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# Aristotle on Thumos and Phantasia

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## Abstract

*What is Aristotle's conception of thumos? This question can be broken down into two separate but related questions: (a) what is the object of desire for thumos, and (b) in which faculty of the soul is thumos grounded? The latter question is the focus of this paper. In this paper, "grounded in" is to be taken physiologically; the second question can be rephrased as "Which faculty of the soul is thumos a function of?" As a general rule Aristotle employs both a colloquial and a technical sense of thumos throughout the corpus. When I ask "What is thumos?" I am interested in the technical sense that appears primarily in *On the Soul* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where thumos is defined as a category of desire (a subset of orexis). The main argument of this paper is that Aristotle's thumos is grounded in the faculty of phantasia – specifically, a sub-faculty called definite phantasia.*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Introducing the Problem

In *On the Soul*, Aristotle offers a tripartite division of desire mirroring Plato's tripartite division of the soul: "For in the part that can reason there will be wishing [*boulēsis*], and in the irrational part wanting [*epithumia*] and passion [*thumos*]; so if the soul is tripartite there will be desire [*orexis*] in each."<sup>1</sup> Although he brings this up

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Eugene T. Gendlin (Spring Valley, NY: Focusing Institute, 2012), 432b5-7.

primarily to dismiss Plato's division of the soul by showing how desire cannot be its own faculty, it is a technical division that he uses elsewhere in *On the Soul* and in various other texts. The three categories of desire he establishes are *epithumia*, *boulēsis*, and *thumos*.

Aristotle defines these three categories in terms of their respective objects of desire. *Epithumia*, as explained in *On the Soul* 2.3, is the desire for pleasant things. It arises from the faculty of sense-perception because sensation is necessarily accompanied by pleasure and pain, and inherent in the nature of feeling pleasure and pain is the desire for more pleasant things and for fewer painful things.<sup>2</sup> This is the basic kind of desire that any animal with a faculty of sense-perception experiences.

The object of desire for *boulēsis*, as defined in the *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.4, is the good: "The good is without qualification and in truth the object of wish [*boulēton*], whereas what appears good to a given person is the object of wish for that person."<sup>3</sup> The reason for which Aristotle references the *apparent* good is that he wants to explain how vicious people wish, since surely they can. People cannot falsely wish; even when vicious people wish, they wish for something that appears good *to them* (though it is not good *tout court*). For virtuous people, the object of their wish is both the apparent good relative to them and also the good without qualification. It seems clear, although Aristotle does not explain precisely how, that *boulēsis* arises in some way out of

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 413b22-414b3. It is important to note that for Aristotle *epithumia* is not a desire for pleasure itself, but for pleasant things. This is because sensation for Aristotle is an interaction between the living thing in question and the external world, so the desire rises up in relation to some particular thing that could be pleasant, rather than in relation to the idea of pleasure in general. This is true for *boulēsis* and *thumos* as well. They are categories of desire; *epithumia* is a general category – namely, desire for pleasure. Certain kinds of desires, such as thirst for a cup of water or hunger for an apple, fall under that category. This is because all desire is accompanied by *phantasia*; we need to be able to imagine the thing we desire (see Section II). If what we desire is as abstract as "the good" or "pleasure" we aren't able to do that. The image has to be specific.

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1113a23-24.

the rational faculty of the soul, since normative thinking is exclusive to those animals with rational capacities.<sup>4</sup>

Unlike *epithumia* and *boulēsis*, it is not clear from any of Aristotle's texts what the object of desire for *thumos* is; nor is it clear that *thumos* is tied to any particular faculty of the soul in a similar way. The focus of this paper will be on the latter issue. Specifically, I want to determine precisely where *thumos* fits into Aristotle's physiological account of the soul in *On the Soul*. Because *thumos* seems to somehow involve justice when it manifests in humans,<sup>5</sup> it is important that I be able to explain how both humans and non-rational animals are able to experience *thumos* while accounting for the involvement of normativity on the human level.

In this paper I will contend that *thumos* is grounded in the faculty of *phantasia* by making two related arguments. First, the paper as a whole will be framed around the claim that Aristotle is for the most part building his conception of *thumos* out of the Platonic one found in the *Republic* and that the differences between the Platonic and Aristotelian conception are largely a result of the relegation of *thumos* from soul-part in the former to category of desire in the latter (as opposed to an entirely new conception). Second, I will argue that *thumos* is linked to the faculty of imagination (henceforth *phantasia*) as *epithumia* is to sense-perception and *boulēsis* is to *nous* (the faculty of thought). Specifically, I will argue that *thumos* is grounded in a sub-faculty described in *On the Soul*, book three: definite *phantasia*. My argument will focus first on the role that self-consciousness plays in *thumos*, and then turn to an examination of the link between definite *phantasia* and memory's role in creating self-consciousness. After setting out these arguments, I will *consider a potential objection to my argument stemming from Aristotle's conception of fear. I outline and respond to the objection by arguing that fear is related not to thumos but to epithumia.*

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<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* 1253a7-18. Specifically, Aristotle says that it is our unique ability to think and conceptualize via language that grounds our capacity for normative judgments.

<sup>5</sup> See Aristotle's discussions of anger, indignation, etc. in *Rhetoric*, book two.

