parasitic' on sense-perception" (281). I cannot agree, however, with the argument of Michael Wedin, *Mind and Imagination in Aristotle* (New Haven, 1988) that "imagination is not a genuine faculty in the sense that there is no complete act that counts as imagining something" (55). DA 427b16–20 (reading *phantasia* at b17) seems a decisive refutation of such a view, Wedin's remarks (74–75) to the contrary notwithstanding.

<sup>2</sup> I reserve for another occasion discussion of *thumos*, the third type of desire that sometimes appears in Aristotle's typology of desire. Like *epithumia*, *thumos* is shared by animals, and so need involve only sense-perception and *phantasia*.

contemporary philosophers of mind, and which has, inevitably, influenced the interpretation of Aristotle. According to this view a mental state such as desire or belief can be analyzed into two components<sup>3</sup>: its content, which corresponds to the object clause in sentences such as "John believes that it is raining," "Mary desires that it stop raining"; and another element which corresponds to the psychological verb in such sentences. The manifold ways this analysis of mental states as "propositional attitudes" can be developed<sup>4</sup> have an important feature in common: desires derive their distinctive characteristic of being able to motivate action not from their propositional content, but from the element which corresponds to the psychological verb in sentences attributing desire. Thus there is no essential difference in propositional content between different sorts of propositional attitude. To quote a recent writer: "[W]hile the belief and the desire that *p* have the same propositional content and represent the same state of affairs, there is a difference in the *way* it is represented in the two states of mind. In belief it is represented *as obtaining*, whereas in desire, it is represented as a state of affairs *the obtaining of which would be good*."<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's view of desire differs fundamentally from the propositional-attitude account outlined above. It is true that Aristotle holds that desires and beliefs have what may be called propositional content. Yet what distinguishes desire from belief is not an element distinct from this propositional content. Rather, there is a difference in the content itself. Aristotelian mental states, I shall argue, are mental predications; a desire is such a mental predication with a specific sort of mental predicate, viz., one with intrinsically motivating force. Thus, unlike in the contemporary theory, for Aristotle beliefs and desires will not have the same propositional contents.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Many theorists do not suppose that this analysis reveals ontological constituents of mental states, but rather reveals, e.g., the logical features of these states (cf. John R. Searle, *Intentionality* [Cambridge, 1983], 14–16).

<sup>4</sup> E.g., it may be held that the analogue of the psychological verbs is a relation between the individual that has the propositional attitude and the attitude's content, which in turn may be construed as an abstract object (along the lines of Frege), as a sentence in a mental language (cf. Jerry A. Fodor, "Propositional Attitudes" in *Representations* [Cambridge, MA, 1981]), or even as a set of abstract and concrete objects (cf. the account of belief in Bertrand Russell, *The Analysis of Mind* [London, 1927]). Or the analogue of the psychological verb may be treated as some sort of operator or modifier of a mental predication which supplies the content of the propositional attitude (cf. A. J. P. Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will* [London, 1963], ch. 11, esp. 231).

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Stampe, "The Authority of Desire," *Philosophical Review* 96 (1987): 335–81, 355 (emphasis in original). A similar view is reported by Russell, *Analysis of Mind*, 58, as that of "ordinary unreflecting opinion": "We think of the content of the desire as being just like the content of a belief while the attitude taken towards the content is different." Russell goes on to reject such a view in favor of a straightforward behaviorist analysis of desire.

<sup>6</sup> David Charles, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (Ithaca, 1984) gives an interpretation of Aristotelian desire that fits it into the framework of contemporary propositional-attitude theory. Thus he gives as a representation of a desire the formula "DES.( $\phi$ 'ing is good)," where "DES." is "the mode

The notion of mental predication<sup>7</sup> needs some explication. As I shall use the term, a mental predication is a mental act relating together two subordinate mental acts in a peculiar way. To illustrate, let us take the occurrent belief that a dog is a mammal. (Only occurrent mental states will be mental predications in the sense in which I use the term.) In having such a belief, one employs or exercises the concept 'dog', and so employing it is to have a mental experience, *dog*.<sup>8</sup> One also employs the concept 'mammal', that is, has the mental experience, *mammal*. Furthermore, one performs the mental act of relating these mental experiences in a certain way; the mental experience of so relating them is: *(a) dog is (a) mammal*.

Now in this example, the subordinate mental acts are both exercises of a concept. But in Aristotle's theory, neither the mental experience that I shall call the "mental subject" nor that which I shall call the "mental predicate" need be the exercise of a concept; that is, he recognizes unconceptualized terms in mental predications.<sup>9</sup> A mental term might be given, for example, by sense perception; the mental experience *the brown (thing) is (a) dog* may have as its mental subject the unconceptualized perceptual experience of the dog's brown color. This feature of Aristotle's theory enables it to encompass a vast range of mental states, from complex sense-perceptions where one unconceptualized percept is mentally predicated of another, through beliefs and desires in which only one term is conceptualized, to fully conceptualized beliefs and desires. As I have stated above, the difference between desires and nondesiderative mental states will be in the nature of the mental predicate: if it is conative, the mental state is a desire; if not, not. The difference between

---

of accepting a proposition which under certain conditions will by itself lead to action" (86). Charles, in faithfulness to Aristotle's texts, insists that the predicate in propositions so accepted must be one of a set of "good-making features"; yet he insists that these predicates may have purely "descriptive meaning" (87), the conative nature of the state deriving strictly from the mode in which the proposition is accepted. But then the restriction on predicates does no real work; that is why it does not figure in contemporary theory. Charles's interpretation is an unstable mixture of two distinct approaches to the analysis of mental states.

<sup>7</sup>I borrow this expression from Kenny, *Action, Emotion and Will*, 229, whose theory is a modification of that of Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (London, 1957). My use of the term differs somewhat from Kenny's in that, as I use the term, mental predications are mental acts, not merely constituents of such acts. My interpretation of Aristotle is thus in some ways closer to Geach's original theory (although Geach did not offer any analysis of desire, nor is it likely he would accept one along the lines of my interpretation of Aristotle).

<sup>8</sup>I shall use italics for mental predications and the subordinate mental acts that figure in them.

<sup>9</sup>Accordingly, mental predications, as I conceive them, presuppose neither the possession of concepts nor linguistic ability. As will become clear below, mental predication is a kind of psychological association or synthesis, of which the components may be either conceptualized or unconceptualized.

the two main types of desire will turn on whether or not the conative mental predicate is conceptualized.

Aristotle's theory is one of considerable sophistication; it has to some extent been lost sight of by recent interpreters, who have tended to assimilate Aristotle's position to what I see as the very different contemporary theory. In this essay I shall elucidate on the theory I am attributing to Aristotle by the consideration of a number of important texts; I hope thereby to make clear that theory's philosophical interest and power. I shall start with the non-desiderative cases, and first of all with the unconceptualized ones: the cases of complex sense-perception.

## 2. SENSE-PERCEPTION

It has often been remarked that Aristotle describes certain sorts of perception as though they had propositional content.<sup>10</sup> Thus he says that we can perceive that the white is (a) man (or, that the white is the son of Diare) and that we can perceive that the white is sweet.<sup>11</sup> Such complex perceptual experiences evidently have a predicative structure. In all such cases, the subject of the perceptual mental predication is a sensible proper to one of the five special senses; or rather, it is the mental act of perceiving such a special sensible "in itself," that is, the activity of the sense in question called forth by the special sensible existing in the world (e.g., the whiteness of a surface). The mental predicate in these complex perceptions, on the other hand, is not any such activity of perceiving something in itself; hence Aristotle calls predicative perceptions of this sort perceptions of things "incidentally," *kata sumbebēkos*. To discover what exactly these mental predicates are, we must take two different cases separately: that in which the mental predicate corresponds to something that could be perceived in itself, and that in which it does not.

