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Perception in Aristotle's Ethics

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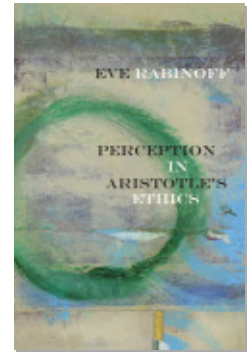
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CHAPTER 2

Human Perception

In Aristotle's ethics, the good is always realized in the present, particular circumstances; being good and doing good deeds is not a matter of applying universal ethical laws to particular circumstances well, but rather discerning and acting according to the good as it emerges in one's particular circumstance. In some circumstances, for example, it is good to use fatal violence, in some circumstances it is bad to help a friend—and it is up to the person of virtuous character to discern this.

Insofar as perception is the means whereby a person has access to the particular, Aristotle's ethics ought to give perception a central role both in ethical reasoning and in virtuous character.¹ Yet Aristotle does not fully account for or explain the role of perception in his ethical works, nor does his primary account of perception in *De anima* neatly fit into an account of ethics. In *De anima*, perception is of special objects—sight perceives color, hearing sound, and so on—and of common perceptibles—motion, rest, number, magnitude, shape; but the perception that the virtuous character must employ is of a unique and meaningful situation in which she must enact the good. We saw in the last chapter that incidental perceptibles are indeed genuine objects of perception, which greatly enlarges the contents of perception.² However, incidental perceptibles are common to both human and nonhuman animals, whereas ethics is a uniquely human sphere. The challenge that we are presented with, then, is one of accounting for ethical perception, that is, answering the question of what makes it possible to *perceive* a situation as a site in which to realize the good and moreover to *discern* the good in it.³ Insofar as humans are the only ethical creatures, this is tantamount to asking, “What is human perception?”

That there is particularly human perception distinct from the perception of nonrational animals, and that this kind of perception is not adequately explained in the *De anima* account of perception, is suggested by an ambiguity in the way that Aristotle treats of perception elsewhere in his corpus. In *De anima* Aristotle treats *nous* and *aisthēsis* as distinct parts of the soul with

distinct objects and distinct powers, yet elsewhere he undermines or blurs this distinction. Explicitly, Aristotle takes perception to be a nonrational faculty whose object is the particular, whereas intellect or thought is that which grasps the universal;⁴ these powers are treated as different functions that are the operations of different parts of the soul.⁵ Yet, (perhaps most notoriously) in *Posterior Analytics* II.19 Aristotle remarks, “although you perceive [*aisth-anesthai*] the particular, perception [*aisthēsis*] is of the universal” (100b1).⁶ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* there is a similar confluence of perception and intellect:

Moreover, intellect is concerned with the ultimate things in both directions, for [what grasps] both the first defining boundaries and the ultimate particulars is intellect and not reason. That is, on the one hand, intellect pertaining to demonstrations grasps the unchanging first defining boundaries; on the other hand, intellect in matters of action grasps also the ultimate particular thing that admits of being otherwise, that is, the minor premise. For these ultimate particulars are principles [*archai*] of that for the sake of which one acts: the universals arise from the particulars. Of these, then, one must have a perception [*aisthēsis*], and this perception is intellect. (*Nic. Eth.* 1143a36–b6)⁷

Similarly, *Metaphysics* VII.10 1036a5 reads: “of these [concrete individuals] there is no definition, but they are known by the aid of *noēsis* or *aisthēsis*.”⁸ Even within *De anima* itself Aristotle admits ambiguity with regard to the rationality of perception: in III.9, in the context of raising the question of what constitutes a part of the soul, he notes that the perceptive capacity (*to aisthētikon*) “could not easily be set down as either irrational or rational” (432a31).

There is a related ambiguity in the general way in which Aristotle uses *aisthēsis* throughout the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he appears to operate with an assumed distinction between animal perception and human perception.⁹ On the one hand, Aristotle uses the term *aisthēsis* (and its variations) to describe the faculty that defines animals and that humans share only in virtue of their animal nature, that is, as a strictly nonrational faculty.¹⁰ Indeed, perception first appears on the scene as definitive of the life of a nonhuman animal in contrast to the life of the human (1098a1–5).¹¹ On the other hand, Aristotle often treats perception as a cognitive activity that human beings employ in uniquely human ways; for example, twice Aristotle remarks that the discernment (*krisis*) of what is blameworthy is in the perception (*aisthēsis*)¹² (*Nic. Eth.* 1109b24, 1126b4).¹³

These surprising passages seem to indicate that, rather than operating independently of intellect and being unaffected by it, the operation of perception is nearly aligned with the operation of *nous*. This suggests that an account of human perception should take into account its relationship to the other parts of the soul of which it too is a part (and especially its relation to intellect), that is, in the context of the whole soul. Indeed, as I will argue, that the parts of the soul are mutually informing and mutually operational follows from Aristotle's account of the unity of the soul (*Metaphysics* 1023b26–34, 1040b6–15; *De anima* 411a24–b14, 416a6–9) and the separability of its parts (*De anima* 413b11–414a1). The strategy for discovering an account of human perception would therefore be to begin by treating the whole human soul.

The course of my argument will be as follows: in the first section, I will address the composition of the soul in general, showing the soul to be a whole that is prior to its parts in the sense that the parts would cease to be what they are outside of the context of the whole. I will argue that this is consistent with Aristotle's view that the parts of the soul are separable only in *logos*, as opposed to separable in place or magnitude, and further that it is confirmed in Aristotle's designation of the lower parts of the soul as being in the higher one in potentiality. I will interpret this to mean that the lower faculties of soul depend for their operation on the presence and operability of the higher, defining, part of the soul. In the second section, I will address the relationship of perception and intellect in the human soul. Here I will argue that the dependency of perception on intellect takes the form of perception being always already informed by intellect, that it is a noetic perception.¹⁴

Specifically, I will argue that the character of human perceptual experience is oriented by the nonperspectival nature of intellect such that human perception always maintains a horizon of indeterminate possibility. In some ways, this position is similar to the one that Modrak espouses, when she addresses the question of the relationship between perceptual and intellectual faculties. She argues, "There is a single continuum of cognitive activity, and the line between perception and intellection is difficult to fix,"¹⁵ and concludes that the noetic faculty and the perceptual faculty, while having distinct objects, are integrated insofar as both faculties represent the same object, and the noetic faculty comes to realize its object by abstracting particularities from the perceptible particulars. Insofar as the perceptual object is the substratum for the intellectual object, the perceptual faculty is the material cause of the noetic faculty. "Thinking is the actualization of a *noëton*, the material substratum of which is a *phantasma* . . . the relation between faculties [mirrors] the

relation between their objects. While formally distinct from the perceptual faculty, the noetic faculty is the perceptual faculty differently disposed in the sense that the latter is its material cause."¹⁶ Without disagreeing with this conclusion, I will take a stronger position on the relationship between the faculties. I will argue that not only does the noetic faculty *employ* the perceptual, but also the perceptual faculty is informed in its very operation by the presence of the noetic capacity. This difference emerges as a result of distinct ways of approaching the problem—where I begin by considering the soul as a whole, Modrak begins by considering the parts of the soul. In the next chapter, I will address how the relationship between intellect and perception constitutes the ground for ethical development.

