Phantasia in Aristotle: The embodied nature of imagination

Phantasia chez Aristote : la nature incarnée de l'imagination.

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Abstract:
This text explores Aristotle's concept of *phantasia*, or imagination, as a distinct cognitive faculty that mediates between perception and thought. Unlike perception, which is always tied to the immediate presence of sensory objects and is inherently true, *phantasia* allows for the voluntary creation of mental images that can be false or imagined. Imagination is closely linked to memory, desire, and motivation, playing a crucial role in anticipating pleasure and pain, thereby driving animal movement and human action. Aristotle's analysis reveals imagination as an active and flexible faculty that bridges sensory experience and thought, highlighting its importance in embodied cognition.

Keywords: *Aristotle, Phantasia, Perception, Thought, Desire.*

Résumé :
Ce texte explore le concept aristotélicien de *phantasia*, ou imagination, comme une faculté cognitive distincte qui assure la médiation entre la perception et la pensée. Contrairement à la perception, toujours liée à la présence immédiate des objets sensibles et intrinsèquement vraie, la *phantasia* permet la création volontaire d'images mentales qui peuvent être fausses ou imaginées. L'imagination est étroitement liée à la mémoire, au désir et à la motivation, jouant un rôle crucial dans l'anticipation du plaisir et de la douleur, et orientant ainsi le mouvement animal et l'action

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humaine. L'analyse d'Aristote révèle l'imagination comme une faculté active et flexible qui fait le pont entre l'expérience sensible et la pensée, soulignant son importance dans la cognition incarnée.

Mots-clés : Aristote, *Phantasia*, Perception, Pensée, Désir.

Introduction

Aristotle's concept of *phantasia* occupies a crucial intermediary position between sensory perception and thought, playing a fundamental role in the functioning of the *psyche*. Unlike perception, which requires the immediate presence of sensible objects and is always true, to subject of perceive, and unlike thought, which necessarily involves distinguishing truth from falsehood, *phantasia* refers to the mental capacity to generate sensory images even in the absence of the actual physical object, such as in dreams or memories, or in perception. Traditional interpretations often reduce *phantasia* to a purely representational function associated with memory and mental imagery. However, recent studies suggest that Aristotle viewed imagination as an active and embodied faculty, essential for cognition and decision-making.

Aristotle emphasizes that imagination is not a form of knowledge because its images can be either true or false. Nevertheless, it plays an active role in cognition by enabling the individual to anticipate sensory experiences, prepare for action, and reinforce memory. In contrast to belief, which involves involuntary acceptance of truth or falsity, *phantasia* depends on the will, allowing one to deliberately engage in mental imagery. Moreover, imagination is multisensory—not limited to vision alone—as evidenced by the vivid auditory experiences one can have when imagining a song.

Another key aspect of *phantasia* is its deep connection with desire and motivation. Aristotle argues that animal movement, especially in humans, is not merely the result of nutrition or reproduction but is primarily driven by desire, which is intimately linked to imagination. Desire arises in response to images created by *phantasia* that anticipate pleasure or pain, thereby directing the body toward action. This relationship demonstrates how imagination functions integrally within the soul as a system, where perception, imagination, desire, and thought continuously interact to produce intentional behavior.

Thus, *phantasia* is not merely a passive repository of images or an accessory function, but rather an active cognitive faculty that supports and coordinates the other functions of the *psyche*, as perception, thought, desire and others. It broadens the scope of experience and enables the complexity of human psychic life. This analysis aims to explore this activity in depth, clarifying its essential features, its relationship with perception and thought, and its significance for movement and action motivated by desire, according to Aristotle's philosophy.

1.1 Imagination – *Phantasia*

This work investigates the notion of imagination in two works by Aristotle, focusing mainly on *De Anima* (Book III) and some books of *Parva Naturalia*. The initial focus is on Aristotle's conception of *phantasia* in *De Anima*, which aims to define the *psyche* by its parts. Aristotle explains that the images generated by *phantasia* are similar to sensations but lack their matter (*De An*. 432a9), and that perception involves receiving sensible forms without their matter (*De An.* 424a19), whereas affections are forms that exist in perception and are movements of the *psyche* (*De An*. 403a25).

Phantasmata (images) resemble sensations and represent the capacity of *phantasia* to generate mental images. The term *phantasma* refers broadly to all mental images affecting us, not only visual but sensory in general. Many scholars argue that *phantasia* is not a faculty separate from perception, just as memory is a function of perception rather than a distinct faculty (*De Mem*, 451a17).

Perception is an alteration or affection involving the reception of forms without matter; these forms encompass all aspects of sensibility. *Phantasia* deals with images or forms that remain in sensibility, such as the image of a sensation, and differs from assertion or denial, since imagination can involve either truth or falsity. (*De An*. 432a9-10).

Stephen Everson (1997) highlights *phantasia*'s intermediate position between perception and thought, involved both in image-creation for thought and sensory reception. Christopher Shields (2016) explains that Aristotle provides two descriptions of imagination: functionally as the capacity producing images, distinct from perception, belief, and reason; and causally as a motion caused by actual perception.