A case of the first sort is the perception that the white is sweet. Such a perception evidently involves mentally predicating *the sweet* of *the white*. What makes this predication possible is a simultaneous perception on an earlier occasion of the white and the sweet in themselves. Such a simultaneous occurrence of *the white* and *the sweet* is also, in virtue of the unity of the sensitive faculty, an

<sup>10</sup> See Stanford Cashdollar, "Aristotle's Account of Incidental Perception," *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 156–75, esp. sect. IV, "Perceptive Predication," and Richard Sorabji, "Myths about Non-propositional Thought" in M. Schofield and M. Nussbaum, eds., *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy Presented to G. E. L. Owen* (Cambridge, 1992), 195–98. Frede, "Cognitive Role of *Phantasia*," argues that neither sense-perception nor *phantasia* can be "explicitly predicative or propositional" because they are possessed by animals (287). This is true, if by "explicit predication" one means a predication in which one of the terms is explicitly conceptualized.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *DA* 418a20–23, 425a21–22, 23–27, 30–b4. For other examples, see Sorabji, "Myths," 197 n.15.

experiencing of their simultaneity.<sup>12</sup> In many animals this experience is enough to produce an association such that when, on a later occasion, one of the two special sensibles is perceived in itself, there occurs in the animal, not only (say) *the white*, but also, mentally predicated of it, *the sweet*. Now *ex hypothesi* *the sweet* on this latter occasion is not an in-itself perception of the sweet; what, then, is it? Although Aristotle is not explicit on this point, it seems most probable that he supposes the mental predicate involves a *phantasma*. A *phantasma* for Aristotle is not an experiencing, but rather something that can occasion a mental activity;<sup>13</sup> the experiencing of *the sweet* in this case, I suggest, is occasioned by a *phantasma* which is evoked by the perceptual experiencing of *the white*. Experiencing this sort of connection between two percepts is the act of mental predication that constitutes (this kind of) incidental perception.<sup>14</sup>

We may now briefly consider the second kind of incidental perception, of which an example is the perception that the white is (a) man. Here the mental predicate corresponds to something in the world that could never be perceived in itself. Men are not, as such, proper sensibles of any special sense; they are rather proper objects of the intellect. That is to say, a man, as such, cannot be cognized in an unconceptualized way, as can special sensibles; when one mentally experiences *man*, one is necessarily exercising the concept of man. Therefore in the sort of incidental perception now under discussion, the perceptual experience, *the white*, evokes the conceptual experience, (a) *man*, which evocation constitutes the mental predication, *the white is (a) man*.

How does the perceptual concept evoke the conceptual one in these cases? As in the other sort of incidental perception, there must here be an earlier, simultaneous experiencing of the two, which establishes an association such that one can evoke the other. This raises the question of how one might first have the conceptual experience, (a) *man*, a question to which Aristotle sketches an answer in *An. Po.* II. 19: out of the memory and accumulated experience of many perceptions animals endowed with mind extract universals. Once one has acquired the concept in this way, one may think it at will; but such an

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *DA* 425a30–b3.

<sup>13</sup> There is a parallel in sense-perception: the proper sensible produces an *aisthēma* in the sense organ, and the activity of the sense occasioned by it constitutes the perceptual experiencing of, e.g., *the white*. As Wedin, *Mind and Imagination*, 36, puts it: "To have an *aisthēma* is not ipso facto to have an awareness of something and so *aisthēmata* cannot be exclusively mental items." The same can be said for *phantasmata*.

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Modrak, *Aristotle: The Power of Perception* (Chicago, 1987) takes Aristotle's failure explicitly to mention *phantasia* in his account of incidental perception to mean that it is not involved in it, and is puzzled by this view (210 n. 50). She concludes: "[W]ere cases of incidental perception not cases of perception proper . . . , then on the most reasonable hypothesis all cases of incidental perception would involve *phantasia*" (210 n. 64). It seems to me clear that incidental perception is not, in the sense required, a kind of "perception proper."

exercise of the concept may also be evoked by the in-itself perception of one of the special sensibles, the perception of which figured in the process by which the concept was acquired. (Further associations may be set up over time between other special sensibles and the concept.) Furthermore, for Aristotle every exercise of a concept somehow involves a sense-derived *phantasma*.<sup>15</sup> Without investigating the exact relationship between *phantasma* and exercise of concept, we may say that in this sort of incidental perception the perceptual experience, e.g., *the white*, evokes a *phantasma* that occasions the conceptual experience, *(a) man*. Some such story must be correct, given Aristotle's view that all thought requires a *phantasma*.

The account just given of the role of *phantasia* in both sorts of incidental perception allows us to make straightforward sense of the synthesis that Aristotle implies is crucial to such acts of mental predication. In this, incidental perception differs from the in-itself perception of the proper objects of the five senses, which is simple in nature. Aristotle considers this difference so manifest that he uses it to illuminate the difference between the mental exercise of a simple concept<sup>16</sup> and the mental predication in which the exercise of a simple concept may figure.<sup>17</sup> Just as there must be two terms in any conceptual mental predication, so there must be two distinct terms in incidental perception. Furthermore, Aristotle is clear that falsity depends upon some synthesis;<sup>18</sup> just as the intellection of a concept cannot be false, so a simple perception cannot be. Incidental perception can be false, and so needs to be the synthesis of two things that may be rightly (or wrongly) so combined.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *DA* 431a16–17, 432a8–10, *Mem.* 449b31–450a1.

<sup>16</sup> Traditionally it has been thought that for Aristotle one can think of a concept on its own, without entertaining any proposition in which it figures. (A. C. Lloyd, "Non-Discursive Thought—An Enigma of Greek Philosophy," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 70 [1969–70]: 261–74, accepts this traditional interpretation and argues that Aristotle's position involves a contradiction.) Today widespread acceptance of the Fregean claim that "words only have meaning in the context of a sentence" (see John Wallace, "Only in the Context of a Sentence Do Words Have Any Meaning," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 [1977]: 305–25) has made such a position seem "bizarre, unpalatable, unintelligible" (the view of Lloyd, "Non-Discursive Thought," 263), and some scholars have sought to show that for Aristotle concepts have no mental life outside of mental predications (Terence Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles* [Oxford, 1988], 323, and Christopher Gill, "Is There a Concept of Person in Greek Philosophy?" in Stephen Everson, ed., *Companion to Ancient Thought 2: Psychology* [Cambridge, 1991], 189; see also Sorabji, "Myths").

<sup>17</sup> "Assertion predicates something of something, as an affirmative assertion does, and is in every case either true or false. This is not always the case with thought: the thinking of the definition in the sense of what it is for something to be is true, and does not predicate something of something; but, just as while the seeing of the special object of sight is true, seeing whether the white object is a man or not is not always true, so too in the case of things which are without matter [i.e., are intelligible]" (*DA* 430b26–30, reading *hōsper hē kataphasia* at 430b26f.).

<sup>18</sup> See, besides *DA* 430b26–30 (quoted in previous note), *DA* 430b1–2: "Falsehood always involves a combining [*en sunthesēi*]" ; also, 430a26–28, 432a11–12, *Meta.* 1012a2–5, 1027b26–27.

Incidental perception is not the only sort of perception that can be false. There is a form of in-itself perception that is not the perception of a sensible proper to one of the five senses: perception of the "common sensibles" (change, rest, shape, size, number), so-called because they are perceptible "in common" by more than one of the five senses.<sup>19</sup> This sort of perception is the one most liable to error, Aristotle tells us;<sup>20</sup> it cannot, therefore, be simple, and must involve synthesis of some sort.<sup>21</sup> We may ask the same questions of this synthesis as we have of the two kinds of incidental perception: what exactly is associated, and how is this association effected? And more specifically, is *phantasia* involved here, too?

If the perception of the common sensibles involves a synthesis, it must be one in which a perceptual experience corresponding to a common sensible is combined with the perceptual experience that is the in-itself perception of a proper sensible of one of the five senses. An example of such a perception of a common sensible, then, would be the mental predication that *the white is round*. The association that makes this predication possible must differ from that involved in cases of incidental perception; for in the latter cases there is an origin to the perceptual predicate distinct from its predication of a perceptual subject, whereas here there is not.<sup>22</sup> Thus it would seem that *phantasia* does not play a role in the perception of common sensibles:<sup>23</sup> no *phantasma* of an earlier perceptual experience corresponding to a special sensible, no *phantasma* of an earlier conceptual experience is evoked by the perceptual experience, *the white*. Aristotle insists that a common sensible is not perceived incidentally, but in itself; yet it is also perceived *via* the perception of the proper sensible.<sup>24</sup> The

<sup>19</sup> Not because they are perceived by some faculty called "the common sense" (so Modrak, *Power of Perception*, 63, and many others). On this see especially Wolfgang Welsch, *Aisthesis. Grundzüge und Perspektiven der Aristotelischen Sinneslehre* (Stuttgart, 1987), 282–96.