1. The Unity of the Soul

Aristotle's *De anima* is an analytic treatise: in it, Aristotle singles out and treats of the parts of the soul as abstracted from the whole soul and in isolation from the other parts of soul. Yet the role of perception in ethical life requires that the parts of the human soul be examined in their connectedness and interaction. This is somewhat of a departure from the usual way of approaching *De anima*, which more frequently examines particular functions or particular features of Aristotle's account.¹⁷ However, Aristotle himself treats of the connection between faculties of intellect and of perception at important junctures of his corpus, and such a unity is implied by the structure of the soul that Aristotle himself lays out in *De anima*. I will therefore begin by investigating the structure and unity of the soul. Setting forth Aristotle's position on the structure and unity of the soul will set the stage for the discussion of the relations of the parts of the human soul. In this section, I will argue first, drawing on passages from the *Metaphysics*, that the soul is a natural, continuous unity, and further, that this is reflected in Aristotle's conclusion in *De anima* that the parts of the soul are separable only in *logos*, not in place or in magnitude. Finally, I will argue that this particular structure implies that the operations of the parts of the soul are not independent; rather, the whole soul is implicated in the operation of each part, or in other words the operation of each part requires the presence and operability of the others.¹⁸

The Whole Is Not the Sum of Its Parts

To begin with, it is clear that, methodologically speaking, Aristotle does not think that the whole soul is equivalent merely to the sum of its parts. He first raises the question of the composition of the soul in *De anima* I.1, asking whether the soul is divisible or without parts (402b1). If the answer to this

is the former, as Aristotle decides it in a certain respect is, a related methodological question follows: “And further, if there are not several souls but rather parts of soul, there is a question whether it is necessary to seek the whole soul or the parts *first*” (402b9, my emphasis).¹⁹ With this question, Aristotle may be suggesting that there is a distinction between the account of the whole soul and the account of its parts. At the very least, the question acknowledges that there is a question of the distinction between accounts of the parts and an account of the unified whole.²⁰

Although Aristotle explicitly decides the compositional question in *De anima* II.2 (deciding that the soul has parts divisible in *logos*), and he implicitly answers the methodological question by proceeding to give an account of the parts of the soul in what follows, he leaves unsaid whether this account of the parts suffices as an account of the whole. However, that the soul is a complex whole that is not reducible to its parts, and that therefore their accounts would not be the same, is evident from Aristotle’s discussion of parts and wholes in *Metaphysics* V.25–26 and VII (especially 10–12, 16–17) and *De anima* II.1–3.

Metaphysics V.26 distinguishes three ways a thing is said to be a whole (*holon*), the second of which secures a strong unity that applies to the soul. Aristotle first identifies the two minimal conditions that a thing must attain in order to be a whole: first, that it not be missing any of its natural parts (1023b26), and second, that the whole contain the things it contains in such a manner that they form a unity (*hen*) (1023b27). Both conditions are necessary for a thing to be a whole: if only the second applied, the whole would be incomplete and therefore not a whole. If only the first applied, we would have a mere heap or pile, and we would not want to claim that a heap of working car parts (for example) would be just as much a whole as a working car. Rather, a whole must have all its components and those components must be brought together in a particular way, a way that is not determined by the parts but by the whole. The car parts do not determine their relationship to one another; on the contrary, they are brought together in a certain relationship because they must be in that relationship if the car as a whole is to function. The whole is the organizing principle of the relationship of parts.

Aristotle further identifies two senses in which the components can be brought together such that they form a whole, either as a collection of items sharing something essential in common or as a unity in the stronger sense of one single thing:

For (a) that which is true of a whole class and is said to hold good as a whole (which implies that it is a kind of whole) is true of a

whole in the sense that it contains many things by being predicated of each, and by all of them, e.g., man, horse, god, being severally one single thing, because all are living things. But (b) the continuous and limited is a whole, when it is a unity consisting of several parts, especially if they are present only potentially, but failing this, even if they are present actually. (*Met.* 1023b28–34)

The difference between the first and the second sense of unity here rests on whether or not the parts of the whole are separable and independent wholes themselves, or whether they are parts in the stronger sense of being dependent upon the whole of which they are parts. In the first case, what instantiates the whole “living things”—concrete individual gods, horses, and people—are themselves wholes composed of body parts and soul parts, and they are separable and independent in the sense that the whole “living things” would remain a complete whole regardless of whether or not a particular individual is present in it. In the second case, however, the parts are not independent and separable in this manner. If anything were to be removed from the continuous and limited unity, the unity would either be destroyed or rendered incomplete, and the thing removed would not be able to stand on its own. For example, a hand is a part of the body in this second sense: if it is separated from the body, it is no longer a hand, except equivocally (*Met.* 1035b25), and the body without a hand is said to be missing something.²¹

It is this second, stronger sense of the whole as a unity that applies to the soul, as indicated in the *Metaphysics* and confirmed in *De anima*. In *Metaphysics* VII.16 Aristotle remarks:

Evidently, even of the things that are thought to be substances, most are only potencies [*dunamis*]—both the parts of animals (for none of them exists separately; and when they *are* separated, then too they exist, all of them, merely as matter) and earth and fire and air; for none of them is a unity, but as it were a mere heap, till they are worked up and some unity is made out of them. One might most readily suppose the parts of living things *and the parts of the soul* nearly related to them to turn out to be both, i.e., existent in complete reality [*entelecheia*] as well as in potency [*dunamis*], because they have sources of movement in something in their joints; for which reason some animals live when divided. *Yet all parts must exist only potentially* [*dunamis*], *when they are one and continuous by nature.* (*Met.* 1040b6–15, my emphasis)

This passage clearly suggests that the soul is a strong unity and that its parts are inseparable from the whole. The parts of the soul are not independent pieces that happen to be joined together into one soul; they are rather like the parts of the body that need to be organized into a whole in order to truly be the parts that they are.²² Parts of a natural, continuous unity are dependent upon the whole in the sense that they receive their character and definition from the whole of which they are parts; the parts receive their form, so to speak, from the whole. If separated from the whole, the parts cease to be what they are, just as a hand is not a hand (except equivocally) when separated from the body. The same is perhaps more obviously the case with the parts of the soul: there *is* no perception apart from a perceptual or intellectual soul—perception is nothing outside of a soul. The parts of the soul are not separable from the whole, in the way, say, a Scrabble tile is separable from its Scrabble game. Moreover, both this passage and the previous one describe the parts as in *dunamis*, existing potentially within the whole, which is how Aristotle describes the parts of the soul at *De anima* II.3 414b30. (I will address this claim in a later section.)

The Incompleteness of the Parts

This inseparability of the parts from the whole is confirmed and specified in *De anima* II.2, where Aristotle argues that the capacities of soul are not many souls within one living creature, but rather parts of a single soul (413b11–414a1), and that these parts are separable only in *logos*, as opposed to separable in place or magnitude. After laying out the powers of soul and their order of necessity (the nutritive power is necessary for all living things, some living things have perception in addition, and few have also intellect [413a35–b13]),²³ Aristotle raises the question of whether each of these “is a soul or a part of soul, and if a part, whether it is such as to be separable only in definition [*logos*] or also in place” (413b14–16).²⁴ Coming as this does on the heels of a discussion about the increasing complexity of kinds of souls—that the plant has nutrition alone, while all animals have perception in addition—one expects Aristotle to mean that the plant is the clear case where a power of soul is a whole soul. But instead Aristotle offers this explanation:

For, just as in the case of plants, some clearly live when divided and separated from each other, the soul in them being actually one in actuality in each plant, though potentially many, so we see this happening also in other varieties of soul in the case of insects when they are cut in two; for each of the parts has perception and motion

with respect to place, and if it has perception, also imagination and appetite. (*De anima* 413b17–23)