Phantasia also addresses absence in perception and from *De Anima* Book III onwards is seen as distinct from thought and perception. Claudia Baracchi (2014) notes that all faculties of the *psyche* involve *phantasia*, which is a dynamic, ongoing movement transforming present circumstances into potential possibilities (BARACCHI, 2014, p. 115). Baracchi emphasizes *phantasia*'s nature as movement and activity.

Michael V. Wedin (1988) interprets *phantasia* not as an independent faculty but a cognitive capacity that supports other faculties. Wedin notes that imagination lacks commitment to truth or falsity, unlike belief, which involves truth claims (WEDIN, 1988, p. 76). Imagination functions representationally, producing images interpreted as forms or representational structures (WEDIN, 1988, p. 68). Thomas K. Johansen (2012) similarly presents *phantasia* as a representational capacity susceptible to error, enabling retention and modification of perceptual content and desire for absent goods, but lacking direct causal links to external reality (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 212).

Finally, *phantasia* is a movement caused by active perception and is part of the *psyche* alongside perception, thought, desire, and memory — which, like *phantasia*, operates in co-activity with perception. *Phantasia* is an activity that participates in and links other faculties, operating on images resembling perceptual sensations.

1.2 *Phantasia* as a Cognitive Ability

Thomas K. Johansen (2012), in *The Powers of Aristotle's Soul*, examines Aristotle's conception of *phantasia*, noting that the common translation of *phantasia* as "imagination" is often contested because we tend to associate imagination solely with visual images. However, Johansen shows that in the Aristotelian text, *phantasia* should be understood as a cognitive capacity involving all the sense organs. The text sometimes presents *phantasia* as a capacity, but this is only one interpretive possibility. Depending on the reading of certain key clauses, *phantasia* could be understood either as a capacity or state not linked to truth, or alternatively, not as a capacity or state at all (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 200).

For Aristotle, *phantasia* is not limited to visual images. The forms referenced are images that resemble sensations. Aristotle consistently refers to the sensible organs and their particular sensibilities, individuating the form of each sense. Receiving a form without its matter goes beyond sight to encompass all sensory activities, such as hearing a sound or distinguishing an odor—these are forms received without their matter. The senses, or sensibility, are thus the potency for such activities. Aristotle writes that "*images are just as perceptions are, except without matter*" (*De An.* 432a9). As a capacity of the *psyche*, *phantasia* is an activity, a movement, or affection of mental images (*phantasmata*) similar to sensible forms or sensations.

Johansen (2012) outlines three points that distinguish *phantasia* from perception and thought, if it is to be understood as a distinct capacity:

1. *Phantasia* is a change (*kinesis*), like perception, and seems to vary in accordance with perceptual changes (i.e., the activity of perception). Johansen argues that imagination is not simply the ability or activity to imagine, since if it were merely the result of perception, this hypothesis would be excluded. He suggests that *phantasia* is an activity consequent to perception (not an additional capacity), writing that Aristotle's emphasis on *phantasia* "*happening to perceivers suggests that phantasia is something that happens to us by virtue of our perceptual capacity, further to the activity of perception*" (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 202).
2. *Phantasia* shares the same objects as perception. Johansen points out that capacities would differ only if they had different objects. The intellect (thought) is distinguished from perception because it deals with perceptual objects abstractly, but *phantasia* could be concerned with perceptible objects not as perceptible per se, but as "imaginable" (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 202). The analogy between intelligible forms (in intellect) and perceptual forms (in perception) is misleading: "*We do not perceive this box as perfectly square, but this is how the mathematician thinks of it. In contrast, Aristotle consistently stresses the similarity in content between perception and phantasia*" (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 202). Aristotle's assertion that perceived

forms remain in the sense organs (*De An.* 425b23-25) supports the causal relationship between perception and *phantasia*. Johansen elaborates that in *De Memoria* and *On Dreams*, *phantasia* functions with the forms received in perception, reinforcing the idea that *phantasia* is a function of perception rather than a separate capacity. He questions whether *phantasia* belongs to perception, especially since memory also utilizes *phantasmata*—images that remain after perception (*De Mem.* 450a30). Perception is always current and in flux, while *phantasia* retains perceptual content without representing it as present. *Phantasia* might deal with images of the past, present, and possibly the future. Thus, *phantasia* belongs to perception by sharing its content, without being reducible to perception.

3. Johansen states that *phantasia* does not act as an efficient cause like perception: *"Phantasia is presented purely as an effect with active perception as its efficient cause"* (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 204).

Johansen's defense aligns closely with Aristotelian passages such as: "*Now, whether the imaginative faculty of the soul be identical with, or different from, the faculty of sense-perception, in either case the thing does not occur without our seeing or perceiving something*" (*On Dreams*, 458b30). Perception is the efficient cause for all capacities of the *psyche*. However, imagination is distinct from perception because it can generate sensations (*phantasmata*) from absent objects and created images. Thus, imagination deals with both presence and absence, which differentiates it from perception. Imagination depends on will or desire, and can function without actual sensory input, as in dreams, whereas perception is always active (*De An.* 428a5-9).