<sup>20</sup> DA 428b22–25.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle never explicitly says that perception of the common sensibles involves synthesis, nor does he ever give a propositional expression of the content of such a perception; but that he does think it involves a synthesis is a reasonable inference from his views about its liability to falsehood and the nature of falsehood. So Andreas Graeser, "On Aristotle's Framework of Sensibilia" in G. E. R. Lloyd and G. E. L. Owen, ed., *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses* (Cambridge, 1978), 86, and Wolfgang Bernard, *Rezeptivität und Spontaneität der Wahrnehmung bei Aristoteles* (Baden-Baden, 1988), 81. Welsch, *Aisthesis*, 273–76, convincingly argues that "die Wahrnehmung von *koīna* wesensmässig auf die von *idia* gestützt, mithin also in *idion*-Wahrnehmung fundiert ist" (275).

<sup>22</sup> This is the brunt of DA III.1. 425a14–b11.

<sup>23</sup> Irwin, *First Principles*, 316, argues that Aristotle should have recognized a role for *phantasia* in the perception of common sensibles on the ground that (to simplify somewhat) the comparison of proper sensibles involves memory which involves *phantasia*.

<sup>24</sup> This intermediate position perhaps accounts for Aristotle's much-discussed apparent contradiction in saying, in the same chapter, both that the common sensibles are perceived "incidentally" (425a15) and that they are perceived "not incidentally" (425a28) (so Welsch, *Aisthesis*, 287–

most likely account seems to be that the in-itself perception of (say) the round is mediated by the perception of the white against the background of a different color.<sup>55</sup> The perception of a proper sensible of any of the five senses will involve perceiving it in some way against the backdrop of other values in the range of that sense; and such perceiving against a backdrop will always bring with it the awareness of some common sensible.<sup>56</sup> (E.g., to perceive a tone will be to perceive it start against a background of silence or of another tone, which brings to light the common sensibles of change and number.) Thus every sense is suited to perceive not only its proper sensibles, but also (at least some of) the common sensibles, in themselves. If we had only the sense of sight, we might not realize that the shape of the white against a blue background was a different sort of sensible from the white and the blue; but possessing the sense of touch, which can sense the shape of the hard against the soft, we realize that shape, though perceived in itself, is indeed a different sort of sensible from the sensibles proper to each of the five senses: precisely a common sensible.

The synthesis involved in the perception of a common sensible, then, is a synthesis of two perceptual experiences, each of which is a perception of some sensible in itself; because the perception of the one is mediated (in the way explained) by the perception of the other, the synthesis of their corresponding perceptual experiences is a mental predication. Furthermore, both terms of this mental predication are unconceptualized; like the mental predication involved in the incidental perception of a proper sensible, the mental predication in the perception of a common sensible has as terms perceptual experiencings, and so is possessed by nonhuman as well as by human animals.

### 3. PHANTASIA

Above we discussed the three different sorts of perception Aristotle recognizes: the perception of proper sensibles, that of common sensibles, and that of incidental sensibles. Of these, the perception of incidental sensibles involves *phantasmata*. We need now to investigate more fully the nature of *phantasmata* and the sorts of mental predication in which they may be involved.

94, esp. 292 n. 99). See Joseph Owens, "Aristotle on Common Sensibles and Incidental Perception," *Phoenix* 36 (1982): 215–36, for a thorough review of discussions of this problem.

<sup>55</sup> This is essentially the view of Bernard, *Rezeptivität und Spontaneität*, 115–32, following the Greek commentators: "[Der Unterschied zwischen Idia und Koina besteht] darin, daß Idia direkt ein Erleiden des Sinnesorgans bewirken, Koina hingegen nur indirekt (aber nicht akzidentell, das heißt, ohne Bezug zu ihrem Wesen), weil sie charakteristische Kombinationen von Idia hervorrufen" (123).

<sup>56</sup> Thus Aristotle says that the common sensibles "accompany" the proper sensibles (*DA* 425b5, 8).



The incidental perception of proper sensibles (e.g., that the white is sweet) involves a *phantasma* corresponding to the mental predicate; this *phantasma* itself can only be evoked because an earlier in-itself perception of the sweet produced a *phantasma*. But perceptual experiences of in-itself sensibles are not the only ones which give rise to *phantasmata*; so do occurrences of the perception of incidental and common sensibles. Furthermore, the nature of the *phantasma* produced varies with the kind of perception producing it: whereas in the case of the simple, nonpredicative perception of special sensibles the resulting *phantasma* is itself simple, in cases where the original perceptual experience is predicative, so too is the resulting *phantasma*. Only on this supposition can we make sense of Aristotle's account of the possibility of error in one's *phantasma*: "The motion which is due to the activity of sense [= *phantasia*] in these three modes of its exercise will differ; the first kind of derived motion [from perception of proper sensibles] is true when the sensation is present; the others may be false whether it is present or absent, especially when the object of perception is far off" (DA 428b25–30). As we have seen, for Aristotle falsehood is only possible when synthesis is involved; thus the possibility of falsehood is the case of the *phantasia* of incidental and common sensibles guarantees their compound status. Nor does the present passage suggest that the *phantasia* of proper sensibles must be complex because they can be false. For the present passage does not say that they *can* be false. Like a proposed definition, the *phantasma* of a proper sensible can either hit or be off the mark; and while Aristotle is prepared to call the former case an instance of truth (though in a different sense than the truth of propositions),<sup>27</sup> he denies that the latter is a case of falsehood.

On the account I have so far given, Aristotle recognizes one type of simple perception (that of proper sensibles), two types of predicative perception that do not require concepts (perception of the common sensibles and incidental perception of proper sensibles), and one type of predicative perception that does require a concept (incidental perception of an intelligible, e.g., of a substance). The last of these occupies an interesting borderline between perception and thought.<sup>28</sup> It involves not the mental predication of one perceptual experiencing of another, but rather a mental predication that may seem

<sup>27</sup> On the difference between these two different senses of truth, see *Meta.* 1051b17–28.

<sup>28</sup> Such cognition could be called *doxa met' aisthēseōs* and is apparently what Plato meant by *phantasia* (see *Sophist* 264a–b). That Aristotle should criticize this as an account of *phantasia* (DA 428a24–b9) while himself recognizing the importance of the phenomenon is not atypical of his relationship to Platonic doctrine. For a discussion of Aristotle's response to Plato's account of *phantasia*, see Gerard Watson, "Phantasia in Aristotle, *De Anima* 3.3," *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1982): 100–13, who does not, however, see that Aristotle recognizes something similar to Platonic *phantasia*.

more familiar to us, one in which a conceptualized mental predicate is asserted of an unconceptualized mental subject. The importance of this sort of perception for action is obvious. It is what allows our general views to be applied to particular situations. Perceptions of this sort figure in deliberation, especially at its close,<sup>29</sup> and when Aristotle says, concerning moral choice, that "the discernment [*krisis*] rests with perception,"<sup>30</sup> and when he compares *phronêsis* with perception,<sup>31</sup> this is the sort of perception he means. Now Aristotle also treats incidental perception of this sort as belief, since it involves a concept and can serve as the last premise in a train of reasoning leading to action.<sup>32</sup> This however should not give us pause; as mediator between the universal and the particular, this sort of cognition combines features of both perception and thought.