What this evidence shows is that the soul maintains its complexity even when the living thing of which it *is* the soul is divided—each part of the severed insect has a perceptive soul. The parts of the soul are thus determined by the whole of which the powers *are* parts: it is because the insect has a perceptive soul that it has the capabilities of motion, perception, imagination, and appetite.²⁵ If this were not the case, the parts should be separable in such a way that one part of the severed critter could just be a nutritive soul, the other part just having the power of perception, for example. But this way of dividing the soul is not possible precisely because the whole is prior to and determinative of the parts.²⁶

I take this kind of inseparability of the parts and priority of the whole to imply that the soul *operates* as a whole: separability in *logos* does not imply separability in actual function; it only shows that the parts of the soul are *definitionally* independent.²⁷ Some examples of kinds of parts will help make this point. A wheel is a necessary part of a bicycle—without the wheel, the bicycle would cease to be a bicycle (at best it would be a unicycle, but more likely it would just be a deficient bicycle, and a bicycle only equivocally). But the wheel does not cease being a wheel when it is separated from the bicycle—it still rolls, embodies its definition, and maintains its capacity as a wheel; it is merely rendered a temporarily inactive wheel, and one that could be made active in a number of different contexts. In this example, the part of the whole is in a real sense *complete* on its own; being a part of a particular whole does not endow it with completeness.

A second way of being a part of a whole is the way a word is a part of a sentence. Here, too, the word is a necessary part of the sentence, but it is not complete on its own in the way that the wheel is. The word garners meaning from the whole sentence of which it is a part: a word takes on a number of senses and nuances and associations depending on the sentence it is in. The ordinary verb “run,” for example, has a very different sense when it is found in a sentence about elections than when it is in a sentence about a well-oiled machine than when it is in a sentence about the Olympic games. The incompleteness of the part is perhaps even more evident in living organisms: a part of a living organism, such as a hand, will not be a hand if severed from the body;²⁸ a blood cell will die if outside the living body.²⁹ In a very real sense, the word is *incomplete* when it is separated from the particular whole of which it is a part.³⁰

In both of these examples (wheels, “run”), the parts are separable in *logos*—each has a definition that does not include reference to the whole or to other

parts of the whole. Independence in *logos*, then, does not by itself achieve a completeness or independence of the parts. Further, the definition of “run” by itself does not determine whether it signifies the movement of a machine, a candidate, or an athlete. In a sense, the verb “run” exists only abstractly outside of concrete whole sentences, despite being separable in *logos*. Even more so is this true of the parts of the soul: there are *no* instances of animals living without perception or without the nutritive capacity. Just as the word, on the one hand, can only fully do its work within the context of a working sentence as a whole, and on the other hand, the full work of the sentence requires the intertwined operation of all of its parts, so too the parts of the soul are only fully operational in the context of the life of the organism, and also the parts work together to constitute the life of the organism. Just as the *Metaphysics* passages suggest, then, the parts of the soul are not independent items grouped together within a whole; if they were, we would have to say either that they were many souls or that they were separable in place, but Aristotle refutes both of these characterizations. The nutritive capacity and the intellectual capacity are separable *simpliciter* from other capacities of soul, as is evident by the fact that they *do* exist separately in the plant soul, on the one hand, and in the divine, on the other. But this does not mean that the nutritive or intellectual *parts* are separable *simpliciter*, only that these capacities as *kinds* of soul are separable. A person in a vegetative state, one whose nutritive power has been separated from her perceptive and intellectual powers, cannot survive without artificial support. The nutritive part of her soul is not sufficient when separated to maintain life, which shows that it is not separable *simpliciter*. Similarly, a person could not live by her intellect alone.

In sum, then, the composition of the soul is such that the whole is prior to the parts and the parts are what they are only within the context of the whole; and this means that the parts do not operate independently but as a function of the soul as a whole. A consequence of this conclusion is that the account of the parts of the soul given in *De anima* is not identical to the account of a whole soul, human or otherwise.³¹ It is the whole that determines the parts, and the particular whole of which the parts *are* parts will influence the manner in which the parts operate.³²

The Potentiality of the Parts

That the parts of the soul operate differently according to the kind of whole of which they are a part is confirmed by Aristotle’s explanation of the inadequacy of the most common account of soul to account for any actual soul in *De anima* II.3. Here Aristotle seems to commit himself to the position that the account of the parts of the soul is not identical to the account of the

whole soul, and further, to commit himself to *giving* accounts of each kind of soul (plant, animal, human) (see *De anima* I.1 402b5–9). After giving the *koinotatos* account of the soul as the first actuality of a natural, organized body in II.1,³³ Aristotle makes a new beginning, where he identifies *living* as the distinguishing mark of ensouled beings (413a21) and continues to articulate the various manifestations of life (intellect, perception, locomotion, nourishment) and their hierarchical sequence (the capacity for nourishment is necessary for all living things, some living things have perception in addition, others have intellect on top of that [II.2]).³⁴ In II.3, Aristotle infers from the variety of kinds of living beings that it is necessary to advance beyond the general account of soul (the hylomorphic account given in II.1) and to supplement it with accounts of “what is the soul of each thing, what is that of a plant, and what is that of a human or a beast” (414b32–33). Here Aristotle appears to promise accounts of *kinds* of soul (that is, of whole souls) which, as he has just remarked, are constituted by different configurations of parts. We have already established that the account of the parts ought to be supplemented by an account of the whole, and indeed Aristotle goes on to indicate that the relationship between the parts of the soul is not one of indifference to the other parts. To put it otherwise, the parts of the soul are not merely externally joined to one another, as if they were independent and separable parts; rather, they exhibit an intrinsic relation to one another.³⁵

In order to explain the inadequacy of the general account of soul to capture the specificity of each kind of soul Aristotle introduces an analogy with geometrical figures, and with this analogy, Aristotle reveals that the structure of the soul is not a mere conjunction of parts. Rather, Aristotle remarks that, with regard to ensouled beings just as with regard to geometrical figures, the soul that is higher in the sequence holds within it the previous soul *potentially* (*dunamis*). Aristotle explains that in the same way that the triangle is in the quadrilateral, so too is the nutritive (*threptikon*) in the perceptive (*aisthētikon*) (*De anima* 414b29–32).³⁶ This analogy begs for interpretation, but at the very least it indicates that, say, the plant soul will not be identical to the nutritive part of the animal soul: the *threptikon* is in the mode of *potentiality* in the animal soul, and this distinguishes it from the plant soul.³⁷ Nor, we may infer, are the parts of the soul on equal footing—the soul, it seems, is characterized primarily by the higher capacity, and the lower capacity ought to be understood in light of that primacy. The soul is *not* constituted by a conjunction of independent parts; rather, it seems that the parts are understood with reference to a governing power that serves as an organizing principle, as the nutritive soul is *in potentiality* with regard to the perceptive soul.³⁸ More importantly, by designating the parts of the soul

that are lower in the hierarchy as present *potentially* in the higher kinds of soul, Aristotle provides us with a clue regarding the relationship between the parts. If we can interpret the nature of this potentiality, we will be better able to construct an account of the human soul in its complexity.³⁹