1.2. *Plato on Thumos*

In this section I aim to clarify how Aristotle's conception of *thumos* relates to Plato's in more detail than I have offered thus far. Before doing so, I need to explain Plato's account on its own terms as it is found in the *Republic*. Plato first introduces the tripartite division of the soul in book four of the *Republic*. He reasons that there must be at least two parts of the soul, given certain internal conflicts that human beings face. For example, take a case in which a person is thirsty but nonetheless does not want to drink. It seems that one thing is making them thirsty – the appetitive part of the soul – and one is forbidding them from drinking – the rational part of the soul.<sup>6</sup> However, there also seems to be a third part of the soul, by which we feel anger: *thumos*. To distinguish *thumos* from the appetitive, Plato provides the example of Leontius, who has an appetite to look at corpses along the wayside as he travels by them.<sup>7</sup> In the same way that there was a conflict for the thirsty person, there seems to be a conflict here as well; Leontius at once has an appetitive desire to look at the corpses, but also feels disgusted and angry with himself for having this desire.

In addition to being different from the appetitive, *thumos* also seems to oppose it in a very important way: “in the civil war in the soul [*thumos*] aligns itself far more with the rational part.”<sup>8</sup> In light of this alliance, Plato needs to distinguish *thumos* from the rational part as well. We know that *thumos* is not the same as the rational, says Plato, because children and animals have *thumos* without developed rational capabilities.<sup>9</sup> However, if *thumos* and reason are not the same thing, then why does *thumos* tend to “all[y] itself with reason”?<sup>10</sup>

To answer this question, it is helpful to consider Plato's analysis of courage: “And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 439c-d.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 439e.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, translated by G. M. A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1974), 440e.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 441a-b.

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, 440b.

feared and what isn't.”<sup>11</sup> Take the example of a soldier on a battlefield who is fighting two enemy soldiers. Although he is outnumbered, rationally he has concluded that he is most likely skilled enough at combat to win the fight. Nonetheless, he has an appetitive desire to flee in the face of possible painful injury (or even death). Reason pulls the soldier towards choosing to fight, and appetite towards fleeing. The role that *thumos* plays in mediating this sort of conflict is siding with reason by pulling the soldier towards the more courageous action. Note that *thumos*'s siding with reason cannot be driven by considerations of pleasure and pain, since those are the motivations of appetite. Similarly, it cannot be driven by considerations of good and bad in the way that reason is. A common theory is that *thumos* is driven by considerations of *kalon* – the fine, noble, and honorable. Against the potential pain that appetite fears, the soldier finds fighting to be a fine, noble, and honourable action, in addition to holding the rational belief that he can win the fight.

Although the above is not incorrect as a general overview of Platonic *thumos*, I believe that there is more going on in the *Republic*. My view is the same as the one argued for by John Cooper in his paper “Plato's Theory of Human Motivation.”<sup>12</sup> In that paper Cooper argues against the claim that Plato conceives of *thumos* in order to parallel the three classes of citizen in the state with three parts of the soul in the individual. Rather, he thinks that underlying the tripartite division of the soul is a psychological theory of motivation; each soul part represents different kinds of motivations that spur our decision-making processes. This is very similar to some of Aristotle's views. Aristotle does not use the terminology of motivation for decision-making, but for him desires are essentially motivations in that they play an integral role in movement – for without desire as an impetus no creature would ever act.<sup>13</sup> A more direct connection between Aristotle and Plato can be seen in *Republic*, book 9, when Socrates says the following: “[i]t seems to me that there are three pleasures corresponding to the three parts of the soul, one peculiar to each

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<sup>11</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, 442b-c.

<sup>12</sup> J. M. Cooper, “Plato's Theory of Human Motivation,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1984): p. 3-21.

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 433a13-15.

part, and similarly with desires.”<sup>14</sup> Like Aristotle, Plato sees appetitive desires as desires having to do with pain and pleasure, like hunger, thirst, or sexual desire.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, for Plato the desire of reason is, much like Aristotle, the desire for the good.<sup>16</sup>

As for *thumos*, Plato introduces it at least partially as an explanation for various emotions that we feel: anger of many kinds, shame, indignation, pride, etc.<sup>17</sup> On the basis of several passages from the *Republic* books 4, 8, and 9, Cooper shows that Plato understands *thumos* as that by which “one feels a) the competitive drive to distinguish oneself from the run-of-the-mill person, to do and be something noteworthy within the context provided by one’s society and its scheme of values; b) pride in oneself and one’s accomplishments, to the extent that one succeeds in this effort; c) esteem for noteworthy others and (especially) the desire to be esteemed by others and by oneself.”<sup>18</sup> His suggestion is that, on Plato’s view, thumotic motivations are rooted in a “desire for self-esteem and...esteem by others.”<sup>19</sup>

On Cooper’s account, *thumos* differs from the appetitive part of the soul because “appetites lack the self-reference which is essential to esteem and self-esteem.”<sup>20</sup> For instance, the physical feeling of hunger in one’s stomach does not require self-reference in the way that an emotion like shame does. The difference between desires of *thumos* and desires of reason, on the other hand, cannot be about self-reference since desires of reason may also be self-referential. Rather, the difference is in the origin of the different desires. For reason, desires for the good come from rational deliberation on what is good and what is not. Thumotic desires, on the other hand, find their origin in “all kinds of contingencies in one’s upbringing and subsequent life”; they are in a sense socially constructed.<sup>21</sup> What people hold worthy of esteem often varies amongst different societies

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<sup>14</sup> Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, 580d7-9.

<sup>15</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 437d3; 439d6.

<sup>16</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 505d11-e1.