The senses are actual, but imagination deals with sensory activity both in actuality and potentiality, such as in dreams. Johansen explains that *phantasia* is generally the representation of sensory contents that are not immediately given in the environment, where "not immediately given" is relative to the perceiver (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 209). In dreams, *phantasia* acts on sensible objects only for the dreamer. Imagination and sense-perception share the same faculty but differ in nature: imagination is sensory activity without sensory input (dreaming). Therefore, dreaming is an imaginative activity of the sensory faculty (*On Dreams*, 459a15-459a22). Since *phantasia* deals with perceptual objects not "immediately given," an object may be physically present but not perceived due to conditions like darkness or inattention, causing it to only "appear" through a different kind of mental motion (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 209). Thus, *phantasia* occupies itself with absent objects or objects not currently actualized by perception.

Johansen's thesis implies a representationalist theory: *phantasma* represents perceptual images, modified in dreams or according to will when awake. Aristotle suggests perception corresponds to truth, while imagination deals more with falsehood, as imagination does not replicate images of directly perceived objects but

modifies them. This accounts for why *phantasia* often deals with the false. *Phantasia* can present images unrelated to current reality, as in dreams or memories. Remembering involves using past *phantasmata* as representations, which is not automatic. In dreams, sensory stimuli (e.g., dripping water) may cause images (e.g., waterfall) that resemble but are not identical to the stimulus (JOHANSEN, 2012, pp. 209-10).

In dreams, imagination is influenced by current perception and the environment. *Phantasia* creates images and forms of present or absent objects and functions as a representational cognitive capacity. Like memory, it participates in perception across contexts such as dreaming and thought. Johansen explains that *phantasia* originates from perception but can occur without sensory input; its content may resemble past perceptions but need not represent present reality. Once formed, a *phantasma* can be voluntarily recalled or activated in dreaming, remembering, or fantasizing (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 210).

Perception, *phantasia*, memory, and thought are interconnected. Importantly, thought and memory depend on perception and *phantasia*. Aristotle's theory holds that all animals perceive, imagine, and think (though not discursively).

1.3 *Phantasia* – Embodied Imagination

The mind-body problem in Aristotelian theory is challenged, all the faculties of the *psyche* are actualized by the material, perceptive, and potential capacities of a natural body, which is formal substance in its processes and purposes. The Aristotelian theory of the *psyche*, when confronting the Platonic dualism, in which it presents the intellect or ability to think separately from the others, even the *psyche* can be separated from the material body. For Aristotle there is no separation between *psyche* and body with life, a body without life is a body by homonymy, so the author defended *psyche* as a principle of all living beings, *psyche* as a formal substance of beings with potency for life. And if the *psyche* does not exist apart from a natural body with life, Aristotle inquired that perhaps it could be separated from the body (the *psyche*) only if it had some affection that seemed to it exclusive, and argued that this was not the case. Like other philosophers, such as Descartes, who understood the nature of thought as a type of affection exclusive to the *psyche* (something that meant being purely mental, and then had to unify through the pineal gland, which is still corporeal and physical). There are still those today who understand the mind, or the ability to conceptualize with amodal and separate characteristics[1], which would be something akin to defending thought as an exclusive affection[2] of the *psyche*. On the other hand, for Aristotle, if in order to think one must imagine, and if imagining is linked to perceiving, then even thought must be an embodied capacity, my point here is that there is nothing in Aristotle's theory of the *psyche* that is not embodied

[1] See Machery, E. (2016). The amodal brain and the offloading hypothesis. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 23, 1090–5.

[2] *De An.* 417a15

in perception, such as the perceptive faculty shared by all animals. If imagining is similar to thinking, if thinking is not possible without imagination, then they are both dependent on perception:

> It seems that in most cases the soul neither is affected nor acts without the body, as, for instance, with being angry or confident or appetitive, or, generally, with perceiving; reasoning, however, would seem most of all to be peculiar to it, but if this is a sort of imagination, or not without imagination, it would not be possible for even this to be without the body. If, then, some one of the functions or affections of IO the soul is peculiar to it, it would be possible for the soul to be separated; but if there is nothing peculiar to it, it would not be separable. (*De An.* 403a5-10)

There is no animal *psyche* that is not a natural body that moves by affecting and being affected, and if it is thinking that characterizes it, the human animal does not separate it from the perceptive faculties either, and so even thought in the Aristotelian theory of the *psyche* is also a kind of embodied capacity. We are aware that Aristotle did not privilege any organ to locate the *psyche*, the notion of organism brings the idea of inseparability of the parts in relation to the whole.