As a guiding idea, let us consider the relationship between the triangle and the quadrilateral. The triangle is in the quadrilateral potentially because, although the quadrilateral is logically independent of—its definition makes no reference to—the triangle, it is a feature of the quadrilateral that it can be construed as being made up of two triangles. Said otherwise, the quadrilateral can be divided, in *logos*, in a particular way such that two triangles will emerge. Aristotle often describes the parts of mathematical objects this way. In *Metaphysics* VII.6, for example, he uses such language to illustrate the concept of actuality (*energeia*): Hermes is potentially in the block of wood and the half line is potentially in the whole line because it can be separated out (*aphairesthai*) (1048a34). But the triangles are not essentially constitutive of the quadrilateral; to be a quadrilateral is not primarily to be made up of two triangles, and this means that the triangles are not in the quadrilateral in full actuality.⁴⁰ Analogously, a substantial change is required to bring either Hermes or the half line into actuality: a block of wood is no longer a block of wood once it is a statue of Hermes. To bring the triangles (or the half lines, or Hermes) into actuality would be to reverse the order of priority, dissolving the quadrilateral into a composite of two triangles. Aristotle nearly says as much in *Metaphysics* VII.10: “For even if the line when divided passes away into its halves, or the man into bones and muscles and flesh, it does not follow that they are composed of these as parts of their essence [*ousia*], but rather as matter [*hulē*]; and these are parts of the concrete thing [*sunolou*], but not also of the form [*eidōs*]” (1035a17–22). I say *nearly* says as much because, insofar as the triangles are forms of the same order as the quadrilaterals—both triangles and quadrilaterals are figures in their own right—it would not be accurate to say that they are in potentiality in the whole in the way that matter is potentially in the composite. When triangles are separated in place or magnitude, the whole in the sense of the form, rather than in the sense of the composite, would no longer be the whole that it is; but nonetheless the triangles can be singled out in *logos*.

From the figure-soul analogy we may infer that the nutritive soul is in the perceptive soul potentially in the same way that the triangle is potentially in the quadrilateral, that is, insofar as it can be logically, definitionally, singled out within the perceptive soul. Indeed, the case is stronger with regard to the structure of the soul because it is impossible to separate out the parts in magnitude or in place, whereas one can separate in place two triangles out of the

concrete quadrilateral. As a result, even though the body, which is the matter of which the soul is the form, can be divided in place, the soul nonetheless remains whole (in some cases). The perceptive soul can *in logos* be divided into a perceptive part and a nutritive part, but in actuality and essentially it is primarily a perceptive *whole*.⁴¹

The analogy suggests that were a nutritive soul to be fully active as a part of the perceptive soul, the perceptive soul would be reduced to its parts. The question of the sense in which the nutritive soul is in the perceptive in potentiality thus turns on the difference between the nutritive *kind* of soul and the nutritive *part* of soul. What is in some cases a kind of soul is in other cases a part. The nutritive capacity is both a plant soul and a part of the animal soul, and the intellectual capacity is both a divine soul and a part of the human soul. Of course, these will be the same insofar as in both cases they accomplish the same activities—the nutritive capacity and the plant soul both accomplish nutrition and growth. However, there must be *some* difference, for otherwise the animal soul would be a plant soul plus an animal soul, and Aristotle recognizes this difference by calling the nutritive *potentially* in the perceptive soul.

What is potential about the nutritive soul that renders it appropriate to be a part of the perceptive soul? It is perhaps tempting to think that the nutritive soul would emerge were the perceptive part, somehow, to be damaged, just as a triangle would emerge were the quadrilateral really to be cut in half along the diagonal. But this is not the case with souls; as Aristotle notes, an animal *must* have the sense of touch if it is to live at all (*De anima* 413b5–7). If the sense of touch is destroyed, so is the animal (435b2–12). Likewise, a person who loses her brain functioning is not able to survive without artificial support. The nutritive soul does not emerge when the whole is severed, in contrast to the way that geometrical figures emerge. Yet this reflection provides a clue for understanding this relation of potentiality. The difference between one kind of soul and that kind as a part of a different kind of soul is in its directive capacity or lack of it: the *kind* of soul is self-sufficient, but when that kind is a part of another soul it is no longer sufficient to supply the life of the animal. The nutritive soul is all that is necessary for plant life to sustain itself, but the nutritive part of the animal soul is not sufficient to sustain the life of the animal. The higher capacity of the soul is the organizing and unifying principle of the soul of the organism, that which first of all explains its life (see 413b1–2).

This suggestion is borne out by Aristotle's analysis of the sense of touch. Touch, he says, is the most necessary sense, that without which the animal would not be an animal, nor would it be able to survive. And touch is the

appetitive sense—it is the sense that produces the desire for food and for drink. Aristotle even goes so far as to say in *De sensu* that flavor—a perceptible object—is an affection of the nutritive part of the soul (436b17–18). The nutritive function, when it constitutes the whole plant soul, is indeed sufficient for life—it needs no other capacity in order to do its work. But as soon as perception is introduced, it no longer does its work independently: it requires the desiring animal to provide it with the means to do its work. The nutritive capacity becomes subordinate to the perceptive capacity, depending upon it to do its work.⁴² The sense in which the nutritive is in the perceptive only potentially is that it requires the activity of the perceptive being in order to bring *it* into activity. Hunger becomes a precondition of the activity of the nutritive activity, and hunger is, indeed, an activity of the perceptive part of the soul.

My conclusion is that a part of a soul is in potentiality in the sense that it is not self-sufficient, but is instead guided by the higher capacity, just as the nutritive function requires that the animal perceive its hunger and its food before the nutritive function can do its work of digestion. To say it otherwise, the nutritive function is now for the sake of a creature whose life surpasses the minimal life of reproduction, growth, and decay. But this claim must be qualified, because this analysis seems at first glance only to apply to *some* aspects of the nutritive capacity. The animal needs to perceive and desire food in order to provide the material for the nutritive capacity to move into activity, but all the while the animal's heart is beating, its blood is circulating, and so on. There are plenty of automatic processes that are functions of the nutritive soul that seem *not* to depend upon the higher capacities and possibilities of the animal. Further, if the heart were to cease its beating, the animal would perish—the dependency seems to be reversed.

Still, such dependency does not contradict my conclusion about the structure of the soul, although it does complicate it. These independent, automatic nutritive processes function independently at times but still exist for the sake of the life of the organism, which life cannot be reduced to these processes.⁴³ Their independence is not entire, but rather circumscribed by this grander life that they are in service of: these processes will themselves cease and go awry if the animal fails to eat, for example. Their independence is thus limited: they are independent processes only for the time being. Thus, even though there is a kind of mutual dependency within the structure of the soul—on the one hand, the nutritive functions depend on the perceptive, but on the other hand, without these automatic nutritive functions there is no living animal at all—nonetheless the primary dependency is of the nutritive faculty on the perceptive soul. The higher faculty of soul is the organizing principle

of the parts of the soul; the functions of the parts, even if some occur without the input of the higher faculty, are for the sake of a life that exceeds these functions.

