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Perception in Aristotle's Ethics

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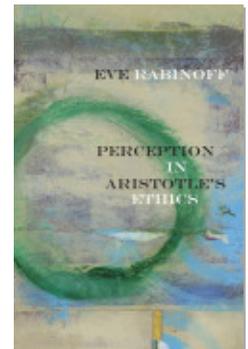
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CHAPTER 3

The Duality of the Human Soul

In the preceding chapter we encountered a problem with our interpretation of the structure of the soul as a continuous, unified whole. The perceptual part of the soul seemed not to be potentially (*dunamis*) in the intellectual soul in a way that upheld this structure. As a first step in resolving this problem, I developed an account of human perception that shows its intimate relationship with intellect: meaningful wholes that are incidentally perceived are reflections of the perceiver's active possibilities with respect to that object, and among the possibilities that are native to human beings are the possibilities of contemplating, thinking, and understanding. Human perception, as a result, is open to the determination of intellect: it is possible to perceive in a manner that transcends the idiosyncrasies of one's personal perspective.

But this is only the first part of the solution. It shows that perception is structured by intellect, and that it is therefore *possible* for one's perception to come under the guidance of intellect; but this solution does not show that perceptual experience is *actually* informed by intellect. The phenomenon of *akrasia*, "lack of self-restraint," attests that it is possible for one to act in pursuit of a perceived pleasure (being driven, as an animal is, by appetite) in spite of one's (intellectual) knowledge. The basic relationship between intellect and perception thus upholds the unity of the soul to a certain degree—the whole determines the parts in the sense that human perception is qualitatively altered by virtue of being in an intellectual soul—but it does not yet guarantee the actual harmony of function of the perceptual and the intellectual parts of the soul, as the phenomenon of *akrasia* shows.

In this chapter, I will address the unique structure of the human soul and show how it forms the basis for ethical development. I will revisit the relationship between intellect and perception, this time covering in detail Aristotle's claim that intellect is separable. I will argue that the separability of intellect is the cause of the duality of human nature as the rational animal: human beings are not simply natural, that is, not simply animal, insofar as nature does not fully govern a person's development, yet neither are human

beings fully actualized gods. This duality is due to the presence of an intellect that is not naturally integrated with the rest of the soul. Overcoming this duality and achieving a “natural” integration of the parts of the soul, I will argue, is the psychological side to the project of ethical development. The possibility of such integration has been established by my interpretation of human perception as characterized by intellectual possibilities. My aim in this chapter is to show that it is the character of perception as loosely determined in its relation to intellect that provides the psychological ground for ethical development.

My argument will proceed as follows. I will begin by developing the idea that human nature is dual: animal and rational, natural but not simply natural. I will then address the issue of the separability of intellect, and argue that intellect is *in itself* unrelated to any particularities of an individual thinker, and that therefore it does not naturally bear upon the desires and perceptions upon which one acts. (The issue of the separability of intellect requires a lengthy discussion of the vexed passage of *De anima* III.5.) Once this is established, I will turn to the *Nicomachean Ethics* to show that bringing these two elements of one’s soul—the perceptual and intellectual—into harmony is the task of ethical development, and I will confirm this with an interpretation of Aristotle’s account of *akrasia*.

1. Neither by Nature nor Contrary to Nature

In *Metaphysics* VII.7 Aristotle introduces a distinction between two kinds of form (*eidōs*) that will be relevant for understanding the unique structure of the human soul. In the context of distinguishing between things that come to be by nature (*phusis*) and things that come to be by art (*technē*), Aristotle identifies a difference in the mode of transmission of the form of the generated thing. In both natural becomings and artful becomings, that by which the generated thing comes about is the form (*eidōs*). But in the case of natural becoming, on the one hand, the form is transmitted by one who embodies the same form, as, for example, a person begets a person or a collie gives birth to a collie. On the other hand, in the case of artful becoming, the form is transmitted by one of another kind, namely, an artisan, a knower, that is, a human being (1023a24–25, 1032b1). In this latter case, “the form [*eidōs*] is in the soul of the artist” (1032b1), but the artist herself does not embody the form.¹ This distinction between modes of coming to be highlights two ways of “having” a form: in the natural case, the animal (for example) has the form in the sense of *being* the form,² and indeed the very transmission of the form through reproduction is governed *by* that form. As Aristotle notes in *De*

anima, “since it is right to call all things after their end, and the end [of the nutritive soul] is to generate something like itself, the first kind of soul will be that which can generate something like itself” (416b23–25)³ (and the soul is the form of the living thing [412a19–21]). Similarly, in *De generatione animalium* II.3, Aristotle remarks: “For, e.g., an animal does not become at the same time an animal and a man or a horse or any other particular animal. For the end is developed last, and the peculiar character of the species is the end of the generation of each individual” (736b2–4).⁴ By contrast, the artist “has” the form of the artifact *not* in the sense of *being* it (except insofar as she *is* an artist—but this, Aristotle would say, is incidental to her in the way that being musical is incidental to Socrates [*Met.* VII.6 1031a19–21]); rather, she has the form in the sense of *knowing* it and being able to bring it about through her thought and activity (*Met.* 1032b15–17). Further, what the artisan gives rise to does not have a life of its own, that is, its form is not self-sustaining.⁵ In a certain sense, the form of the artificial product *remains* in the artist insofar as the maintenance of the artifact is a part of that art (or a related art). For example, both the arts of shipbuilding and ship maintenance are required for a ship to be serviceable as a ship, that is, to *be* a ship. The difference in the two modes of transmission of the form identified here thus reflects a difference in the *kind* of form that is being transmitted: a natural form and an artificial form. The natural form differs from the artificial one insofar as the natural form determines not only what the being is at a given moment, but also how the being will develop over time—it is the soul of the natural being that governs its development from a seed to a fully formed adult (*De anima* II.1 412b25–27); while the artificial form, by contrast, requires the continued input by those who have the form in their souls.