Aristotle does not consider that the *psyche* or soul does not present any capacity that is not embodied, not even thought. And as it seems that there is no privilege of the brain as the exclusive part of thought, the brain was the coldest part of the body, the heart warming the blood and circulating the blood. Aristotle makes use of explanations at a very basic level about the functions of organs, and it cannot be said that they are also mere abstractions, as they make some sense. But about distinguishing what is a kind of embodied knowledge and discursive thinking, what human animals share, thinking or reasoning in general, Aristotle also says other animals participate. Formal causes are a type of explanation of motion as it includes final causes, as Aristotle wrote, the *psyche* of the eye would be its vision. Sensitivity is in all the organs and the whole natural body, as well as all the capacities and powers of the *psyche* as well. Moreover, *phantasia* can be the point of connection between thought and perception, as we saw in the Aristotelian argument, if in order to think one must imagine, and imagining is a capacity activated by perception, so all capacities are interconnected. The challenge is to try to describe verbs such as imagine, or notions such as imagination, which involve the combination of the sensible forms that remain in perception and about the nature of the representation of such mental, or rather sensory, images.

Aristotle posed the question of whether we could locate the *psyche* in some part of the body, or whether we could continue to live without some parts of the body.

Here's why perhaps some researchers understand that the problem for Aristotle was more about the problem of identity, *psyche*, and the natural body. If by chance the *psyche* could be in some specific and exclusive part of the body, but if all parts of the natural body exhibit sentience, they also exhibit imagination and desire.

As Prof. Johansen (2012) explained, imagination cannot be understood as a faculty independent of perception. On the other hand, it is clear that there can be no cognitive capacity that is separate from sensibility or perception, not even thought. But there is another passage in the Aristotelian text which seems to suggest that the *nous* is an exclusive capacity of the human *psyche*, or essential part, just as it is the nutritive part for plants, and perceptive part for animals. Which would be related to the notion of rationality. But probably many researchers have resorted to this passage in the Aristotelian interpretation, to assume that the intellect can perhaps be separated, (but perhaps as a kind of understanding, or rationality), on the other hand it seems to refer to something else that would be eternal, which even see in us the question we are dealing with of knowledge being eternal and separate. something like Hegel's absolute, the realm of Frege's thoughts, or perhaps even what has been presented by Artificial Intelligence. And this passage about the faculty of theoretical knowledge as something separate from the tangible, and therefore eternal, but this perhaps refers to knowledge as the result of discursive thought, because the other parts of the *psyche* would not be separable from the body.

But there is no affirmation, on the other hand the attempt at understanding, and if there is anything that could be separated it would be understanding, or thought, such a capacity to abstract (*nous)* it refers to the separability of what would be our human capacity to understand, in addition to perceiving. As Cohoe (2022) explains, the *Nous* It is a capacity that is separate to the extent that it distinguishes us from other animals that also perceive. And perhaps the difference also comes from the fact that we develop a kind of ability to deal with images in a way that is different from other animals.

Our ability to imagine, that is, to know the form of beings, the investigation of what things are, that is, in an essentialist view of knowledge, this is how Cohoe understands the power of human thought. This also understood Husserl about phenomenology as descriptions of essences. But it is our imagination in that way a different imaginative capacity from that of other animals, and here the distinction seems to be crucial the role of the *nous*, as a capacity to understand, but not separate from perception.

If in order to think one must imagine, and if imagination is incorporated, then thought must also be. The images generated by *phantasia* and the knowledge of sensible forms that are received throughout our sensory apparatus. Hence the conception of *phantasma,* or image, is better understood as the impressions of printed forms, that is, which still remain in our organs: *"even when the objects of sense have gone*

away, perceptions and imaginings remain in the sensory organs." (*De An.* 425b25) This highlights that thought, even at its most abstract, is never fully detached from the body or from lived experience. Imagination serves as the bridge through which perception informs cognition, ensuring that all intellectual activity remains grounded in the sensory and corporeal capacities of the organism. In this sense, Aristotle anticipates a perspective similar to that later developed by phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty, for whom consciousness and imagination are always embodied: our ability to think, reason, or conceptualize is inseparable from the body that perceives and interacts with the world. Therefore, *phantasia* is not merely a preparatory or subsidiary faculty; it is a fundamental, embodied component of cognition, revealing that even the loftiest reaches of human thought emerge from and remain connected to our sensory and bodily experience.

1.4 *Phantasia* vs Thinking and Perception

Aristotle clearly distinguishes imagination (*phantasia*) from both perception and thought, emphasizing their interrelations but also their fundamental differences. He writes: "*For imagination is different from both perception and reasoning, and it does not come about without perception, and without this there is no conceiving*" (*De An.* 427b15). This points to imagination's dependence on perception as a necessary condition, while also affirming that imagination is a distinct faculty.