<sup>17</sup> Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation,” p. 12.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

and types of people.<sup>22</sup> In forming a desire from reason, thinking about what is good comes first, and the desire is formed on account of those thoughts. But for thumotic desires, just as with appetites, the desire for esteem comes first before any considerations of the good.

As expressed in Section I.1 of this paper, my contention here is that Aristotle's *thumos* is nearly the same as the *thumos* of Cooper's Plato. Recall that in *On the Soul* 3.9, Aristotle defends his division of the soul against Plato's:

[f]or in one way there seem to be an unlimited number [of soul parts] and not only those [that] some authors mention in distinguishing them – the parts capable of reasoning, passion, and wanting, or (according to others) the rational and irrational parts; for in virtue of the distinguishing characteristics by which they distinguish these parts, there will clearly be other parts too with a greater disparity between them than these, those which we have already discussed[:] the nutritive, which belongs both to plants and to all animals, and [sense-perception], which could not easily be set down as either irrational or rational. There is [also] the part capable of imagination, which is different from all of them in being[,] although with which of them it is identical or non-identical presents a great problem if we are to posit separate parts of the soul. In addition to these there is the part capable of desire, which is held to be different from all in definition and potentiality. And it would [surely] be absurd to split this up; for in the part that can reason there will be wishing, and in the irrational part wanting and passion; so if the soul is tripartite there will be desire in each.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Plato makes this evident in his account of the four kinds of persons lacking the virtue of justice in *Republic*, books 8 and 9. Cooper gives a good overview of this, but it is not within the scope of this paper to completely reconstruct his argument. It is enough for me to summarize the main points that I agree with.

<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Eugene T. Gendlin, 432a24-b7. (Translation modified)



Although he references other divisions of the soul (irrational vs. rational), the theory that Aristotle is most clearly setting himself against is Plato's tripartite division of the soul. Desire cannot be a soul-part on its own the way that Plato claims, because under his tripartite division there would be desire in all three parts. However, rather than pointing out this flaw and then discarding the division entirely, Aristotle *keeps* the tripartite division, but for desire: *boulēsis* (corresponding to the rational part of the soul), *thumos* (corresponding to the spirited part of the soul), and *epithumia* (corresponding to the appetitive part of the soul). Yet, as we have seen, if Cooper is right (as I think he is), then Aristotle's criticism of Plato is off the mark. Plato is without a doubt aware that there is a kind of desire for each part of the soul.<sup>24</sup> Although it is unclear if Aristotle is deliberately misrepresenting Plato's views in order to prop up his own, what is clear is that Aristotle adopts the tripartite division for desire. We know this because he explicitly describes *epithumia*, *boulēsis*, and *thumos* as the three sub-categories of *orexis* elsewhere in *On the Soul* as well as in the *Nicomachean* and *Eudemean Ethics*.<sup>25</sup>

Given (a) that Aristotle explicitly adopts Plato's tripartite division for desire, (b) that Aristotle and Plato both use *thumos* to account for the same phenomena (emotions such as anger, normative feelings like shame and indignation, pride, the human concern with public reputation and honor, etc.), and (c) that Plato's account of appetitive desires (for pleasure) and desires of reason (for the good) parallel Aristotle's *epithumia* and *boulēsis*, it seems quite plausible that Plato heavily influenced Aristotle's theory of desire. And if Aristotle is operating under a generally Platonic understanding of the different kinds of desires, then his account of *thumos* – the subject of our investigation – would likely parallel the one outlined in the *Republic*.

However, it is important to note that, although the accounts of the three kinds of desire may parallel one another, they are not identical. The difference between the two accounts lies in Aristotle's vastly different account of the soul. Unlike Plato's, Aristotle's account of the soul is a physiological one in which he defines a soul as a set of

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<sup>24</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 580d7-9.

<sup>25</sup> Aristotle, *EN* 1111b10-13 and *EE* 1225b24-25.

capacities.<sup>26</sup> When organisms engage in activities like nutrition, movement, or thought, they do so in virtue of the system of capacities that they have; they do so in virtue of their soul. This is relevant to the topic at hand because Aristotle grounds desires physiologically in his account of the soul: *epithumia* is grounded in the faculty of sense-perception and *boulēsis* is grounded in the faculty of thought. Although Aristotle does not explicitly do so himself, it follows that *thumos* can similarly be grounded somewhere in his account of the soul. This clearly contradicts Plato's account of these three kinds of desire. For Plato, only appetitive desires have a physiological explanation of this kind.<sup>27</sup>

One of the reasons for which Aristotle considers his account to be superior is that it is more nuanced and can easily explain the differences among different kinds of living organisms: plants have only the nutritive faculty; animals have the nutritive and sense-perception; humans have both of those, in addition to *nous*, and so on. Because of this nuance and the fact that *thumos* is not itself a faculty, Aristotle can more easily explain something that both he and Plato believed: non-rational animals also have *thumos*. For Plato, explaining this is a serious problem. Under the Platonic view outlined above, thumotic desire is for self-esteem and esteem from others. Esteem, however, seems to be something only humans are capable of giving, as it seems to involve, at least on some level, normative considerations that animals cannot have. This is easily seen in emotions such as shame or indignation. It would seem bizarre to say that a squirrel, for example, desires esteem from other squirrels in the way that a person does from their community. If Plato sees the animal soul as consisting only of appetite and *thumos*, then how can he explain this normativity? He must either abandon his assertion that animals have *thumos*, or he must provide a different account of thumotic desire.

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<sup>26</sup> He defines the soul as “the first actuality of a natural body that has life potentially” (*DA* 412a27). Since a first actuality is acquiring a set of capacities, and the soul is a first actuality, then the soul is defined as a set of capacities.