2. Noetic Perception

The geometrical analogy *should* extend to include the intellectual soul, that is, the human soul, but as we shall see, the case of the human soul is more complicated. Aristotle notes that “in the former case [of figures] there is no figure over and above the triangle and the others which follow it in order, nor in the latter case [of souls] is there soul over and above these mentioned” (*De anima* 414b21), suggesting that the subsequent comments about the succession of figures/souls applies to all of them. If the analogy could simply extend, we should find that human perception in some way relies on intellect in order to function, just as the nutritive power relies on the animal’s perception and desire to provide it with the opportunity to work. The life of the animal would not be possible in the absence of the perceptive power, and so similarly the life of the human should not be possible without the intellectual capacity. However, one aspect of Aristotle’s account of *nous* presents a difficulty for this simple extension of the analogy: in general, intellect differs from perception and nutrition insofar as it must be cultivated or developed in order to be used well. Unlike perception, the first actuality of knowledge must be developed through learning (417b17–19, 417a23–b2), which does not occur just of its own accord or by nature (*Nic. Eth.* 1103a1–3). If it were the case that a person *could* live without developing these capacities of intellect, it would not make sense to say that the perceptual soul is importantly incomplete in that particular person’s soul—this person is indeed living by means of perception. Aristotle notes at the end of the chapter on *phantasia* (*De anima* III.3) that “because imaginings persist and are similar to perceptions, animals do many things in accord with them, some because they lack intellect, viz. beasts, and others because their intellect is sometimes obscured by passion, disease, or sleep, viz. humans” (429a5–9). Because *phantasia* is a function of the perceptive part,⁴⁴ this implies that, contrary to the necessity of perception for the animal to live at all, the human *is* able to live when her intelligence is either temporarily disabled or, perhaps, not developed at all.⁴⁵ Moreover, Aristotle tells us more than once that thinking requires and cannot occur without perception and *phantasia* (431a14–18, 432a8–9), which seems to suggest that intellect rather relies on perception for its operation. If this is the case, we need to develop a different account of the way that the perceptive soul is in the intellectual soul in potentiality.

This difficulty is a consequence of the strange dual nature of human beings: humans are *zōon logon echon*, “animals having reason.” We are animals, but with a godlike capacity to reason and think. This is precisely what makes us ethical beings: on the one hand, we *can* and often *do* live by perception alone. But on the other hand, we *can* and *should* develop ourselves through habit to become virtuous—to reason well and choose well—or to become a scientist, a legal expert, a philosopher, or a trivia champion; that is, to become the people who know things of various kinds. The question, then, is whether we maintain our animal natures within or underneath the knowers we become.⁴⁶ This is just another way of asking whether and how the perceptual faculty is qualitatively altered by virtue of being within the intellectual soul. Let us, then, assume a fully developed intellectual soul and ask: what does the perceptual power look like within this soul? I will argue in what follows that perception is always already informed by *nous*, whether or not *nous* happens to be active at the moment of perception, by situating perception within a nonperspectival context.⁴⁷ The result is that human perceptual experience is characterized by an ambiguity or indeterminacy: the object of perception is perceived as a site of multiple possibilities.

Animal Perception

To Aristotle’s mind, perception provides the animal’s original cognitive access to the material objects around it. As opposed to plants, which are *simply* affected by material things—they *become* warm by the sun or cold in the snow (*De anima* 424a34–b2)—the animal also *encounters* material objects by virtue of perception being a mean or a ratio (424a23–25). Perception is a power that discriminates (*krinein*) (e.g., 424a6, 432a16), that is, that has access to things that are other than it and *as* other than it.⁴⁸ Encountering the perceptible object as other is inherent to the mechanism of perceiving. To perceive, Aristotle tells us, is for the sense organ (and the sense power) to be moved from the mean state by the perceptible object.⁴⁹ “For this reason,” Aristotle says, “we do not perceive what is as hot or cold, or hard or soft, as we are, but what exceeds us, since the sense is a kind of mean between the contrary attributes in the things perceived. In virtue of this it discriminates the things perceived, for the mean has the discriminating power, since it comes to be either of the two extremes in relation to the other” (424a3–7).⁵⁰ The perceptive power discriminates perceptible objects by keeping track, so to speak, of its own original condition, that is, the mean, as it is moved toward one or another extreme by receiving the perceptible form of the object. Insofar as it holds onto its own original condition while being altered, the perceptive power is able to *distinguish* between itself and what is other than it, the perceptible, material, object.⁵¹

Importantly, the animal's encounters with material objects are not neutral; rather, the animal encounters objects as pleasurable or painful, to be pursued or avoided. Aristotle tells us repeatedly that the power of perception is necessarily accompanied by pleasure and pain, and therefore desire (*orexis*), appetite (*epithumia*), and imagination (*phantasia*), and also spiritedness (*thumos*) and wishing (*boulēsis*) (*De anima* 413b23–25, 414b2–3, 414b4–7, 434a2). Aristotle identifies being pleased or pained with desiring (*orexis*) or fleeing, and he defines being pleased or pained as “to be active [*to energein*] with the perceptive mean towards the good or bad as such” (431a11–12). He explains that perceiving things as pleasant or painful is necessary if the animal is to survive: without perceiving the object as pleasant or painful, the animal would not discern what it should flee and what it should pursue, what endangers its life and what supports it.⁵² As Aristotle remarks, “since the animal is an ensouled body, and every body is tangible, and it is that which is perceptible by touch which is tangible, the body of an animal must also be capable of touch, if the animal is going to preserve itself . . . anything which touches things will be unable, if it does not have perception, to avoid some of them and take others. If that is so, it will be impossible for the animal to preserve itself” (434b12–17). A contrast with plant life is illuminating here: the plant does not have the power to perceive, and neither does it need to—it is physically constituted to absorb those things that support its life (nutrients, photons, etc.).⁵³ Animals, however, have perception, and since “nature neither does anything in vain and never fails in anything that is necessary” (432b21–22), they need *not* be physically constituted to accept only what is good for them. Perception takes over that function, as it must if nature does nothing in vain. In other words, if an animal has perception, perception must play an essential and not extraneous role in its life (because nature does nothing in vain), and being (merely) physically constituted in the way that a plant is would render perception superfluous.⁵⁴ It is thus necessary that perception perceive things as pleasant or painful, that is, as good or bad for the perceiving animal. It is here, in the perception of an object as pleasurable or painful, as the reason to flee or pursue, that perception opens itself up to the intellect.

The Possibility of Resituating Perception

Implicit in the discussion of pursuit and avoidance made possible by the perception of pleasure and pain is the animal's capacity for locomotion. In his discussion of locomotion, which directly succeeds the discussion of perception and intellect,⁵⁵ Aristotle considers and rejects the possibility that the nutritive, perceptive, or intellectual part of the soul is the source of

locomotion. The nutritive part is rejected because nonlocomotive creatures like plants would then have the capacity for locomotion; the perceptive part is similarly rejected because there exist nonlocomotive animals; and the reasoning part or intellect is rejected because (a) theoretical intellect does not contemplate anything to do with action, and (b) in the case of unrestrained people, desires produce acts that are contrary to reason (*De anima* 432b15–433a6). On the other hand, Aristotle continues, desire (*orexis*) cannot be the source of locomotion, since the restrained person *will* act according to reason but contrary to desire (433a6–9). Nevertheless, Aristotle concludes that *to orektikon*, the faculty of desire, is the source of locomotion, because it is shared in common by both *nous* and *epithumia* (433a21–23). Aristotle explains further that ultimately it is the *object* of desire (*to orekton*) that, by arousing desire (433b12), causes motion and that “[the object of desire] is either the good or the apparent good [*to phainomenon agathon*], and not every good, but the good as contained in action [*prakton agathon*]” (433a29–30).⁵⁶ Aristotle then explains that desires come into conflict with one another

when reason [*logos*] and appetites [*epithumia*] are opposed and it takes place in creatures that have perception [*aisthēsis*] of time (for the intellect [*nous*] bids us to resist on account of the future, while the appetite bids us to act on account of what is immediate, since what is immediately pleasant appears [*phainetai*] to be both simply pleasant and simply good, on account of not looking to the future). (*De anima* 433b5–10)

The object of desire (the *orekton*) engages *orexis*,⁵⁷ either in relation to *nous* and *logos* or in relation to *epithumia*, which motivates the animal to move. The present object, say, a piece of chocolate cake, may be desired epithumetically but resisted rationally, depending on whether the object is engaged perceptually or rationally. But even the rational engagement with the chocolate cake is an engagement with *this* chocolate cake; the rational resistance to the chocolate cake is to a perceptible object taken up rationally. The conflict of desires, then, shows that the perceptible object, that is, what one perceives as pleasurable, can *either* engage the rationally desiderative aspect of the noetic part of the soul *or* the appetitive aspect of the perceptive part, and that when it engages the appetitive, it engages it as the merely *apparent* good.⁵⁸ Thus it seems that in the discussion of motion Aristotle has opened up the possibility that the faculty of perception come under the provenance of the noetic faculty in the possible perception of what truly *is* good in the realm of action.