If perception involves the forms implicated in matter — that is, the sensible objects as they are directly encountered — *phantasia* is the activity of reenacting these forms, which remain impressed upon the sensory organs even when the immediate stimuli are absent. Thus, *phantasia* is both a capacity and a form of affection, If every movement of the soul is an affection, then imagination is also a mode of being affected. Importantly, this faculty depends on our will; we can voluntarily attempt to recall or recreate these sensory images, that's why is a movement or activity, which connects imagination closely with memory and the ability to be affected again by forms. If in order to think one must imagine, and if imagination is incorporated, then thought must also be embodied. The images generated by *phantasia* and the knowledge of sensible forms received through our sensory apparatus demonstrate that even when the objects of sense are no longer present, perceptions and imaginings remain in the sensory organs (*De An.* 425b25). As Johansen (2012) emphasizes, *phantasia* "happens" to the perceiving subject, showing that imagination is not an isolated faculty but an alteration of the subject grounded in perception. David Charles (2021) similarly stresses that even rational thought is intimately connected to embodied processes, and Klaus Corcilius (2024) highlights that Aristotle conceives the human intellect as emerging from, rather than existing apart from, the perceptual and bodily capacities of the organism. Together, these perspectives reinforce that imagination is the embodied bridge between perception and thought: cognition, reasoning, and understanding are inseparable from our bodily and sensory engagement with the world.

Aristotle distinguished *phantasia* or imagination of thought and reasoning, first because thinking and reasoning depends on their facticity, and we tend to form opinions about what we believe to be true. On the other hand, *phantasia* it would be an activity that produces images, and that would not be committed, like opinion, to the true and the false, or like knowledge, to the true. Imagination differs from conceiving or believing because it depends on our will—we can choose to imagine something, like creating mental images or using memory techniques. Belief, however, is not voluntary and must be either true or false. When we believe something frightening or bold, we are immediately affected emotionally, but imagining these things is more like seeing them in a picture—less directly affecting us. (*De An.* 427b20-25).

Imagination differs from thought and reasoning in that it depends on our will to create images, whereas in thought there is a composition between the false and the true. Opinion or belief affects perception, and it seems that imagining the creation of images means something like "contemplating something with value." Here Aristotle suggests that our beliefs alter our emotions, images that we may desire or avoid. When we believe in something, it has to be as true, and this can affect us more, unlike the imagination that there could be some kind of suspension and affect us less. *Phantasia* seems to be a capacity that presents greater freedom because it is less linked to facticity, that is, we know that such images that we are imagining, contemplating, abstracting are not true. Which is still a type of affection. And perhaps it presents itself more as a disposition or potency to assist in the formation of beliefs, or even to guide perception in some way. Reasoning is distinct from perceiving, but both imagination and conception seem to be part of it. After defining imagination as the capacity that produces particular images, it's important to clarify whether imagination is itself a capacity or state that allows us to distinguish and make judgments about truth and falsehood. Such faculties include perception, belief, knowledge, and reason. (*De An.* 427b27-428a5).

Aristotle stresses that imagination is a capacity offering greater freedom because it is less tied to actual facticity. We know, when imagining, that the images we create or contemplate do not necessarily correspond to reality, yet this imaginative activity is still a type of affection, a mental state that can influence the formation of beliefs and guide perception. While reasoning is distinct from perceiving, both imagination and conception appear as integral parts of cognitive processes. After defining imagination as the capacity that produces particular images, Aristotle questions whether imagination itself is a capacity or state that allows us to distinguish and judge truth and falsehood—faculties that include perception, belief, knowledge, and reason (*De An.* 427b27-428a5).

Phantasia deals with the forms that remain in perception, even without the immediate presence of specific sensory stimuli, and is a kind of movement actualized by perception. Perception requires the presence of sensibles in exercise, whereas imagination can function without current sensory input, as in dreams or recollec-

tions. While animals possess imagination to varying degrees—excluding, for example, some insects that show no behavioral change—perception is always true according to Aristotle, whereas imagination frequently involves false images (*De An.* 428a9-15). This is because we actively combine and create images in imagination, producing representations that may not correspond to reality.

Imagination is thus not perception; if it were, all animals would have imagination, which they do not. Perceptions are always true, but imaginings are mostly false. Clear perception requires that we do not doubt the reality of what we perceive, but imagination lacks this certainty. Visual images may even appear when our eyes are closed, underscoring imagination's independence from immediate sensory input.

Unlike perception, which is always true, imagination entertains falsity, and thought can be either true or false. Opinion and knowledge require belief in truth, but imagination operates in the realm of possibility and potentiality, not committed to truth values (*De An.* 428a16). Thinking and reasoning engage with both truth and falsity; imagination is a kind of thought about perception but not itself a belief. Aristotle differentiates imagination from belief by noting that belief concerns specific objects of perception, whereas imagination involves creating images that may not correspond directly to perceived objects (*De An.* 428a25-428b).

Johansen (2012) highlights Aristotle's insistence on distinguishing *phantasia* from both perception and knowledge, arguing that *phantasia* often involves error and is not a form of knowledge, which must always be true. Belief (*doxa*) can contradict appearances, such as the example of the sun appearing only a foot wide despite being much larger, showing the complex relationship between perception, opinion, and belief (JOHANSEN, 2012, p. 200).