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Rep.* 439d1-2. See also Cooper, “Plato’s Theory of Human Motivation,” p. 10-12.

In contrast, it is easy for Aristotle to explain how both animals and humans have *thumos* – namely, by grounding *thumos* in one of the lower-level faculties that humans and animals share. What allows Aristotle to do this is his relegation of *thumos* from soul-part to category of desire. In the following section I will consider Aristotle’s views of *thumos* independently of Plato, as found in his works on natural philosophy, and consider what lower-level faculty *thumos* could be grounded in. I will then show that *thumos* is grounded in the faculty of *phantasia*.

## 2. Thumos and Phantasia

### 2.1. The Faculty of Phantasia

As I stated in Section I.1, my primary aim in this paper is to show that Aristotle’s *thumos* is grounded in the faculty of *phantasia*. In this section I will explain why I think that *phantasia* is the likely faculty in which *thumos* is grounded, and I will go over the general role *phantasia* plays in Aristotle’s account of the soul. My reasoning primarily comes from the hierarchical nature of Aristotle’s account of the soul. On his account, the lower level faculties of the soul are necessary conditions for higher faculties. For example, it is impossible for an animal to have the faculty of *nous* but not the faculty of sense-perception, or to have sense-perception but not the nutritive faculty.<sup>28</sup> In *On the Soul* Aristotle outlines four different faculties: the nutritive faculty, sense-perception, *phantasia*, and *nous*.<sup>29</sup> *Thumos* cannot be grounded in the nutritive faculty because, if it were, plants would have the capacity for it, which they plainly do not. On the opposite end, *thumos* cannot be grounded in *nous* because *thumos* is not exclusive to humans.

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<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 432a27-31.

<sup>29</sup> There is debate as to whether or not locomotion is its own faculty for Aristotle. It might be, since Aristotle seems to go out of his way to distinguish it from *nous* and perception just like he does for *phantasia*. It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into whether or not locomotion is its own faculty, because it seems very unlikely that *thumos* would be grounded in it if it were; there is nothing unique to locomotion that might ground *thumos*, unlike *phantasia*, which includes the capacity for memory.

Similarly, *thumos* cannot be grounded in the faculty of sense-perception. In *Sense and Sensibilia*, Aristotle remarks that the purpose of the work is to consider in further detail those activities and characteristics of animals grounded in both the soul and the body, particularly “sensation, memory, *thumos*, appetite and desire in general, and, in addition, pleasure and pain. These are found practically in all animals.”<sup>30</sup> Note that Aristotle does not say that *thumos* is found in *all* animals, but that it is found in *practically* all animals. In other words, there are some animals that do not experience *thumos*. Aristotle is most likely thinking of an animal like a sea sponge, which clearly does not exhibit thumotic behaviours; after all, sea sponges do not feel anger, jealousy, shame, etc. Since all animals possess a faculty of sense-perception, it cannot be the case that *thumos* is grounded in sense-perception or it would be found in all animals.

This leaves us with the faculty of *phantasia*. Independently of the above process of elimination, there is reason to suspect that Aristotle would ground *thumos* in *phantasia*. For one, it is heavily involved in his account of emotions in *Rhetoric*, book two.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Aristotle, like Plato, treats *thumos* as though it is somewhere in the middle between reason and the appetites.<sup>32</sup> In Aristotle’s account of the soul, *phantasia* is the faculty that links sense-perception (which grounds *epithumia*) and *nous* (which grounds *boulēsis*). It stands to reason that *thumos* might be grounded in the faculty between these two.

In *On the Soul* 3.3, Aristotle defines *phantasia* as “a motion taking place as a result of sense-perception in act.”<sup>33</sup> It is a motion that does not “occur apart from sense-perception, but only in what perceives and of that of which there is perception.”<sup>34</sup> The connection between

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Sense and Sensibilia*, trans. J. I. Beare (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 436a9. (Translation modified)

<sup>31</sup> For example, he defines anger as the desire for retaliation, and the mental state associated with such a desire is one in which imagining this retaliation is pleasurable (*Rhet.* 1378a30-33). Fear, another emotion he discusses there, is a state of mental anguish at imagining some nearby possible pain or evil (*Rhet.* 1382a22-23). See *Rhetoric*, book two for more.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, *EN* 1149a24-b8.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. Eugene T. Gendlin, 428b30-31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 428b10-14.

*phantasia* and sense-perception is clear; having the faculty of sense-perception is a necessary condition for *phantasia*, because images (*phantasmata*) can only be of things that can be and have been perceived. *Phantasia*, in that way, is a motion that continues from sense-perception because it uses past perceptions (recalls images through memory).

At this juncture it is reasonable to point out that *phantasia*, as described above, runs into the same problem I attributed to sense-perception – namely, that all animals possess this faculty.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle is explicit about this, noting that sense-perception is both a necessary and sufficient condition for *phantasia*: “if sensation, then *phantasia*.”<sup>36</sup> This is an obvious consequence of his conception of *phantasia* as a continuation of the motion of sense-perception, and as something that “does not occur apart from sense-perception.”<sup>37</sup> At first glance this appears to be a serious objection. As is often the case with Aristotle, however, the devil is in the details. In *On the Soul*, book three, Aristotle distinguishes between three types of *phantasia* that animals may possess: deliberative, indefinite, and definite. It is this distinction that paves the way for grounding *thumos* in the faculty of *phantasia*. In the following two sections I will outline these distinctions in detail and then contend that *thumos* is grounded in definite *phantasia* specifically.