Resituating Perception

Aristotle describes an intimate relationship between perception and intellect in the course of his discussion of intellect in *De anima* III.4–8, both on the side of the faculties of soul and on the side of their objects. Indeed, Aristotle ventures forth into the discussion of the intellect with perception as his guide: he bases his understanding of the mechanism of intellect on the mechanism of perception, deciding that both are receptive of the forms of their objects (424a17, 429a15–16), although not in the same way (429a30–32). Unfortunately, the passage wherein Aristotle most directly addresses the relationship between the perceptive and the intellectual power is rather cryptic. Nonetheless, the passage reveals the way in which the intellect informs the perceptive soul. Specifically, it reveals that the intellect situates perception within a nonperspectival framework—intellect enables the perceiver to see beyond the limitations of her private perspective. An animal is restricted to perceiving things as they directly bear on its survival—as pleasant or painful. This is what I mean by perspectival: the animal is bound to perceive relative to its desires and needs. People do this too, of course, but they are not *bound* to do it. People can distinguish between what appears good to them and what *is* good; that is, people can perceive *either* in a way that is relative only to their own desires and needs *or* in a way that involves other factors. Their perceptual framework is nonperspectival. Thus, just as the power of perception expands the horizons of life in comparison with the nutritive life—the animal is able to pursue what it desires—so too the intellect expands the horizons of life in comparison with the perceptive life—the human person need not be irremediably bound to pursue what merely *appears* good *to her*, but is free to pursue what is truly good (see 431a10, 433a29).

The passage in *De anima* III reads in full:

Since a magnitude and what it is to be a magnitude are different, and water and what it is to be water (and so too for many other things, but not for all; for in some cases they are the same), we discern what it is to be flesh and flesh itself either by means of something different or by the same thing differently disposed. For flesh does not exist apart from matter, but like the snub it is this in that. It is, then, with the power of perception that we discern the hot and the cold and those things of which flesh is a certain proportion [*logos*]. But it is by something else, either something distinct or something that is to the former as a bent line is related to itself when straightened out, that we discern what it is to be flesh. Again, in the case of those things which exist in abstraction,

the straight corresponds to the snub, for it involves extension; but “what it is for it to be what it was,” if what it is to be straight and the straight are different, is something else—let it be duality. We discern it, then, by something different or by the same thing differently disposed. In general, then, as things are distinct from matter, so it is too with what concerns intellect. (*De anima* 429b11–23)⁵⁹

Here Aristotle addresses two kinds of objects, one that is by definition material (flesh), and one that is abstracted from its materiality but is nonetheless composite (straightness). Aristotle tells us that it is perception that grasps flesh (the material composite) and that the faculty that grasps the being-flesh is a different one, *either* separate from perception *or* related to perception as a straight line is to itself when bent. It is clear from the context, embedded as this passage is in the discussion of the nature of the intellectual activity, that Aristotle intends us to understand that it is the intellect that grasps the being of things. (This is further confirmed by Aristotle’s later remarks that the intelligible object is in the perceptible objects, *De anima* 430a5, 432a5). But not much else is clear about this opaque passage: first, what *is* the relationship between a line as straight and that same line as bent, and how might this illustrate the relationship between two faculties of soul? Second, how are we to take the disjunction? Does Aristotle mean to leave open both possibilities, to decide later whether the capacity of intellect to grasp the being of flesh is separate from perception or like perception straightened out? Or does he mean the disjunction to be inclusive, indicating that in *some* cases the intellect is separate, and in others it is straightened-out perception? Aristotle seems to consider intellect to be closely related to perception, but he does not clearly spell out this relationship. However, more than this can be concluded from this passage when one considers the remarks that precede this passage and Aristotle’s claim that the material object is potentially intelligible.⁶⁰

Immediately prior to this passage, Aristotle draws a distinction between the manner in which the intellect receives its objects, and the manner in which the perceptive power receives its objects. He argues that if the intellect is to be able to think all things it must be unmixed, having no other nature than potency, and therefore cannot be mixed with body, “since it would come to be of a certain kind, either cold or hot” (*De anima* 429a25), which would interfere with it becoming all things in thinking them. Aristotle continues by drawing a contrast between the manner in which excessively perceptible objects yield no perception and that in which excessively intelligible things aid in the thinking of lesser intelligible things (429a30–b6). This contrast refers back to Aristotle’s discussion in II.12 of the destruction of the sense

by extreme perceptible objects—sight is blinded by the extremely bright, hearing is deafened by the extremely loud, and so on (424a29–b3). The explanation of this relies on his designation of sense as a mean (*mesotēs*) (424a1–7) and a ratio (*logos*) (424a32) of perceptible qualities (for example, the sense of touch is a ratio of hot-cold, hard-soft, etc.). The perceptive power *senses*, is aware of, the perceptible qualities by virtue of discriminating the change the sense undergoes from its mean state. For example, the frying pan is perceived to be hot not in itself but relative to the resting temperature of the hand.⁶¹ The sense is destroyed, then, when the perceptible object exceeds the variation that the sense power can distinguish, when the sense can no longer hold on to both the mean state and the variation from it. Regardless of the details of this explanation, with this contrast Aristotle has put the reader in mind of the manner in which perception is always relative to the perceiver: perceiving always implies a perspective, a mean of perception by which it senses the difference. Without this, there would be no perception; instead, one would be just like the plant, which is affected by heat but does not perceive it (424a34–b3).⁶²

By contrast, the faculty that distinguishes the being–flesh, the intellect, is not subject to an analogous destruction by an exceedingly intelligible object precisely because it is nonbodily. (Throughout *De anima*, Aristotle keeps open the possibility that the intellect is a special case—related to the body in a special way, separable in a special way.)⁶³ But this contrast turns out not to be simply between bodily and nonbodily powers. Because it is insofar as perception is bodily that it is perspectival—that is, as a mean that serves as a standard for discriminating, for example, hot (increasing temperature relative to the mean) or cold (decreasing temperature relative to the mean)—the contrast is both between what is bodily and nonbodily *and* between what is perspectival and nonperspectival. For example (one that Aristotle gives in another context), we perceive the sun to be the size of a quarter, but we *know* it to be much larger than the earth: our perception reflects our position with respect to the thing under consideration, while our knowledge is not constrained in the same manner. Distinguishing the being–flesh, or the being–water or the being–straightness, is precisely to surpass the limits of one’s own perspective and to get at what the particular thing in front of a perceiving subject *really is*.⁶⁴

This is an intuitive way of understanding the way that intellect stands to perception both as separate and as a bent line that has been straightened. On the one hand, the absence of body explains why we would take the capacity of intellect that grasps the being of something material to be a separate faculty: insofar as intellect is nonbodily, it must be separate from bodily

perception. On the other hand, it is nonetheless the being *of* a material thing that is being grasped, and this provides the basis for understanding the intellectual grasp of the being of flesh to be related to the faculty of perception as perception straightened out—it is perception without the constraints of the body.⁶⁵ If this is the right way to take the meaning of the separation or straight-bent relation of intellect to perception, then we can easily take the disjunct to be inclusive: the faculty that grasps the being is *both* a separate faculty *and* the same faculty straightened out, depending on which aspect of intellect one is focusing on.