Phantasia is thus a capacity that abstracts from direct perception, producing images that are akin to sensations but without the physical matter. This aligns it closely with memory, which also deals with images or affections of sensory forms, situating perception as primary among the faculties of the soul. Without perception, no alteration or reception of forms is possible, making imagination akin to perception in capacity but distinct in function (*De An.* 432a5). *Phantasia* encompasses all senses, not just vision, and is broader than the common notion of imagination as visual imagery. Dennett (1991) similarly argues that mental imagery is multisensory; for instance, imagining a song is a vivid auditory experience, illustrating the rich sensory modalities of imagination beyond mere visual pictures (DENNETT, 1991, p. 58).

For Aristotle, the images created by *phantasia* are like sensations but without matter, enabling us to abstract from the sensible to the intelligible. Memory, *phantasia*, and thought collectively allow us to transcend immediate sensory perception and contemplate forms without their material substrate. While imagination seems common to many animals, discursive thought and conviction, which require persuasion and reason, are uniquely human. Therefore, imagination cannot be equated with belief, as belief involves conviction and rational assent (*De An.* 428a20-25).

Discursive thinking, a hallmark of human rationality, coexists with perception, but they are distinct faculties. Moss (2012) notes that discursive thinking characterizes humans as rational and social animals capable of opinion and knowledge. Understanding the *psyche*'s capacities requires recognizing how they function and differ. Imagination assists both perception and thought, anticipating them by allowing us to consider possibilities beyond immediate experience. For example, perceiving an unnatural hair color may invoke imaginative judgment to assess its artificiality.

Aristotle insists imagination is not opinion; it is similar to sensation but distinct from opinion generated by sensation. While opinion concerns true or false, imagination deals with possibility and potentiality, not constrained by truth values. Philosophers before Aristotle, such as Empedocles and Homer, conflated understanding and perception, assuming reasoning was corporeal, yet Aristotle emphasizes that perception and understanding differ fundamentally, with reasoning capable of error and unique to rational beings (*De An.* 427a17-427b14).

Perception is always true and shared by all animals, whereas reasoning can be false and is exclusive to beings with reason. Imagination, distinct from both, depends on perception but is not always active and is absent in some animals. It is a movement or affection that occurs only with actual perception, linked to the principal sense of sight, from which the term *phantasia* derives (*De An.* 429a5).

In summary, imagination is a capacity distinct from perception and thought, dependent on perception but characterized by freedom from strict truth conditions. It is an essential bridge connecting sensory experience with cognitive functions such as memory and reasoning, facilitating human thought by enabling mental imagery that is vivid, multisensory, and flexible.

1.5 *Phantasia* and Desire

Imagination correlates with sensitivity and desire, if one can feel possibly there is also desire. This is because desire moves animals, occupying a teleological role for action in Aristotle's theory. Especially when referring to animals that have touch, that need to look for their own food, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of desire for the performance of basic activities for the survival of the animal. Even when the author points out that "*For the sensory organ is in each case receptive of the object of perception without its matter; and for this reason, even when the objects of sense have gone away, perceptions and imaginings remain in the sensory organs."* (*De An.* 425b25) In short, we need imagination to perceive and act.

Desire or will is not a type of affection that could be considered a mental behavior, on the other hand the one who perceives and has appetite also has desire, for Aristotle. Animals that perceive and clearly possess the sensitivity to choose what can cause pleasure or pain, possess will, and so we can assume that they possess desires. The perception of animals is linked to a theory of desire to explain their movements, as he points out "*But if the perceptual faculty, then also the desiderative faculty*".

(*De An.* 414b5) Plants share the nutritive faculty with animals, but not perception, which apprehends and manifests "*appetite is a desire for what is pleasurable."* (*De An.* 414b5)

For Aristotle, what moves an animal spatially is not simply the nutritive or reproductive faculty, for what moves it *"for the sake of something, and occurs along with imagination and desire; for nothing is moved, other than by force, which is not desiring or fleeing something." (De An.* 432b15*)* And also to explain the movements of human animals that are moved by desires, wills, appetites, even when they may be acting acratically.

That said, we can recognize that for Aristotle the teleological causes for human action are desire and practical thought, "*In any case, these two appear to initiate motion: desire and reason-if one were to posit imagination as a sort of reasoning." (De An.* 433a9-10*)* and here Aristotle suggests that some are inclined to be guided by their imaginations.

The causes for human movement would be for Aristotle desire and a kind of practical thinking. On the other hand, not all animals have thought and reasoning. Practical thinking also seems to imply some kind of reasoning, which has as its view a specific end, the object of desire. However, the author points out: "*For the object of desire initiates motion and because of this thought initiates motion, because its starting point is the object of desire. And whenever imagination initiates motion, it does not do so without desire."* (*De An.* 433a20) The purpose of theoretical thought differs from practical thought, the objects are distinct. Desire also exists with a view to something, the object of desire, which participates as a starting-point for practical thought, and therefore for action. Practical thought moves, because it has as its reference, the object of desire. Consequently, for Aristotle, what moves animals is desire.