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<sup>35</sup> On Aristotle’s definition, all animals do possess *phantasia*. However, he makes what at first appears to be a perplexing comment: that ants, bees, and grubs do not have *phantasia* (*DA* 428a8). I opted not to include this in the main body of my paper because the comment is understandable in light of his later distinction between three different kinds of *phantasia*. See section II.3 and footnote 21 for more.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 413b23 (my own translation).

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 428b10-14. Because *phantasia* does not occur apart from sense-perception, some might argue that *phantasia* is not actually its own faculty. I disagree; in *On the Soul*, book three, Aristotle pointedly goes out of his way to distinguish *phantasia* from sense-perception and thought. For the purposes of this paper, however, I am omitting a full exegesis of book three of *DA*, and take the designation of *phantasia* as a faculty of the soul as given for Aristotle.

2.2. *Three Kinds of Phantasia: Deliberative, Indefinite, and Definite*

Towards the end of *On the Soul* 3.10, Aristotle makes a distinction between two types of *phantasia*: deliberative and perceptual.<sup>38</sup> He goes on to say that deliberative *phantasia* is the ability to “make a unity out of several images.”<sup>39</sup> What does this mean, and why does Aristotle say it?

Aristotle says that “deliberative *phantasia* [is found] only in those that are deliberative: for whether this or that shall be enacted is already a task requiring deliberation (*logos*); and there must be a single standard to measure by, for that is pursued which is greater.”<sup>40</sup> Only those animals that can reason (namely, humans) have deliberative *phantasia*. To make a decision, a choice between two avenues of action for a single end, a being must be able to deliberate. In order to reason to a choice, this kind of being must have a standard by which to judge one avenue superior. So “making a unity out of several images” literally means being able to compare. It is taking two or more images (imagining different ways that one might go about achieving some X), and making them one; comparing them side by side to determine which is better based on some standard. Deliberative *phantasia* is the ability to compare alternative choices for action. Perceptual *phantasia*, on the other hand, is something all animals have; it does not involve deliberation of this kind.

At the beginning of *On the Soul* 3.11, Aristotle makes a subdivision within perceptual *phantasia* between indefinite *phantasia* and definite *phantasia*. He says only the following about this division:

[w]e must consider also in the case of imperfect animals, those which have no sense but touch, what it is that in

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<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 433b29-30. An alternative translation is “calculative” *phantasia*. Generally, words with *logos* as their root are translated as a declension of either “deliberation” or “calculation.” For the sake of consistency in this paper, I will use “deliberation” and “deliberative” exclusively, even when the particular translation I am quoting from uses “calculative.”

<sup>39</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. J. A. Smith (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 434a10.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, *DA* 434a7-100.

them originates movement. Can they have *phantasia* or not? Or desire [*epithumia*]? Clearly they have feelings of pleasure and pain, and if they have these they must also have desire [*epithumia*]. But how can they have *phantasia*? Must not we say that, as their movements are indefinite, they have *phantasia* and desire [*epithumia*], but indefinitely?<sup>41</sup>

The context here is fairly important. Aristotle comes up with “indefinite *phantasia*” as a way to deal with animals that have perception (touch) but do not locomote. He initially used the example of such animals to show that locomotion was different from perception, since there were animals with sense perception that did not locomote. However, here he has to deal with the consequences of considering such creatures by explaining how they can have *phantasia* and desire, which are necessarily entailed by perception.<sup>42</sup>

Remember that, for Aristotle, when a sensation is painful (or pleasant), the pain (or pleasure) is not a second event, not another activity in addition to sensing.<sup>43</sup> Rather, it is the sensation itself that has this quality, and the quality itself necessarily involves the possibility and desire for less of it. (This is why he says that *epithumia* comes necessarily out of perception.) A good example is the feeling of hunger in one’s stomach; inherent in the feeling itself is the desire to lessen the discomfort. The desire and the sensation are concurrent.

This phenomenon of being guided to move by the possibility of less or more of a sensation, which animals with only touch also experience, *is itself* a kind of *phantasia* that comes necessarily along with pleasure and pain. This is what Aristotle terms indefinite *phantasia*. It does not involve having a picture (*phantasma*) of the preferred condition, because it happens in the present time and not in the future drawing upon past memories.

Why call this indefinite *phantasia*? In the quote above he is comparing this kind of *phantasia* to indefinite motion. The Greek word being worked with here is the adverb *aoristōs*, which derives

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<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. J. A. Smith, 433b31-434a6.

<sup>42</sup> At this point in *On the Soul* we already know that sensation necessarily includes *phantasia* and desire because it has been stated several times, for example in 2.2: “if sensation, then *phantasia* and desire” (*DA* 413b23).

<sup>43</sup> See Aristotle’s description of *epithumia* in *On the Soul* 2.3.

from the verb *horizō*, meaning “to mark out by boundaries” or “to define.”<sup>44</sup> For Aristotle, motion is defined by its limits – where it begins and where it stops. The animals in question don’t locomote, so there aren’t clear boundaries to their kind of rudimentary movement. Hence their movement is classified as indefinite or indeterminate. In the same way that their motion lacks spatial definition, the *phantasia* of these animals lacks temporal definition because it exists in the present moment, occurring simultaneously as the creature perceives.