#### 4. THOUGHT

Our interest here is not in Aristotle's theory of thinking in general, but only insofar as it is relevant to our proposed analysis of desire as a special form of mental predication. We are thus concerned only with Aristotle's account of predicative thought. The incidental perception of intelligibles we have just discussed may be considered one such kind of thought; another is that in which both the subject and the predicate are conceptualized. What about the remaining case of mental predication, that in which the subject is conceptualized, but not the predicate? Such a case would be one, for example, in which one would think of a rose, which thought would then evoke a *phantasma* which occasioned the unconceptualized mental experience corresponding to red or to a particular fragrance. This sort of cognition seems perfectly intelligible; so far as I know, however, Aristotle does not seem to take notice of it in nonaction contexts. I shall argue below,<sup>33</sup> however, that postulating Aristotle's recognition of such a sort of cognition helps make sense of what Aristotle says about one type of weakness of will. If my argument proves successful, then we shall have grounds for saying that Aristotle recognizes all four kinds of mental predication to which the permutation of conceptualized and unconceptualized terms give rise.

Having completed a survey of the basic forms of mental predication in Aristotle, we may now turn to the analysis of those mental predications that are desires.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. *EN* 1112b34–1113a2.

<sup>30</sup> *EN* 1109b22–23, 1126b4–5.

<sup>31</sup> *EN* 1142a26–30.

<sup>32</sup> *EN* 1147a25–26: "The one opinion [*doxa*] is universal, the other is concerned with particulars, and here we come to something of which perception is in control." Cf. also 1147b9–10.

<sup>33</sup> Section 8.

## 5. DESIRE WITHOUT PHANTASIA

The most important passage for the predicative nature of desire is *DA* III.7. The passage of most immediate relevance to us starts as follows: "To perceive is like bare pronouncing and thinking [*tôî phanai monon kai noein*], but when [it perceives something] pleasant or painful, [the soul] as if affirming or denying [*hoion kataphasa ê apophasa*], pursues or avoids" (*DA* 431a8–10). In comparing perception to "bare pronouncing and thinking," Aristotle must, I think, be comparing it to the nonpropositional thinking of a simple concept.<sup>34</sup> In the preceding lines he has been discussing how the sensible leads the sensitive faculty out of potentiality into actuality (431a4–7), which account applies only to the in-itself perception of a proper sensible;<sup>35</sup> in the present passage he goes on to discuss a predicative synthesis into which such a perceptual experience can enter, one that is different, however, from the syntheses in incidental or common perception we have already discussed. The second term in the synthesis under discussion here seems to be the (unconceptualized) experience, *the pleasant* or *the painful*; when it is the former, the animal moves towards the thing perceived, when the latter it moves away from it. This connection with motion is one of the distinctive marks of this sort of mental predication which, unlike those studied so far, is conative. But let us leave the connection with motion aside for the moment, and ask the questions we have been asking about the other mental predications: what is predicated of the perceptual experience caused by the proper sensible, and how is the predication effected?

The answer to the first question seems already to have been given: it is *the pleasant* or *the painful*, mental experiences in their own right, that are associated with the proper sensible. And although, as we shall see, there are cases in which these conative mental predicates are mental experiences involving a *phantasma*, there must be a more fundamental sort of desiderative mental predication which does not involve a *phantasma*. For were a *phantasma* always involved, then conative mental predications would always be *incidental* perceptions of the pleasant and we would need to posit some nonincidental perceptual source to account for the *phantasma*, i.e., a special sense for pleasure and pain.<sup>36</sup> Besides being implausible in itself, such a view conflicts with Aristotle's analysis of pleasure as (supervenient on) unimpeded activity of a well-

<sup>34</sup> Charles, *Philosophy of Action*, 85, holds that Aristotle's comparison here works as follows: perceiving (propositionally) : desiring :: saying or entertaining a proposition : asserting that proposition.

<sup>35</sup> This explains why Aristotle says that proper sensibles are "sensibles in the strict sense, and are that to which the being [*ousia*] of each sense is naturally fitted" (*DA* 418a24–25).

<sup>36</sup> The argument I construct here is analogous to the one Aristotle gives (*DA* III.1) for the claim that there is no special sense for perceiving the common sensibles.

conditioned sense<sup>37</sup> on the best of its objects.<sup>38</sup> The pleasant and the painful, then, must be perceived in a way analogous to the common sensibles: they are perceived in themselves, but in a way essentially mediated by the activity of the proper senses.

The passage quoted above continues as follows: "Being-pleased or being-pained is being active with the perceptive mean towards what is good or bad, as such. Both avoidance and desire, when actual, are identical with this. The faculties of desire and avoidance are not different, either from one another or from the faculty of sense-perception; but their being is different" (431a10–14). When we are pleased, we are active with (or: actualize) the perceptive mean; this confirms the suggestion that being pleased is essentially connected with the operation of sense-perception. That is to say, the pleasant is not perceived in a merely incidental way.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, this passage tells us that the perception of the pleasant, which we have seen to be a predicative perception that initiates movement, is identical both with active desire, as we might have expected, and with being pleased, as we might not.<sup>40</sup> What may at first seem not to fit with the theory of desire as we have interpreted it so far is the claim here that this desire is the perception of good or bad, as such. For this claim might suggest that it is the good that is perceived along with the proper sensible, not the pleasant. But this problem is illusory; the good is not to be contrasted here with the pleasant, but rather identified with it. Aristotle wants to indicate why it is that perception of the pleasant (unlike perception of the common, proper, and incidental sensibles) can initiate motion. In Aristotle's theory of action, it is the cognition of the good<sup>41</sup> that initiates motion; here he tells us that the form cognition of the good takes at the sensory level is precisely perception of the pleasant.<sup>42</sup> The unconceptualized mental experience of the good is the experience of being pleased.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>37</sup> I leave aside here the pleasure of contemplation, which Aristotle analyses in parallel fashion as (supervenient on) the unimpeded activity of an excellently conditioned *mind* on the best of its objects.

<sup>38</sup> See *EN* 1174b14–1175a3.

<sup>39</sup> In incidental perception the faculty of perception is not affected by the incidental perceptible (*DA* 418a23–24); that is, we are not active with the sensitive mean towards the incidental perceptible, as such.

<sup>40</sup> This is rightly emphasized by Welsch, *Aisthesis*: "Nicht entsteht, diesem Aristotelischen Ansatz zufolge, Lust dadurch, daß ein Streben sein Ziel erreicht, sondern es entsteht gerade das Streben erst dadurch, daß Lust erfahren wird" (393).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. *DA* 433a27–29, b8–9, 15–16 (*to prakton agathon*); *MA* 700b24–29 (quoted and discussed below, in section 7), 701a24. Cf. also *Meta.* 1072a27–28.

<sup>42</sup> So too Henry S. Richardson, "Desire and the Good in *De Anima*," in M. Nussbaum and A. O. Rorty, eds., *Essays on Aristotle's "De Anima"* (Oxford, 1992), 395 n. 41.

<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that the concept of the good and the concept of the pleasant are the same; see further below.

As in the case of the common sensibles, Aristotle does not give any explicit treatment of the mental predication involved in the perception of the pleasant; however, his discussion of the desire felt by animals possessing only the sense of touch gives us some sense of how he conceives this predication to work. Animals, by definition, must have some sensation; while there is no necessity that stationary animals have the other senses, they must have touch. For “where there is immediate contact the animal, if it has no sensation, will be unable to avoid some things and take others, and so will find it impossible to survive” (434b16–18). What is passed over in this passage is a specification of the content of the perception that initiates this motion, and its relation to touch and the proper sensibles of touch. An earlier passage addresses these points:

If any living thing has the faculty of sense, it also has that of desire [*to orektikon*]. . . . Now all animals have one sense at all events, namely touch, and whatever has a sense has pleasure and pain, and the pleasant and the painful; and whatever has these, has bodily desire [*epithumia*]: for this is desire of the pleasant. Further, they have the sense for food, for touch is the sense for food: the food of all living things consists of what is dry, moist, hot, cold, and the sense for these is touch (which is a sense for the other sensibles incidentally). . . . Hunger and thirst are forms of desire [*epithumia*], hunger a desire for what is dry and hot, thirst a desire for what is cold and moist; and flavor is as it were a sweetener of these [*hêdusma ti*]. (414b1–13)