In this passage Aristotle seems to suggest that desire and imagination may be right or wrong, for if we move because of the objects of desire, and/or because they appear to be good or because they are good, and it seems that theoretical discourse thought, as the understanding pointed out, tends to be correct, and should be more apt to recognize the value of actions, but that it is desire that moves, which seems more than obvious to us. In view of the problem of akrasia, in which there are contrary desires between reasoning and appetites. And for now, it seems to imply other problems about wanting what is pleasurable, or not, that is, what can be considered good for the one who desires such an object of desire. On the other hand, here we would already enter into questions aimed not only at a theory of cognition, but at ethics and philosophy of action.

For Aristotle, the importance of desire in trying to explain the movement of animals, as well as the purposes of their actions, is clear. We move and act because we desire and have purposes in our actions, the objects of desire. And it seems in Aristotle's theory that desire occupies a crucial role, both as part of basic cognition, and can also be encompassed by a theory of action and even in its ethics. However, in the

de Motu Animalium[3] Such a fundamental passage that teleology for the explanation of action can be reduced to thought and desire: "*we see that the movers of the animal are reasoning and phantasm and choice and wish and appetite. And all of these can be reduced to thought and desire.*" (MA 700b15-20)

Aristotle argues that what makes animals move could therefore be recognized as thought and desire, without ignoring that imagination and perception are intertwined. Inclined to deal with the prevalence of desire which for the author can also influence the ability to reason when writing: "*Wish and spiritedness and appetite are all desire, and choice shares both in reasoning and in desire.*"(MA 700b20) The choice of action is to be seen and considered with the starting point not only of desire but also of thought, so such notions are correlated with both perception and imagination, "*the animal moves and progresses in virtue of desire or choice, when some alteration has taken place in accordance with sense-perception or phantasia*." (MA 701a5) Since perceiving and imagining are foundational and incorporated to drive action with purpose, as well as desire and thought. For Aristotle, desire is the first condition.

But thought can also alter perception, and also seems to have a power to lead to the understanding of things and how they affect us, imagination and thought seem to update our understanding of the states of things, or about ourselves, as Aristotle points out.

Aristotle wrote in *De Motum Animalium,* that it is desire that moves animals, and *phantasia* appears as a kind of capacity of anticipation for desire, it is the forms that remain in us that make us then distinguish forms that we desire or avoid, therefore, we distinguish between pleasure and pain. Jessica Moss (2012) goes even further and argues that *phantasia* is the basis of all human motivations.[4] Imagination can also appear as a discriminating capacity, as we saw in the example in which Aristotle expounded on the role of *phantasia* in direct perception, in the example of how we perceive the size of celestial bodies, but the understanding differs from that imagined. Perception is always actual, the activity of *phantasia,* just as perception refers to images, or rather, just as perception is also understood as the capacity to receive forms in perception. If, for Aristotle, imagination also resembles sensations, therefore, it makes sense to agree with Johansen (2012) that *phantasia* is not understood as a faculty separate from the perceptive faculty. In this way, in my opinion, it also results in understanding that none of the capacities function apart from the perceptive faculty, (not even thought) as we can confirm in the Aristotelian text, sensations, like imaginations, remain in the sensory organs, in the sensibility, not only in some specific organ: *"For the sensory organ is in each case receptive of the object of perception without its matter; and for this reason, even when the objects of*

[3] Translated by Martha Nussbaum.

[4] Jessica Moss (2012) Phantasia and Deliberation, In *Aristotle on the Apparent Good. Perception, Phantasia, Thought & Desire*, p. 137: Oxford University Press.

sense have gone away, perceptions and imaginings remain in the sensory organs." (*De An.* 425b25)

Imagination would play an intermediate role between thought and perception, since these two capacities can be considered different activities and faculties (powers) of the *psyche* in Aristotelian theory. Moreover, Aristotle wrote about thinking making use of images (sensible forms), so the conception of *phantasia* is also associated with the images that are necessary for thinking.

For everything that is the object of thought, i.e., intelligible, forms, images, is a kind of abstraction, hence the notion of attached representation, but they are thought of from their sensible forms. So, we see the primary role of perception, whether for thought, imagination, memory, understanding, desire. But as Moss (2012) distinguished, for Aristotle our difference between other animals that also imagine and perceive was at stake.

To identify how the imaginative part of the soul differs from the other parts is a difficult task. Aristotle wrote that if we move, it may be simply by imagining, since this ability acts on desires and our understandings. So, it depends on which one is more inclined, either to reasoning or to desire, but to imagine (*De An.* 433a10). And if imagining is different from thinking, for thinking is a combination of thought (true and false), and if some animals do not reason or think, but imagine and desire: "*whenever imagination initiates motion, it does not do so without desire*" (*De An.* 433a20). Therefore, there is a correlation between what we imagine and what we desire, Aristotle recognized the role of imagination for planning and disposition to action, along with desire. And imagining how a movement seems to depend on our will.

On the other hand, thought, which, when presented as an opinion, may be false or true, differs from perception, which is always true, because it is always actual, the sensation is always of the present. On the other hand, the ability to abstract and create images, that is, to remember or create images that make us anticipate action, as well as thought, is also modified by *phantasia* or imagination. And in addition to this, it also influences perception, *phantasia* can create images that generate affections, we remember forms, and we create sensations from what we think. The activity of thought, perception, and imagination are interconnected and are capable of altering our ability to act.