What we would call definite *phantasia*, then, is when *phantasia* involves drawing upon memories, which can provide clearer boundaries: memories are of the past, we are imagining something in the present, and the thing being imagined might be placed in the future. Other kinds of animals, such as dogs or cats, have this sort of *phantasia*.<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that although the capacities for *phantasia* and desire are both necessary consequences of having a faculty of sense-perception, it is *phantasia* that plays a mediating role between sensation and desire. We know that it plays a mediating role because you can imagine things without desiring them, but you cannot desire things without imagining them. For example, I can imagine a pink elephant in the room, but this does not cause any sort of desire for pink elephants to be in the room. Desire necessarily entails *phantasia*, but *phantasia* does not necessarily entail desire. In fact, Aristotle states this quite explicitly: “[an animal] is not capable of desire without possessing *phantasia*.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon founded upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), s.v. “*horizō*.”

<sup>45</sup> This distinction makes sense of Aristotle’s seemingly strange comment about grubs and ants in *On the Soul* III.3 (see Footnote 15). They don’t have the kind of perceptual *phantasia* that Aristotle was discussing there, that requires drawing upon memories, but they certainly do have this kind of basic *phantasia* that necessarily comes along with the ability to sense. They lack definite *phantasia*, but still have the indefinite variety. In this way, Aristotle can still say that all creatures who have the faculty of sense-perception also have *phantasia*, but he can also explain why there seems to be a difference between certain kinds of creatures given capacity for memory, etc.

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 433b27-30 (my own translation).



### 2.3. *Grounding Thumos in Definite Phantasia*

Having now thoroughly explained Aristotle’s conception of *phantasia*, I will argue that *thumos* is grounded in the faculty of *phantasia* just as *epithumia* is in sense-perception and *boulēsis* in *nous*. Specifically, I will ground *thumos* in definite *phantasia*. My argument rests on the two following claims: (a) self-consciousness is a necessary condition for *thumos*, and (b) definite *phantasia* is a necessary condition for self-consciousness. When I use the term “self-consciousness” I mean it in the modern, philosophical sense of the term, as opposed to the colloquial sense of feeling ashamed or embarrassed.<sup>47</sup> I mean it as an awareness that one is aware; an awareness of oneself as a self.<sup>48</sup>

The reason that an animal must be self-conscious in order to experience *thumos* is one that has already been discussed with regard to Plato: thumotic desires are self-referential.<sup>49</sup> A person cannot refer to a self without an awareness of that self. This seems to hold true for Aristotle’s *thumos* as well. For example, consider the distinction Aristotle makes between slaves and citizens in *Politics* 7.7. There, he states that the people of Asian countries are enslaved because they lack *thumos*.<sup>50</sup> What is the connection between lacking *thumos* and slavery? Recall that for Aristotle a slave is a person who is not fit to rule himself: a person who is naturally lacking in deliberative capacity. Additionally, a person is a citizen when they are precisely the opposite of that: the willingness to deliberate and judge – that is, to be a citizen – *requires a sense of self-importance* that the slave lacks.<sup>51</sup> This sense of self-importance, which underlies *thumos*, is a demand that others view your judgments and deliberations as important as well; that is, a demand that people recognize and respect you and your opinions. Aside from this particular example, it seems generally true

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<sup>47</sup> It is the post-Cartesian sense of self-consciousness.

<sup>48</sup> Awareness that we are aware entails awareness of a “we” that is aware. It is quite literally *self-awareness*.

<sup>49</sup> See Section I.2 above.

<sup>50</sup> Aristotle, *Pol.* 1327b27.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1275b18.

that the phenomena that *thumos* explains require a sense of self in this way.<sup>52</sup>

Definite *phantasia* is a necessary condition for self-consciousness because self-consciousness requires the capacity to perceive time, which not all animals possess.<sup>53</sup> This is because “self” is an identity that persists through time; perception of an atemporal self doesn’t make sense because the concept of a self is inherently temporal. Not only does self-consciousness require the ability to perceive time, but it also requires memory. This is clear; to be conscious of oneself as a self that persists through time requires remembering a past self. In *On Memory*, Aristotle says that memory is a function of the same part of the soul as imagination: *phantasia*.<sup>54</sup> Since memory is a function of *phantasia*, self-consciousness is impossible without memory, and *thumos* is impossible without self-consciousness, it is clear that *thumos* must be grounded in the faculty of *phantasia*. However, memory cannot be a function of indefinite *phantasia*, which involves only the present and not the past, so *thumos* cannot stem from it.<sup>55</sup> Nor can *thumos* stem from deliberative *phantasia*, for, if that were true, only humans would experience *thumos*. Definite *phantasia*, being the type of *phantasia* dealing with memories, must be the ground for both self-consciousness and *thumos*.<sup>56</sup> Even on a surface level this makes sense: a sea sponge does not exhibit thumotic behavior in the way that a human or a bull might. The relevant difference between a sea sponge and a bull in this case is that the sea sponge only has indefinite

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<sup>52</sup> There are many examples that I could list here. An illustrative one is anger, which occurs when a person feels insulted by another. In order to feel insulted, there must be some notion of a self that has been insulted; anger makes no sense as an emotion otherwise. This follows for the other emotions as well. See *Rhetoric*, book two.

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *Mem.* 449b28-29.

<sup>54</sup> Aristotle, *Mem.* 450a20-24. The perception of time comes out of the faculty of sense perception (*Mem.* 450a12-14), but the ability to retain and recall memories is a function of *phantasia*. It is this ability, not merely the capacity to perceive time, that is necessary for self-consciousness (and thus, for *thumos*).

<sup>55</sup> See Section II.2.