Bodily desire is desire for the pleasant; hunger and thirst are forms of bodily desire, and hence are desire for the pleasant; yet hunger is also desire for the dry and hot, and thirst desire for the cold and moist. Now the dry and hot, and the cold and moist, are proper sensibles of the sense of touch. It would seem, then, that hunger, in the simplest case, consists in the perception by touch of something dry and hot, and the concurrent perception of it as pleasant, which initiates the movement of grasping the thing. That is to say, the desire is a mental predication in which the subject is *the dry and hot* and the predicate, *the pleasant*. This mental predication, in which both terms are unconceptualized, is conative. Of course, not every perception of something hot and dry brings with it a perception of that thing as pleasant; presumably a certain state of the body of the animal is required for that. Nonetheless, given that condition of the body, the perception of (certain of) the proper sensibles of touch brings with it an actual, nonincidental, in-itself perception of the pleasant. As in the case of perception of the common sensibles, so here it would seem that no *phantasma* is involved.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Desires of this sort thus do not involve *phantasia* in the strict sense. Many scholars (e.g., Martha Nussbaum, *Aristotle's "De Motu Animalium"* [Princeton, 1978], Essay 5; Irwin, *First Principles*, 300, 304–305) have argued that *phantasia* is involved whenever something is seen-as something else—in my terms, whenever a perception has predicative structure. For a treatment of passages which have been taken to show that *phantasia* is involved in all desires, see note 49 below.

One peculiarity (from our perspective) of Aristotle's account as I have presented it is that desire, as a perception of the pleasant, is itself an experiencing of pleasure.<sup>45</sup> To be sure, it is not an unalloyed experiencing of pleasure; the bodily condition which makes objects of this sort pleasant may well be in itself painful, so that the experience of the desire is, overall, a painful one. In fact, we can see the movement initiated by desire as a movement on the animal's part from a state where pleasure is outweighed by pain to one in which the opposite is true. In the simple case under consideration, this state comes about when the animal "takes" (cf. *labein*, 434b17)—that is, eats—the pleasant object.<sup>46</sup>

#### 6. DESIRE WITH PHANTASIA

In the simplest case of desire, then, there is no role for *phantasia* in the strict sense. But the in-itself perception of the pleasant, like all perceptions, gives rise to a *phantasma*. Like the *phantasma* produced by the perception of common sensibles, and for similar reasons, the *phantasma* produced by the perception of the pleasant must be complex: it must have a predicative structure, with one constituent *phantasma* corresponding to the proper sensible(s) whose perception mediated the perception of the pleasant (e.g., the hot and dry), and with another corresponding to the pleasant. This complex *phantasma* somehow remains in the animal, to be evoked at a later time and to occasion thereby the corresponding mental experience. There are two ways that this can happen, of which the first is relatively straightforward. We noted in the last section that the perception of certain proper sensibles does not invariably give rise to perception of the pleasant (i.e., to a desire), but does so only when certain bodily conditions obtain. But it would be odd to suppose that when those conditions obtain, animals cannot experience desire unless they actually perceive the proper sensibles that they find (in those conditions) pleasant. Aristotle's view, rather, is that the bodily conditions themselves trigger a complex *phantasma* which occasions a mental predication in which *the pleasant* is predicated of (as it may be) *the hot and dry*.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> See my discussion of *DA* 431a10–14 above. Plato, too, holds that desire involves an element of pleasure, though his analysis of how it does so differs from Aristotle's. See *Philebus* 34d–36b and 47c–d.

<sup>46</sup> The eating itself is a pleasure felt by the sense of touch (*EN* 1118a23–b1, *EE* 1231a15–21).

<sup>47</sup> Simplicius, too, recognizes that *phantasia* must play a part in desire when there is no actual perception of the thing desired: "But even the least animals have an indefinite *phantasia*, so that they may desire that which is absent" (*In Libros Aristotelis De Anima Commentaria*, ed. M. Hayduck [Berlin, 1882] = *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* XI, 102.8–9). This consideration seems to me decisive against the view that Aristotle denies *phantasia* to stationary animals (compare Wedin, *Mind and Imagination*, 41–42 and n. 21). *DA* 428a8–11 is merely an *endoxon* that is revised at *DA* 434a3–5.

The mental predicate *the pleasant* is distinctive from other unconceptualized mental predicates in being conative: mental predications in which it figures can give rise to movement on the animal's part. The two cases of desire so far discussed, however, can give rise to only the simplest of movements. The actual perception (by touch) of the sensibles the body requires prompts the animal to consume what it touches. Imagining those sensibles *via* a complex *phantasma* presumably prompts random movements which will lead, if all goes well, to the actual perception of the sensibles in question.<sup>48</sup> These rudimentary movements comprise the repertory of only the simplest, stationary animals; animals capable of locomotion have other senses, besides touch, which enter into a more complex mental process connecting desire and movement. This more complex process involves, not only mental predication, but also certain operations involving several such predications, operations which are syllogistic in form. The predications which we are concerned with at present are still those with unconceptualized terms, and the syllogistic operations involving them are performed by animals as well as by humans. What I shall be outlining is in essence a theory of the unconceptualized practical syllogism. As we shall see, Aristotle's theory of human action involving thought is an extension of this theory.

Aristotle tells us that the higher senses belong "not to any and every kind of animal, but to some; that is, they must belong to an animal capable of forward motion [*tôi poreutikôi*]; for, if it is going to survive, it must perceive not only when it is touched but also at a distance" (*DA* 434b24–27). How he envisions that the higher senses are employed in animal desire can be seen in a passage from the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "Nor is there in animals other than man any pleasure connected with those senses except incidentally. For dogs do not delight in the scent of hares, but in eating them; but the scent gave them the perception of the hares. Nor does the lion delight in the lowing of the ox, but in eating it; but he perceived by the lowing that it was near, and therefore appears to delight in the lowing. And similarly he does not delight because he sees a 'stag or wild goat', but because he is going to have a meal" (1118a16–23). In Aristotle's examples an animal perceives a sensible proper to one of the special sensibles in itself; pleasure, he tells us, is connected with this perception incidentally. There is a middle term in these examples, which is connected nonincidentally to the animal's pleasure, and incidentally to the in-itself perception of the proper sensible. Aristotle indicates this middle term

<sup>48</sup> I have in mind here, for example, the random movement of the tentacles of a sea anemone, which, with luck, result in the perception of its food. Compare *DA* 434a4–5: "How could *phantasia* be in [the lowest animals]? Or just as they move in an indefinite way [*aoristôs*], so are these [*phantasia* and *epithumia*] present in them, but present in an indefinite way?"

here by referring to the animal's eating its prey or having a meal; the middle term is clearly a mental experience which is in some sense of these activities, occasioned not by the activities themselves (which are in the future) but by a *phantasma*.

Thus there seem to be two mental predications at work in the examples Aristotle cites. Because Aristotle holds, as we have seen, that what we find pleasant insofar as we are hungry is the hot and dry, I suggest that we can formulate the two mental predications involved in the first example as follows: (1) *the odoriferous is hot-and-dry* and (2) *the hot-and-dry is pleasant*. The first of these is an incidental perception made possible by a past simultaneous perception of the odoriferous and the hot-and-dry, and involves a *phantasma* corresponding to the hot-and-dry. The second is a mental experience made possible by a past experience of eating, which at that time produced a complex *phantasma* corresponding to the predication of *the pleasant* of the tactile experience, *the hot-and-dry*. On Aristotle's account, the animal performs some mental operation similar to inference in coming mentally to predicate *the pleasant* of *the odoriferous*; in so doing, the animal has an impulse to pursue the odoriferous object. (The terms of the mental predications involved in this inference are, let it be remembered, unconceptualized.)

How are we to understand the temporal relation of the two mental predications that serve as premises in the quasi-syllogism discussed above? That is to say, are we to suppose that the incidental perception of the hot-and-dry evokes the *phantasma* that occasions the mental predication *the hot-and-dry is pleasant*, that is, evokes the desire for hot-and-dry, that is, evokes the animal's hunger? Or are we to suppose that the animal's bodily condition had itself already evoked the *phantasma* (and the attendant hunger), and that the incidental perception of the hot-and-dry merely gave some direction to its otherwise random movements in search of satisfaction? Clearly both scenarios are possible; they correspond to the two cases of simple desire discussed above. It is reasonable to suppose that sometimes an animal's desire is prompted by the perception of something in its environment, while at other times its own bodily condition is sufficient.