But it should be noted that what the intellect grasps over and above what perception grasps is in a specific sense not a separate *object*. Aristotle considers the material object that is perceived to be potentially intelligible (*De anima* 430a7), and “the intelligible objects [*ta noēta*] are in the perceptible forms” (432a5). Understanding the being-flesh, the intelligible object, gives one a better understanding not only of being-flesh independent of this flesh here, given to a subject in her limited perspective through perception, but *also* of this flesh here that you perceive. So the intellect surpasses what perception provides, but it does so in such a way that it reshapes the perceptible object itself: the perception is swept up in the new noetic understanding, such that the perceiver perceives, from within her perspective, the way the perceptible object exceeds or is independent of that perspective. *Nous* thus guides perception beyond itself while also maintaining it. And so, for example, when one perceives the sun, or better, a house in the distance, perception *strictly speaking* tells one that it is small. But one’s *experience* of the house in the distance is not as small—one’s perceptual experience takes into account the distance between oneself and the house and one knows it to be large.

This resituation of perception within a nonperspectival context is not something that occurs only sometimes—rather, perception is always already informed by intellect, whether or not intellect happens to be actively contemplating at the moment one perceives. What distinguishes human perception from animal perception, and the form that the impression of the intellect takes on the perceptual faculty, is that human perception is structured by an ambiguity or flexibility in the perceived objects. Animals perceive their objects as objects of desire or repulsion, simply and abidingly—the character that their perception takes is unquestioning; what they perceive could not be otherwise. For example, my cat always runs from the sound of the broom and any similar sound, not because the broom is a threat to her, but because it is the same sound as, for example, a snake in the grass, a predator. Her perceptual scheme is not flexible enough to imagine a different meaning for that sound. By contrast, human perception always has a horizon of

possibility, even if one is not thinking of those possibilities at the moment of perception. For example, when I see a tree I see it *as* a tree, but I also see it as a shade giver, or a jungle gym for children, or paper, or a fruit bearer, or an object of inquiry. I may not actively think of any of these possibilities, but my experience of the tree includes its flexibility. Human perceptual experience is informed by the freedom from private concerns that the intellect makes possible; in the tree I see not only *my* possibilities with respect to it, but also the possibilities that other people have with respect to it and the possibilities the object itself shows, independent of any particular perspective on it (as, for example, a photosynthesizing organism or a home for birds).⁶⁶

This characterization of human perception is reflected in Aristotle's distinction between perceptual and deliberative *phantasia*. Aristotle determines that *phantasia* is "that in virtue of which we say that an image occurs to us" (*De anima* 428a1), being "a movement taking place as a result of actual perception" (429a1). It is in general the power of maintaining and producing images derived from perception, and it is a power that both human beings and (some) animals share. In both cases, *phantasia* provides the creature with some distance and freedom from her immediate perceptual environment: rather than being constrained to desire and pursue the things in her immediate environment, the animal is able to conceive a desire for an absent object and seek after it through the image it has of the desired object (in the case of nonrational animals: 429a5–7, 433a10–21;⁶⁷ in the case of humans: 431b2–5).⁶⁸ Aristotle introduces the distinction between deliberative (or rational)⁶⁹ and perceptual *phantasia* at 433b30, at the conclusion of the argument that the object of desire is the origin of motion, and he elaborates on the meaning of deliberative *phantasia* in his following chapter. "Perceptual *phantasia*, as we have said, is found in the other animals also, but that concerned with deliberative *phantasia* in those which are capable of reasoning (for the decision whether to do this or that is already a task for reasoning; and one must measure by a single standard; for one pursues what is superior; hence one has the ability to make one image out of many)" (434a6–10). Here we see the openness in *phantasia*—and therefore in the perceptual faculty of which *phantasia* is a function—by which the question of what is "better" arises. Nonrational animals cannot choose between different courses of action based on what is better because the manner in which they perceive is not open to the flexibility that such a choice requires. If the things perceived have only one meaning—pursuit or flight—then there is no question of whether or how it is best to pursue or flee.

This understanding of perceptual experience answers the problem that the human is seemingly not dependent on intellectual powers for her life, while

the animal *is* dependent on the perceptual powers for *its* life. The dependency of the perceptual capacity on the intellectual capacity is not such that human life could not persist without the activity of the intellect, but rather that the form that human perception takes always relies on the possibilities provided by the intellectual capacity. Nonetheless, the perceptual power can still be said to be within the intellectual soul *potentially* because the very nature of the perceptual freedom that characterizes perception is that it is to be realized by thinking about and deciding upon certain possibilities. It is an act of intellect actually to deliberate, and in deliberating the perception of the object's possibilities is brought to completion.

A Note concerning the Relationship between Intellect and Perception

Before concluding this chapter, I would like to clarify precisely what I take the relationship between the faculty of perception and the faculty of intellect to be. It is uncontroversial, I take it, to claim that there *is* a unique relationship between these two faculties: for example, in *De anima* Aristotle remarks that mortal beings with intellect cannot think without employing *phantasia* (431a14–17). But this relationship as I see it has two registers: in a straightforward way, the operations of intellect can be *applied* to perception, as when one brings to bear on a work of art categories like “expressionism,” or the objects of perception can inform the work of thinking, as when one looks at a drawing of a triangle when demonstrating the Pythagorean theorem. But this is not the only or even the most significant way that the two faculties are related. There is rather a deeper connection that I have been developing: that perception is qualitatively altered just by virtue of being a part of an intellectual soul. So when I say that human perception is minimally determined and that it is the work of *nous* to decide upon the possibilities of perception, I do not mean to say that intellect applies its categories to the raw data of sense perception. When I see a tree, I *see* a tree: it does not require the application of the concept “tree” by the intellect to the sensory data in order to recognize the tree. Nevertheless, the manner in which a person sees the tree differs from the manner in which a bird sees the tree insofar as the tree is the site of multiple significances for the person. The presence of intellect marks the difference between the way that a nonhuman animal engages with its world and the way a human engages with her world, where the human has more freedom to influence such an engagement through her ways of being than the nonhuman animal does—but it is still a *perceptual* engagement. I see the tree—the tree presents itself to me—as a pretty shade giver, primarily, but an entomologist will see the tree *as* a home for ticks. Neither I nor the entomologist apply different categories to the visual presentation

of the tree; rather, the tree speaks to us in different ways. In a similar way, a social situation, such as a party, will feel exciting for an extrovert or a source of anxiety for an introvert. Aristotle articulates the general principle that the way that things appear to one is partly determined by one's subjective state in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he argues that things appear differently to virtuous and to nonvirtuous people (III.4), and that those with experience *see* rightly (VI.11 1143b13–14).