<sup>56</sup> While memory is the domain of definite *phantasia* (and sometimes, in humans, deliberative *phantasia*), recollection is exclusively the domain of deliberative *phantasia*. See *On Memory*, book two.

*phantasia*, and thus lacks the bull's capability for self-awareness and *thumos*.

#### 2.4. Fear, Thumos, and Definite Phantasia

One potential objection to my argument that *thumos* is grounded in definite *phantasia* stems from a counterexample involving fear. I have maintained throughout this paper that *thumos* is supposed to be the explanation for many of the emotions that we can experience. Fear is an emotion that, on its face, should fall under this category; not only is it one of the emotions considered in *Rhetoric*, book two, but Aristotle also explicitly describes fear in *Topics* as being in the *thumoeides*.<sup>57</sup> A problem arises because there seem to be cases in which fear is not self-referential in the way that I argued a thumotic emotion *must* be. A good example of this is being scared by a sudden loud noise; the fear seems to be an instantaneous, instinctual response that happens in the present moment without the use of memory at all, much less self-reference. If fear is thumotic but may not involve self-reference, then it seems that *thumos* is not *necessarily* self-referential. This undermines my entire argument for why *thumos* is grounded in definite *phantasia* specifically. Nonetheless there is a way for me to make sense of this and save my argument. Based on evidence from *Rhetoric*, *On the Soul*, and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I will show that for Aristotle fear is actually not, as it seems at first, thumotic. Rather, it is epithumotic.

Before dealing with this objection, I want to briefly explain Aristotle's views on fear in book two of *Rhetoric*. He defines fear as "a sort of pain and agitation derived from the imagining of a future destructive or painful evil."<sup>58</sup> We don't fear all evils, just those with "potential for great pains or destruction", and even those only if the possible pains are near in any way. People do not only feel fear at things with "great potential for destruction...[and] pain," but also at signs of those things. This is what it means to fear danger, which Aristotle defines as "an approach of something that causes fear."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Aristotle, *Top.* 126a8-9.

<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 1382a22-23.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 1382a31-32.

For example, we fear anger against us from those with the power and means to act because as soon as the desire for retaliation is there, those people *will* bring us pain, since the means to do so are available to them. In other words, we fear not only angry people in the moment of their anger, but we also fear actively angering them (and so try to avoid insulting them, etc.). Note that recognizing signs of danger requires the capacity for definite *phantasia* because it involves memory. Recognizing a hot stovetop as dangerous if touched, for example, might draw on painful memories of burning one's hand as a child.

Having outlined Aristotle's conception of fear in *Rhetoric*, book two, I can now explain why Aristotle's fear is not thumotic. Recall that in *Topics* Aristotle describes fear as being in the faculty of *thumos* (*thumoeides*).<sup>60</sup> This is the only major piece of evidence in the Aristotelian corpus that favours reading Aristotle's fear as thumotic. That Aristotle talks about a faculty of *thumos* should bring immediate suspicion, since we know that he does not view *thumos* as its own faculty. Furthermore, he seems to contradict the *Topics* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he discusses courage. There, he describes *thumos* as a sort of a natural courage through which animals can ignore and overcome fear.<sup>61</sup> If *thumos* is something by which fear is overcome, then fear cannot be born of *thumos*. Indeed, evidence points in precisely this direction.

Given what Aristotle wrote in both *Rhetoric* and *On the Soul*, it cannot be the case that fear is a manifestation of *thumos*. Rather, it is part of *epithumia*. Recall that for Aristotle desire in general (*orexis*) requires *phantasia*, which means that *phantasia* is involved for both *epithumia* and *thumos*.<sup>62</sup> We know that *epithumia* is the desire for pleasant things, on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire to avoid painful things. The literal experience of this second articulation of *epithumia* is the emotion we call fear; it is experienced as mental anguish brought upon by imagining some nearby possible pain. Take the case of a rabbit that sees a wolf, becomes afraid, and runs away. The rabbit does not do this in virtue of any kind of thumotic desire; it is acting upon a desire to avoid the imagined, future, nearby pain of

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<sup>60</sup> Aristotle, *Top.* 126a8-9.

<sup>61</sup> Aristotle, *EN* 1116b35-37.

<sup>62</sup> Aristotle, *DA* 413b23.

being attacked. We know this because that is how Aristotle defines fear in *Rhetoric*, book two. Put another way, “fear” is the word we use to describe the actualized experience of the epithumotic desire to avoid pain. Given the above, we can take *Topics* 128a8-9 as an instance of Aristotle speaking casually rather than technically about the topic, as he often does. This is especially probable given that in this particular discussion in the *Topics* he is merely using these ideas as place-holders for a larger point about argumentation rather than trying to argue himself that fear is located in some sort of faculty of *thumos*.

It is important to note that fear is epithumotic in nature, but animals with higher-level functions of *phantasia* can experience fear in some different ways. In the above case of the rabbit and the wolf, the rabbit’s desire to avoid pain makes use of definite *phantasia* because it recognizes the wolf as a sign of danger. Fear also has a basic form with indefinite *phantasia*, which can be seen when we are scared by a loud noise (as discussed in the beginning of this section). The reason this example initially appeared to pose a problem was because this fear happens in an instant, which is characteristic of desires arising through indefinite *phantasia*, since they deal exclusively with the present.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. The Significance of Thumos and Avenues for Further Inquiry

At the outset of this paper I presented two related questions: (a) what is the object of desire for *thumos*, and (b) which faculty of the soul is *thumos* grounded in? My answer to (b) here is important not only because it might inform an answer to (a), but also because the role of *thumos* in Aristotle’s account of desire is unduly neglected and under-theorized in Aristotelian scholarship.