Aristotle nowhere explicitly discusses the difference between the two cases I have just outlined. The distinction can, however, help clear up a confusion concerning Aristotle's view of the role of *phantasia* in desire.<sup>49</sup> More impor-

<sup>49</sup> The existence of these two different cases may be the source of the confusion that exists among scholars as to whether *phantasia* is always required in desire. (See, for example, Modrak, *Power of Perception*, 210 n. 61.) Sometimes Aristotle makes *phantasia* one possible cognitive element in desire among many (*MA* 701a5-6, 29-30, 36, *DA* 433b12); at other times he seems to say that it is always present in desire (*DA* 433b28-29, *MA* 702a17-19). I have already argued that desire does not require *phantasia*. In cases where desire prompts locomotion, *phantasia* will always be



tantly, it draws attention to the real difference Aristotle thinks obtains between deliberated human action and even the most complicated animal action. Deliberated action resembles in one respect the case in which an animal's bodily condition evokes a desire unconnected to what it actually perceives: deliberation characteristically starts from a desire which is not yet focussed on any object one currently perceives. Whereas the nonhuman animal is essentially passive, however, in that it is dependent on something's turning up in its perceptual field that it associates with the object of its desire, the deliberator can actively reason back from the object of her desire to various ways it might be realized in her present circumstances. At every step of her reasoning her general knowledge is brought to bear on her particular situation.<sup>50</sup> Such calculation involves consciously considering general propositions of various sorts; hence, it involves the use of concepts. Furthermore, if general propositions (e.g., causal ones) are to be applied to what is desired, the desired object itself must be conceptualized. Therefore the desire that gives rise to deliberation must be a cognition that explicitly involves concepts.

#### 7. CONCEPTUALIZED DESIRE

Desire, as we have seen, is on Aristotle's account a mental predication, of which both terms can be unconceptualized. If deliberation is to take place, then the subject term must be conceptualized. The predicate term need not, however. One may mentally predicate the unconceptualized mental experience *the pleasant* of a conceptualized subject, proceed to think certain causal propositions relevant to attaining what corresponds to that subject, and ultimately act in order to attain it. Interesting cases of weakness of will often involve desire and deliberation of this sort, as I shall argue below. In this section I shall be concerned more specifically with desires in which the predicate term is conceptualized. For while desires with conceptualized subjects and unconceptualized predicates can give rise to calculation and, therefore, to actions of greater complexity than desires with unconceptualized subjects, nonetheless they are not, as desires, different in kind from the other sorts of desires studied so far. What makes a mental predication a desire is its conative predicate, and all the desires so far discussed share the same, unconceptualized conative predicate: *the pleasant*. The desire which is different in

---

involved, for the pleasant in such cases is perceived incidentally, which involves a *phantasma*. (Cases of locomotive desire are by far the most common, and it is with these that Aristotle is concerned in *DA* 433b28–29 and *MA* 702a17–19.) Within the class of locomotive desires, some are instigated by perception, others are evoked purely internally, by means of *phantasia* alone. When Aristotle contrasts perception with *phantasia* in the origination of locomotive desire, he usually has this latter contrast in mind.

<sup>50</sup> See *Meta.* Z.7.1035b15–31 for a clear example of such deliberation.

kind from all these, and which, as desire, is characteristically human, contains a conceptualized conative predicate. This conceptualized conative predicate is, I suggest, the mental exercise of the concept 'good'. If this is Aristotle's position, then there is a straightforward way to explicate his distinction between *epithumia* and *boulêsis*. To say the former is desire of the pleasant, the latter desire of the good, is simply to say that the former is the mental predication of an unconceptualized, the latter the mental predication of a conceptualized, conative predicate.

The view of Aristotelian *boulêsis* here proposed interprets Aristotle's association of *boulêsis* with *logos* and the *logistikôn meros* of the soul in a more modest way than is common in the recent literature.<sup>51</sup> On my view, *boulêsis* can be called "rational desire" only in a limited sense; it would perhaps be better to call it "conceptualized desire." A full critique of the more robust interpretation of *boulêsis* as rational desire is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>52</sup> I shall instead further explicate and defend my proposal by addressing a question that immediately arises for it, namely, that concerning the relation between the unconceptualized and the conceptualized conative predicates; that is, between *the pleasant* and *the good*.

*The pleasant* and *the good* are distinct conative mental predicates. Nonetheless, it is not in the way they are conative, i.e., the way they motivate action, that they differ; they differ only in their mode of cognition: the one is conceptualized, and so involves thought, while the other is unconceptualized, and so involves perception (or *phantasia aisthêtikê*). In order to understand the sense in which the two mental predicates are alike, we must look more closely at *the pleasant*.

In the case of a nondesiderative predicative perception, e.g., the perception which is the mental predication *the white is sweet*, there are sensibles in the world corresponding to the terms in the predication, namely, particular cases of whiteness and of sweetness (although that which gives rise to this perception need be neither white nor sweet). But in the case of a desiderative perception, e.g., the predication *the sweet is pleasant*, there are no sensibles in the world, particular cases of "pleasantness," corresponding to the mental predicate. The sugar is perceived as pleasant, as we pointed out earlier, due to a certain condition of the body. Appealing to Aristotle's discussion of pleasure

<sup>51</sup> See G. E. M. Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle," in R. Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (London, 1965), 143–58, and Terence Irwin, "First Principles in Aristotle's Ethics," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 3 (1978): 252–72, for influential statements of the common view, which construes *boulêsis*, roughly, as a desire for which the person with the desire can give reasons.

<sup>52</sup> I discuss one of the major pieces of evidence for this interpretation, *EN* 1142b18–19, in section 8 below.

in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we may make this more precise: the object is perceived to be pleasant because it occasions the excellent activity of (one of) the animal's psychic capacities. Now for animals, the only psychic capacity whose activity can in itself give rise to perceptions of the pleasant is that of touch (i.e., eating and sex); among humans, the activity of the other senses can do so, too. (So, too, can the exercise of the capacity to think.)

Now even though there is no sensible "pleasantness" existing independently in objects, we still have the mental experience of *the pleasant*, which serves as a conative mental predicate in the way described. The repetition of this mental experience can in humans give rise to a concept, just as the repeated experience of the mental predicate *the round* can give rise to the concept 'round'. The conative concept that arises from the experience of *the pleasant* is, I suggest, the concept 'good'.<sup>53</sup> In this way Aristotle's theory of action preserves a certain unity: the distinction between *epithumia* and *boulêsis* does not turn on a distinction between two kinds of attractiveness in things that can motivate us to action, but rather on the two different ways we can cognize the attractiveness of things: either conceptually (through thinking) or nonconceptually (through perception or *phantasia*).

More light is shed on the way the pleasant and the good are related in a unified theory of action, and on the conativity they share, by a passage in the *De Motu Animalium*: "The first cause of movement is the object of desire and the object of thought. Not, however, every object of thought, but only the end of things done [*telos tôn praktôn*]. Accordingly, it is goods of this sort that initiate movement, not everything fine. For it initiates movement only so far as something is for its sake, or so far as it is the end of that which is for the sake of something else. And we must suppose that the apparent good takes the position of the good, as does the pleasant, which is itself an apparent good" (700b23–29). Here Aristotle analyzes the conative concept 'good' as the concept 'end of action', 'that for the sake of which' other things are or are done.<sup>54</sup> Cognizing something as an end of action is, in itself, to be motivated to pursue it. (This, which might be called the "internalist position" with respect to motivation, is what taking desire as cognitive comes to.) Cognition of something as an end has motivating power no matter what modality of cognition is in question.<sup>55</sup> But the kind of desire such cognition constitutes will vary according to

<sup>53</sup> The distinction between this concept and the concept 'pleasant' will be discussed below.

<sup>54</sup> While insisting on the multivocality of "good," Aristotle nevertheless maintains that its various meanings are related in a nonarbitrary manner. I find Berti's argument that all other meanings of "good" have reference to a primary or focal one, which is that of end, persuasive. See Enrico Berti, "Multiplicité et unité du bien selon *EE* I 8," in P. Moraux and D. Harlfinger, ed., *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik* (Berlin, 1971), 157–84.