I have been appealing to the immediacy and variety of the significances of the things we encounter in our experience to support the claim that these significances are made possible by intellect but are nevertheless perceived. This is not uncontroversial, nor is it uncontroversially Aristotle's position. Kahn, for example, writes, "It is only in the case of *human* perception, enriched by the conceptual resources provided by its marriage with *nous*, that Aristotle can speak of us as *perceiving a man*. If we were restricted to the reception of sensible forms, all we could perceive would be colors and shapes."⁷⁰ Modrak, on the other hand, argues that such things as men or the son of Diarees are indeed objects of perception and that they are apprehended through the common sense faculty.⁷¹ What is at the heart of the disagreement is the question of how to interpret what Aristotle means by perceiving incidentally (*kata sumbebēkos*).⁷² I argued in the previous chapter that there is no reason to exclude the incidental perceptibles from the operations of perception, that they are indeed perceived. Here I would like to adduce some additional considerations that will help make clear the relationship between intellect and perception with respect to the incidental perceptibles.

Kahn argues that these incidental perceptibles cannot, strictly speaking, be apprehended through perception because these incidental perceptibles either are or essentially invoke universal categories, and perception can only access the particular.⁷³ He writes: "What is not always noted by commentators is that the incidental perceptibles represent the overlap or conjoined action of sense and intellect. 'The son of Diarees' is already a *noēton*, a complex conception involving notions of human being and fatherhood . . . Sensation *per se* cannot recognize even individual substances as such, since it has no access to any sortal concepts like *man, horse, tree*."⁷⁴ However, Kahn's statement that the operations of perception are restricted to the apprehension of the special and common perceptibles is problematic. In the first place, if one takes Kahn's restriction seriously, it becomes difficult to explain why Aristotle insists on introducing such things as sons and trees as incidental *perceptibles*, and why he introduces them alongside the more straightforward objects of perception. In the second place, the perceptual part of the soul is responsible for many operations that are not strictly acts of sensing, namely imagination

(*phantasia*), memory, dreams, and reflexive awareness, pleasure and pain, and it is inseparable from such things as appetite, desire, fleeing and pursuing.⁷⁵ Given the multitude of powers and the sophistication of those powers that Aristotle attributes to the perceptual capacity, it seems arbitrary to limit perception to its special objects.⁷⁶

Moreover, nonhuman animals must also perceive incidental perceptibles if they are to be able to respond appropriately to predators and to prey—the hawk, for example, must not only perceive a small patch of color moving around below him, but also see it *as* potential food. The *as*-structure of this perception indicates that it is an instance of an incidental perceptible. Moreover, this information (that the moving patch of color is food) is not inherent to the special or common perceptibles, nor does it act directly on the sensory organs. But Aristotle designates perception as the faculty by which the animal directs its behavior, pursuing some things and avoiding others (III.12); the apprehension of the food must be a perceptual activity. Kahn recognizes this problem, noting that designating the incidental perceptibles *noēta* creates “a major problem for the interpretation of animal perception. Clearly animals need to ‘make sense’ of their perceptions. Do they have something corresponding to sortal classifications like *man, dog, or my master, my sibling?* Aristotle has apparently nothing to say on this question except that, lacking *logos*, animals cannot have *our* way of understanding what they perceive. The ‘incidental sensibles’ for animals must be interpreted quite differently.”⁷⁷ While it is true that animal perception must be understood differently than human perception due to their lack of intellect, this difference does not require that the incidental perceptibles, in the case of human perception, not be apprehended by perception at all. This is only necessary if one understands the incidental perceptibles to be *articulated* wholes, that is, concepts. But the incidental perceptibles need not be understood this way. Even a reflection upon human experience reveals that concepts are not necessarily invoked in one’s interactions with sensible objects—when one walks through a door while talking with a friend, one does not necessarily perceive the door as “door,” but rather as to-be-opened.⁷⁸ (On the other hand, if one is itching to get out of an uncomfortable situation, one may be able to think about nothing else than that the thing over there is a door and an escape!)

I propose, then, that incidental perceptibles be understood, primarily, as the externalization of one’s own possibilities in the world, as supported by the concrete objects that make up those possibilities. This way of understanding the incidental perceptibles resolves the problem of animal perception while maintaining a real difference between animal and human perception because the possibilities of humans and animals differ precisely due to *nous*.

So my cat perceives my chair as a scratching post (although of course she could not call it that), and I perceive my chair as a seat—site of scratching and site of sitting are the incidental perceptibles (even if she is not actually scratching it and I am not actually sitting). My cat's perception, however, is limited to that possibility (and possibly one or two others). The object of my perception, however, exhibits an indefinite number of possibilities, including being an object of thought and an instance of "chair." And insofar as the rational capacities are the defining feature of human beings, it is the possibility of realizing these that most of all characterizes human perception.

This understanding of the incidental perceptibles allows perceptual objects to be the bearers of significances, and allows that some of those significances be brought to bear upon a perception by the activity of *nous*. The understanding and naming of the common sensible "site of sitting" as a "chair" are operations of *nous* and *logos*. But it also, importantly for our ethical lives, opens up the possibility that our noetic habits congeal in our perceptions and shape them. I need not think about what a chair is in order to immediately recognize and name what I see in front of me a chair; on the other side, if I lack a concept for or experience of, say, guns, I will not see what is in front of me *as* a gun, but as an oddly shaped metal thing that can be used as a paperweight. In this way we can understand the relationship between the operations of perception and the operations of *nous* to be fluid, where *nous* can shape perception in a strong sense of allowing it to apprehend perceptible objects in a sophisticated way.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that an account of any kind of soul—plant, animal, or human—must take into account the complexity and dynamic relationship of its parts, because of the manner in which the whole is prior to the parts of the soul. The parts of the soul are intrinsically related to one another, I argued further, due to their incompleteness outside of the context of a particular kind of soul. The operations of any part of the soul depend upon the presence and operability of the other parts of soul; Aristotle expresses this relation of dependency by saying that the lower parts of the soul are in the higher part potentially. This dependency relation is easily seen in the case of the animal soul: the operations of the nutritive part of the soul primarily depend upon the operations of the perceptive faculty, especially the sense of touch. The dependency of the faculty of perception on the intellectual faculty in the human soul is more complicated because the human can live by the faculty of perception alone, which implies that perception does not depend upon

intellect to operate. I answered this difficulty by arguing that, in a soul with a fully developed intellectual capacity, perception is dependent upon intellect in the sense that intellect reshapes and resituates it in a nonperspectival context, allowing the intellect to inform perception through the establishment of sophisticated incidental perceptibles.

This answer to the difficulty of the relationship between perception and intellect within the human soul is only a partial one. This answer assumed a fully formed intellect in a good relationship to perception. The next chapter will remove these assumptions, and address the development of the relationship between intellect and perception within a person's soul. For the most part, this will take us outside of the context of *De anima* and into the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I will argue that by virtue of the unique separability that Aristotle attributes to *nous*, the human soul is, in an important sense, *not* naturally whole, as in general the structure of soul is, but rather dual: the human soul is a perceptive soul with the additional capacity for thinking and intellect, rather than being a fully integrated noetic soul. I will argue, however, that it is this natural duality that provides the condition for ethical life and ethical development. The first section will address the strange case of the human soul, outlining the ways in which the human soul fails to achieve this natural unity. The second section will explain how this natural lack of unity constitutes the condition for ethical life and ethical development, and the third section will confirm that the nonvirtuous person suffers from a nonintegrated soul through a discussion of the phenomenon of *akrasia*. In the fourth chapter I will give an account of *phronēsis* as intellectual perception, showing the integration of intellect and perception in the soul of the virtuous person.