The only thorough attempt in the secondary literature to answer these questions is made by Giles Pearson in his book *Aristotle on Desire*.<sup>64</sup> Pearson argues that *thumos* and *orgē* (anger) are synonymous: *thumos* is the desire for retaliation as defined in *Rhetoric*, book two. His

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<sup>63</sup> Aristotle also discusses some human-specific types of fear in *Rhetoric*, book two, which require deliberative *phantasia*. See *Rhet.* 1383a5-8.

<sup>64</sup> Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

argument relies mostly on an exposition of Aristotle's account of anger in *Rhetoric* and providing a list of examples in which Aristotle uses *thumos* and *orgē* interchangeably.<sup>65</sup> He claims that when discussing thumos Aristotle "almost always has in mind his account of orgē, a desire for revenge owing to a perceived slight."<sup>66</sup> However, this is patently untrue. For example, in *History of Animals* 9.1 Aristotle associates *thumos* with shame and envy, and in *Politics* 7.7 he grounds philia in *thumos*.<sup>67</sup> Pearson dismisses such examples by calling them isolated events in Aristotle's work.

The main problem with Pearson's interpretation is that he flippantly dismisses certain passages in Aristotle's writings when his own interpretation can be dismissed for far better reasons. Pearson's argument hinges on the fact that Aristotle frequently uses *thumos* and *orgē* interchangeably. What Pearson seems to miss is the distinction between Aristotle's colloquial and technical usage of *thumos*. In those passages where *thumos* and *orgē* are synonymous, Aristotle is not using *thumos* in the technical sense that Pearson is after. A point made by John Cooper in his article on Plato is useful to us here: "by Plato's time [*thumos*] seems to have been in ordinary use mostly as a name for anger: the word is in fact etymologically the same as our word 'fume' – someone in a state of *thumos* would be 'fuming' about something. But in Homer... the word has a broader usage" as the "seat of emotion."<sup>68</sup> It is this usage that Plato employs in the *Republic* and that Aristotle borrows in his categorization of *thumos* as a type of desire in *On the Soul*. The passages in which Aristotle conflates *thumos* and *orgē* are using the colloquial, ordinary meaning of *thumos*. Since these are the passages that form the crux of Pearson's argument, in the end his interpretation lacks sufficient textual support.

John Cooper gives the only other significant interpretation in his book *Reason and Emotion*, where he argues that the *kalon* is the object of desire for Aristotle's *thumos*. The core of this argument is based on Aristotle's assertion in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that there are three objects of choice: "the *kalon* (the noble, fine, beautiful), the

<sup>65</sup> Giles Pearson, *Aristotle on Desire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 111-117 ("Reason and Desire").

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132

<sup>67</sup> Aristotle, *HA* 608b7-13 and *Pol.* 1327b39.

<sup>68</sup> Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," p. 12.

advantageous, and the pleasant.”<sup>69</sup> Cooper connects each object of choice to one of Aristotle’s categories of desire: the pleasant to *epithumia*, the advantageous to *boulēsis*, and the *kalon* to *thumos*.<sup>70</sup> The assertion that the *kalon* is *thumos*’s object of desire should immediately ring false to someone who knows that Aristotelian *thumos* is found in both humans and animals. There is no way that an animal could desire the *kalon* because it is a normative concept. In order to desire it, the being in question would need to have *logos*, which animals plainly do not. Cooper himself acknowledges this, and quickly elaborates that he does not think that the *kalon* is the object of *thumos* in general. Rather, it is the object of desire “for the morally virtuous person, and only after a certain stage is reached in the special course of moral development and self-discipline that leads a person to the possession of the virtues of character.”<sup>71</sup>

That the only two meaningful attempts to settle the question of *thumos* fall short of the providing the right answer reinforces that my paper is a significant contribution to the ongoing conversation, because it is a stepping stone to answering the question definitively. Moreover, both Pearson and Cooper fail to address even in passing what I have shown here to be a central question regarding Aristotelian *thumos* – namely, its place in Aristotle’s account of the soul. To the best of my knowledge, my paper alone considers *thumos* from a physiological angle and attempts to make sense of it in the context of *On the Soul*.

In addition, the arguments that I have made regarding *thumos* provide multiple avenues for further inquiry. First of all, what I have said here provides a good basis for a follow-up paper on what the object of desire for *thumos* is. Second of all, understanding *thumos* helps us rethink Aristotle’s psychology; understanding *thumos* and the tripartite division of desire on the whole is a great aid in understanding Aristotle’s accounts of various other topics like

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<sup>69</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1984), 1104b30-1105a1.

<sup>70</sup> Cooper argues that “the advantageous” in this passage is a stand-in for “the good,” which he connects to *boulēsis*. John Cooper, *Reason and Emotion: Essays on Ancient Moral Psychology and Ethical Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 265-266.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 276.

locomotion, choice, and virtue. In Section I.2 of this paper I also argued that we need to consider Plato's account of desire as an influence on Aristotle's account (and therefore his philosophy of action as well as psychology in general). Third of all, although I did not discuss it here, understanding *thumos* would prove very useful to someone interested in Aristotelian notions of manliness, since *thumos* was no doubt a gendered concept. Finally, the recognition that fear is epithumatic is useful for future work on Aristotelian notions of courage and cowardice, especially from a physiological angle.

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