<sup>55</sup> Note that *dianoëton* here covers *phantasia* and *aisthêsis* as well as *nous*; see 700b19–21.

whether that cognition is unconceptualized (in which case the mental predicate is *the pleasant*) or conceptualized (*the good*).

In the passage quoted above Aristotle refers to something cognized as good as an apparent good. He seems also to distinguish two different kinds of apparent good, the pleasant and some other kind; but he does not give any explanation of this distinction. A similar passage in the *Eudemian Ethics* helps provide the explanation: "The object of desire and wish [*to orekton kai boulêton*] is either the good or the apparent good [*to phainomenon agathon*]. Now this is why the pleasant is an object of desire; for it is something that appears good [*phainomenon . . . ti agathon*]. For while some people have this opinion of it, to others it appears good, even if they do not have this opinion of it. For appearance [*phantasia*] and opinion [*doxa*] do not reside in the same part of the soul" (*EE* 1235b25–29). Here, too, the pleasant is said to be one kind of apparent good. But as the passage continues it becomes clear that the pleasant can be called an apparent good for two reasons. On the one hand, anything that is desired must be cognized as an end (that is, it must have a conative predicate mentally predicated of it). In this sense the mental subject of a *boulêsis* is as much an apparent good as the mental subject of an *epithumia*.<sup>56</sup> But the pleasant is also a *phainomenon agathon* in the technical sense, for *the pleasant* is the form the conative predicate takes when it is cognized, nonconceptually, by *phantasia*.<sup>57</sup> Because such cognition is not conceptualized, for something to appear good to one in this restricted sense does not entail that one has the belief that that thing is good; indeed, as Aristotle points out here, one may believe that it is bad. It is this difference in the way the good can be cognized that allows Aristotle to recognize real conflicts of desire while retaining his view that contradictory beliefs are contrary properties and so incapable of being simultaneously held (*Meta.* 1005b26–32).

It might be supposed that my account of the concept 'good' as the concept corresponding to the perceptual experience *the pleasant* leaves no room for a distinct concept of 'pleasant'. This however is not so, for 'pleasant' and 'good' are different sorts of concepts: the latter is conative, while the former is not. To think something good (in the focal sense) is to cognize it as an end of action, and thereby to have an impulse to pursue it. The same holds of perceiving it or "phantasizing" it to be pleasant. But thinking of an object as pleasant does not have this conative dimension. It is simply to think of the object as being such that, in some circumstances, perceiving it or "phantasizing" it

<sup>56</sup> See *EN* 1113a23–24: "Are we to say that absolutely and in truth the good is the object of wish [*to boulêton*], but for each person what appears good [*to phainomenon*]?"

<sup>57</sup> On the analysis offered above, only the most elementary perception of the pleasant (i.e., by touch) takes place without the assistance of *phantasia*. In any *epithumia* that prompts locomotion the conative mental predicate will be cognized by *phantasia*.

would result in the perception or *phantasia* of it as pleasant<sup>58</sup> (that is, in the mental predication of the unconceptualized predicate *the pleasant* of the mental subject corresponding to it). Thinking an object pleasant may, on the other hand, lead one to have the corresponding *phantasia* of it (if one is in the right condition), and so to have an *epithumia* for it; but it need not. At the level of thought only the concept of 'good' has intrinsic motivating force.<sup>59</sup>

I have so far argued that what makes a desire a *boulêsis* is its having a conceptualized conative predicate. I conclude my discussion of *boulêsis* with a few remarks about the subject term in the mental predication that is a *boulêsis*. This mental subject may be either conceptualized or unconceptualized. If it is unconceptualized, then the *boulêsis* in which it figures cannot give rise to deliberation. Furthermore, any deliberation that results from a *boulêsis* with two conceptualized terms must end in a mental predication with an unconceptualized subject if that deliberation is to issue in action. For only when the mental subject is an experience occasioned by a sensible in one's environment is there a direction for the impulse to action involved in the conative predicate. A process of deliberation issuing in action terminates when one has mentally predicated *good* of some experience occasioned by a sensible, *via* a succession of middle terms (involved in the thinking of various propositions); this ultimate *boulêsis* is a *prohairesis*.<sup>60</sup>

This completes my account of the difference between *epithumia* and *boulêsis* in terms of the difference in the cognition of the conative predicate in a mental predication. I now turn to showing how this account of Aristotelian desire may help us understand Aristotle's views on weakness of will and moral education.

#### 8. WEAKNESS OF WILL

My purpose here is not to treat fully this vexatious topic in Aristotle's moral psychology, but merely to suggest what light the proposed interpretation of *boulêsis* and *epithumia* may shed on it. Now in his *phusikôteron* account of *akrasia* in

<sup>58</sup> The concept 'pleasant' is thus in one sense more complex than the concept 'good', in that its analysis refers to certain modes of cognition (see *DA* 431a10–11). Its acquisition will therefore involve some kind of reflexivity, as does, presumably, the acquisition of such concepts as 'perception' or 'belief'. Acquisition of the concept 'good' will not, on my account, require such reflexivity.

<sup>59</sup> Is there any reflexive, nonconative concept that bears a relation to the conceptualized experience *good* similar to that which the concept 'pleasant' bears to the perceived or phantasized experience of *the pleasant*? Although I cannot pursue the point here, I suggest that the concept 'fine' (*kalon*) may have such a role (among others) in Aristotle's theory. For a discussion of passages where Aristotle distinguishes the fine from the good, see D. J. Allan, "The Fine and the Good in the Eudemian Ethics," in Moraux and Harlfinger, *Untersuchungen zur Eudemischen Ethik*, 63–71.

<sup>60</sup> Some *boulêseis* of particular perceived things are not preceded by deliberation; cf. *EE* 1224a3–4, 1226b3–4. As these passages show, Aristotle refuses to call such desires *prohairesis*.

EN VII.3, Aristotle pictures two competing motivations at work in the case of the incontinent agent: "When the universal opinion is present, restraining one from tasting, and there is also the opinion that everything sweet is pleasant, and that this is sweet (and this opinion is active), and *epithumia* happens to be present, the one opinion bids one avoid the object, but *epithumia* leads one on" (1147a31–34). Since Aristotle repeatedly tells us that the incontinent acts *para boulêsin*, we may assume that the "universal opinion" restraining the agent from tasting is a *boulêsis* which is a cognition of the eating of the thing as bad. It seems unlikely, however, that *epithumia* is to be identified with the opinion that everything sweet is pleasant, because Aristotle seems to mention this opinion and *epithumia* as two distinct items. This opinion, then, is simply a fully conceptualized, nonconative belief. The second opinion mentioned here on the side of the incontinent action, that this is sweet, would seem to be a case of incidental perception, where the predicate is conceptualized: the agent perceives in himself some feature(s) of the object (e.g., its color and shape) which evoke in him a mental experience of the concept 'sweet'.<sup>61</sup> What we have so far, then, is the (incidental) perception that something is sweet, with the general belief that the sweet is pleasant, and so the materials for the inference that this thing is pleasant. But since the pleasant in the major premise is conceptualized, it has no conative force; therefore it has none in the conclusion, either. That is why we need the additional mention of the presence of *epithumia*, for *epithumia* involves precisely that cognition of the pleasant that has conative force. Therefore I think we must suppose that the belief that this thing is pleasant (where the corresponding mental predicate is conceptualized) evokes the "phantasized" mental experience that this thing is pleasant (unconceptualized). As I mentioned before, beliefs of this sort do not always evoke *phantasiai* to match; much will depend on the individual's bodily condition, her character, and other factors. This contingency is suggested by Aristotle's expression "*epithumia* happens to be present [*tuchêi . . . enousa*]."