Perception, on the other hand, could not for Aristotle be easily identified as something rational or irrational, animals would also perceive what can be considered good or bad through the distinction of pleasure and pain, and the notion of rationality, and perhaps the intellectual faculty (understanding) would be exclusive to human animals. Aristotle refers to this as linked to the eternity of science, of knowledge. In addition to trying to distinguish humans from non-human animals, discursive thinking with the power for knowledge would be something exclusive to humans. Imagination is also a faculty that would be difficult to classify, after all, animals in general

have imagination, just as they perceive. If they perceive and possess sensibility, they also desire, and the capacity to desire will be another faculty of the *psyche*, the desiderative as distinguished from perception, imagination, and thought. Aristotle argues that it would be absurd to consider it (desiderative faculty) separate from the other faculties of the *psyche*. Therefore, like perception and *phantasy*, desire is interrelation capacities. If the human *psyche* can be defined by its parts, it doesn't matter how many there are, desire will participate in them all.

The capacity to desire, for Aristotle, was different from the others, but they are not separable. And he stressed that this capacity acts on a rational and irrational part, that is, desire. Jessica Moss (2012) presents the idea of rational desire as a human capacity, but also presents irrational desire as appetite, impulsivity. Finally, if the *psyche* has three parts, Aristotle affirmed that desire is present and acts in each of them. By defining the *psyche* by its parts or faculties, Aristotle argues that there is no discursive thinking in nonhuman animals, but there is imagination. *Phantasia* is a faculty and part of the *psyche* that would also explain the movement of other animals beyond desire.

What moves is the object of desire as the final cause and principle of action, something that was explored by the philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1981) in *The Intentionality of Sensation*,[5] wrote about the notion of the "object of desire" as well as the "object of thought".

Ryle, Austin, Anscombe rejects in particular the conception of "sense data" that has been developed by analytic philosophers. We see that this is the attempt of philosophers to deal with the problem of *phantasia*, linked to that of mental images, as we are seeing, is not an easy subject. If images are not like images, as in seeing what I am seeing, but are a type of images, which Anscombe called intentional objects, we understand it as the notion of intentionality as a mark of the mental in Brentano and also as a final cause for action in Aristotelian theory. Such an understanding goes on to deal with the *slogan* of intentionality, but we need to understand what it is to be intentional is.

Dealing with mental images, or ideas, contents (Anscombe takes up Descartes) that the author describes as intentional objects that are like objects of thought or desire. Intentional objects are not particular objects that we find in the world, but the images that we have of them in mind, but if this is the problem, what is the nature of such mental images. But beyond the difficulty of distinguishing the *phantasia* of the other capacities, desire is also a type of theory of intentionality in Aristotelian theory. But it is the object of desire that makes the animals move, the object insofar as it is understood and imagined, and the relation between imagination and desire, as well as thought, is emphasized to explain the movement.

[5] ANSCOMBE, G. E. M. (1981) The Intentionality of Sensation IN *Metaphysics and Philosophy of Mind*. The Collected Philosophical Papers of G. E. M. Anscombe. Vol 2. Basil Blackwell Publisher.

Desire and imagination are faculties of the *psyche* that we share with other animals. And desire as an explanation of the movement of animals is also linked to imagination, because it is the object of desire that makes the animal move.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Aristotle's notion of *phantasia* represents a unique cognitive faculty that, although dependent on perception, differs fundamentally from both perception and thought. Whereas perception is anchored in the actual presence of objects and corresponds to truth, and thought necessarily involves truth and falsehood, imagination enjoys a distinctive freedom, capable of producing images that may be fictitious, combined, or false. This freedom makes *phantasia* an essential bridge for thinking, expanding human capacity to transcend immediate sensory input and contemplate possibilities and abstractions.

Furthermore, Aristotle's analysis reveals that imagination is not a passive function but an active power underpinning key processes such as memory, reasoning, and, notably, desire. Desire, connected with *phantasia*, emerges as the primary driver of animal and human movement, with humans uniquely capable of directing their actions through the anticipation of pleasures or pains imagined. This interplay between desire, imagination, and perception provides an integrated framework for understanding not only cognition but also motivation and action, demonstrating the depth of Aristotle's account of the soul and its faculties.

By reconsidering *phantasia* as a dynamic and embodied process, this paper challenges traditional interpretations of imagination in Aristotle. We argue that *phantasia* is essential for cognition, memory, and action, functioning as a bridge between perception and thought. Understanding this concept contributes to contemporary debates on imagination, cognition, and intentionality.

Aristotle's insights into *phantasia* not only illuminate key aspects of ancient psychology but also resonate with contemporary discussions in cognitive science and philosophy of mind. Recognising the embodied nature of imagination allows for a more integrated account of how the sensible forms or images that remain in the senses sustain the activity of *phantasia*, linking perception to memory, thought, desire. In this way, imagination or *phantasia* is not merely a repository of mental representations but a living process that prolongs sensation, shaping cognition and guiding action.

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