In this example of weakness of will it does not appear that the agent deliberates how to attain her incontinent goal; the perception of the sweet object triggers the action. But in another passage Aristotle does seem to recognize that incontinent action can be the product of deliberation: "The incontinent person, and the bad person, if clever, will get what he proposes through calculation [*ek tou logismou*]" (EN 1142b18–19). This passage has been taken to show that a *boulêsis* involves more than taking the object of your desire as

<sup>61</sup> This sort of incidental perception is different from that in which the incidental sensible is merely phantasized—though the latter may mediate the former. The incidental sensible must be conceptualized if the incidental perception is to be subsumed under the fully conceptualized predication *the sweet is pleasant*.

good;<sup>62</sup> for here an incontinent person, acting presumably against his *boulêsis*, acts in accordance with his deliberative calculation and the desire which gave rise to it. It is a fair inference from these facts, I think, that the desire from which the deliberation took rise was not a *boulêsis* (and so, for purposes of illustration, may be taken to be an *epithumia*). But once we realize that even a desire without a conceptualized predicate can give rise to deliberation, there is no need to suppose that the desire from which the deliberation arose was one in which the agent *thought* of the desired object as good. For as long as the *epithumia* in question has a conceptualized *subject*, it can give rise to deliberation. Therefore the passage provides no reason to think that a *boulêsis* is anything more than a desire in which the desired object is thought to be good.

The account of "incontinent deliberation" is a plausible one that fits, I suggest, some cases of weakness of will. A person may think of something which she thinks bad (= *boulêsis* restraining her), and at the same time may phantasize it as pleasant (= *epithumia*). She may then deliberate how to attain the object, never consciously thinking that it would be good to attain it. It is easy to see that she could then actually perform the deliberated deed, without ever having "decided" to pursue the goal at all. If Aristotle is alluding to actions that manifest weakness of will in this way, then this passage is perfectly intelligible on the basis of the account of *boulêsis* and *epithumia* given above.

#### 9. MORAL EDUCATION

*Boulêsis*, on the above interpretation, requires at least one concept, that of the good; hence those who do not possess concepts, for example infants and nonhuman animals, do not have *boulêseis*. Infants do, however, have *epithumia*, which involves the cognition of the attractiveness of things through sense-perception or *phantasia*. This nonconceptualized cognition of the good serves as the experiential basis for the child's coming to possess the concept 'good'. It would seem natural, then, for the child's first *boulêseis* to have much the same objects as its *epithumiai*. If this situation is not addressed by moral education, then the things an individual finds good may continue to be just those things that appear good (i.e., are pleasant) to nonhuman animals: the things that satisfy basic bodily appetites. Aristotle makes this point in a passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: "That which is in truth an object of wish [*to kal' alêtheian sc. boulêton*] is an object of wish to the good person, while any chance thing may be so to the bad person. . . . But in the case of the many the error seems to come about because of pleasure. For it appears a good when it is not. Therefore they choose [*hairountai*] the pleasant as a good [*hôs agathon*], and avoid pain as

<sup>62</sup> Anscombe, "Thought and Action in Aristotle," seems to have been the first to draw attention to this passage and to propose the interpretation here discussed.

an evil [*hōs kakon*]” (*EN* 1113a25–26, 33–b2). But *boulēsis* does not always take its lead from *epithumia*. Once one has the concept of the good, one can, under the influence of parents, etc., come to *believe* that some things are good which do not *appear*, through perception or *phantasia*, good to one. If in fact such things appear bad (i.e., painful) to one, then the stage is set for a conflict of desires. The moral education of most people progresses only this far; hence most people are incontinent (*akratēs*) or continent (*enkratēs*).

Moral education need not stop there. For not only can *epithumia* influence the objects one thinks good, *boulēsis* can influence the objects that appear to one as pleasant. Unlike such erroneous appearances as the visible size of the sun,<sup>63</sup> sensible appearances of the good can be modified by sincerely held opinions about the good. Thus moral education, by inculcating and reinforcing the proper opinions about the good, can also influence the appearances of the good, that is, a person’s *epithumiai*.<sup>64</sup>

These two moments of moral education are evident in a passage from the *Eudemian Ethics*: “While what is good absolutely is choiceworthy absolutely, what is good to oneself is what is choiceworthy for one. These things must be in harmony. And virtue brings this about, and the political art exists to this end, to bring this about in those in whom as yet it does not exist. . . . And the road is through the pleasant; the noble must be pleasant. And when these are out of harmony a person is not yet perfectly good. For incontinence may arise; for the disharmony of the good with the pleasant in the passions constitutes incontinence” (*EE* 1236b39–1237a3, 6–9). I suggest that the two references to harmony in this passage are to two different kinds of harmony. In the first half of the passage, Aristotle tells us of the need for one’s views of the good to be correct; that is, the apparent good in our *boulēseis* must be what is really good. In the second half of the passage Aristotle refers to the harmony needed between what we think good and what appears good to us in *phantasia* or perception, i.e., what we find pleasant. This harmony is one between our *boulēseis* and our *epithumiai*.<sup>65</sup> The virtuous person is characterized by both sorts of harmony.

<sup>63</sup> See *DA* 428b2–4, *De Insomniis* 460b16–20.

<sup>64</sup> The view that a nonconceptualized cognition is needed for *epithumia*, and that a person with the correct conceptualized cognition can work to achieve such nonconceptualized cognition, is also represented by Posidonius, the first-century B.C. Stoic who reverted to a Platonico-Aristotelian moral psychology: “How could someone move the irrational part [of the soul] with reasoning [*logōi*], unless one adds to it a vivid picture [*anazōgraphēsēn*] similar to one perceived by sense?” (F 162 in L. Edelstein and I. G. Kidd, ed., *Posidonius: The Fragments* [Cambridge, 1989\*]; cf. *phantasias* in the same fragment).

<sup>65</sup> See *EN* 1119b15–18: “Therefore the faculty of *epithumia* in the temperate person should agree with *logos*; for the noble is the mark at which both aim, and the temperate person desires [*epithumei*] the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought; and this is what *logos*, too, ordains.”



## 10. CONCLUSION

Aristotelian desire is a special kind of cognition: a mental predication with a conative predicate. I have tried to show that the distinction between the two main types of Aristotelian desire, *epithumia* and *boulêsis*, is based on the more fundamental division between the two ways in which the conative predicate can be cognized: conceptually or in unconceptualized form. Lastly I have briefly suggested how this interpretation of the distinction may shed light on Aristotle's views of weakness of will and of moral education.

One value of the theory I attribute to Aristotle is that it treats the distinction between the two main kinds of desire not as irreducibly given, but as a consequence of our twofold cognitive capacity. This attraction will be merely specious, however, until it is shown how the third kind of Aristotelian desire, *thumos*, fits into the picture. This project is beyond the scope of this essay; the general lines along which it can be carried out, however, are as follows. *Thumos* is not a fundamental kind of desire in the way the other two Aristotelian desires are, in spite of Aristotle's occasionally availing himself of the traditional Academic tripartition that suggests that all three are equally fundamental. Rather *thumos* is more at home in Aristotle's theory of action as one of the emotions, which are all treated by Aristotle as rather complicated combinations of beliefs, perceptions, and desires of the two fundamental sorts. *Thumos* and the other emotions can motivate action, to be sure; they do not do so by means of any other fundamental desires than *boulêsis* or *epithumia*.

If my interpretation is correct, we can see that Aristotle's concern in the analysis of desire is rather different from that of most contemporary philosophers of mind. Aristotle takes as fundamental the twofold cognitive capacity of human beings; contemporary philosophers do not, as a rule, have any single fundamental criterion for the recognition of distinct primitive psychological attitudes that would distinguish kinds of desire. For Aristotle, on the other hand, just as the difference between sensing or "phantasizing" the world and thinking about it is crucial in purely theoretical contexts, so it is when what is being cognized is the attractiveness of things in the world. It stands to reason that he should have made this distinction the basis of his analysis of the fundamental kinds of desire. Its usefulness in Aristotle's treatments of weakness of will and moral education shows that this analysis is a philosophically fruitful one.<sup>66</sup>

*University of Kansas*

<sup>66</sup> I should like to thank my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at the University of Kansas for their discussion of some of the issues in this essay at several department colloquia, and especially Jack Bricke for his helpful comments. The writing of this essay was facilitated by a summer research grant from the University of Kansas General Research Fund.