The soul is, of course, paradigmatically a natural form. In *De anima* II.1 Aristotle argues that the soul is the form of the natural body that has life potentially (412a19–21).⁶ The soul governs the activities of life: thinking, perceiving, moving, nourishing, growing and decaying (413a22–25); moreover, these activities of the soul *constitute* the life and development of the living thing.⁷ In the absence of interference, the plant simply *will* ingest from the soil the appropriate amount of water and nutrients and thereby grow, and the animal cannot *help* but perceive color when its eyes are open in the daylight, all by virtue of the soul. Aristotle expresses this idea in *Metaphysics* IX.5, where he argues that nonrational potentialities only produce one effect, and must be brought into activity in the presence of its object. The plant soul, being a nonrational potentiality, is subject to this description. The perceptive part of the soul is not simply nonrational, but in its basic capacities for seeing color, hearing sound, and so on, it is passive and reliant on its object in

a similar manner (*De anima* 417b16–23). Living things “have” their form in the sense of *being* their form.

Human souls are already unique insofar as humans are the only living things that have artifice, but more importantly the form of the human being is *not* naturally brought to fruition, insofar as the form of the human is virtue.⁸ The oak seed will become a fully formed oak tree by nature, given enough sunlight and rain and fertile soil, but whereas humans are born with the capacity for perception already formed (*De anima* 417b16–18), “we do not by nature become good or bad” (*Nic. Eth.* 1106a9–10). Neither are there external conditions that can guarantee the development of virtuous habits. As Plato has Socrates note in *Meno*, virtuous people do not always or necessarily produce virtuous children. The human being will only become a fully formed adult *animal* by nature, having an adult body and the natural capacities of nutrition and perception; the human does not naturally come to fruition *as* human, because neither the intellectual virtues nor the virtues of character by nature are accomplished by nature (*Nic. Eth.* 1103a14–26). The human soul is therefore uniquely ambiguous: it is natural insofar as a human being is an *animal*, the life of which is defined and governed by the perceptive capacity, but it is not *simply* natural—and indeed it resembles an artificial form—insofar as its virtue is not brought about by nature. The human seemingly “has” her form ambiguously: she both has her form in the sense of *being* it, but she also *has* her form in the sense of being able to produce virtue in herself, analogously, perhaps, to the way a doctor has the form of health in her soul and is able to bring it about in herself and others through art. The human both *is* her form and also needs to generate her form through something like art.⁹ The human form is ambiguously natural, and this ambiguity describes a dual nature: the rational (on the one hand) animal (on the other).

2. The Separability of Intellect

This duality that characterizes the human soul is grounded in the particular structure of the human soul and specifically in the strange separability of the intellectual part of the soul. This is already suggested by the fact that the *having* of the form in the soul is made possible by intellect. As Aristotle says, “Those who say, then, that the soul is a place of forms speak well, except that it is not the whole soul but that which can think, and it is not actually [*entelecheia*] but potentially the forms” (*De anima* 429a27–29).¹⁰ More to the point, Aristotle treats intellect in *De anima* both as the part of the soul that is “most divine” (see also *Nic. Eth.* 1177b30–31) and also as an ordinary part of the soul.¹¹ On the one hand, intellect is merely a capacity that certain mortal,

embodied creatures have which, in a certain sense, is not any different in form from the activities of the other parts of soul. Nutrition, perception, and intellect are all (increasingly sophisticated) ways of engaging with the objects in the world. Plants absorb nutrients and sunlight in such a way that they grow, realizing at the same time the possibility of the nutrients and sunlight to be food and their own plantlike possibility to grow (*De anima* 416b10). Animals receive the perceptible form in such a way that they can navigate their environments according to their perceived best interest (431a9–14), all the while realizing both the potentiality of the perceptible objects to be perceived and their own perceptual potentialities (426a8–26).¹² Similarly, humans receive the intelligible form in such a way that they can engage their world through art (*technē*) and contemplation (*theōria*), all the while realizing the potentially intelligible and their intellectual potentialities (429b29–430a9). From this perspective, intellect is not any more mysterious or special than nutrition or perception. Yet, on the other hand, intellect must be a special capacity because its objects are eternal and unchanging, and contemplation is identical with its object. Intellect therefore *is* in some sense eternal.¹³

In a word, the problem is this: Aristotle considers intellect to be somehow *divine*, yet somehow to be still a part of the *mortal* soul. All living things yearn for “the everlasting and divine” (*De anima* 415a29), and while most achieve this only indirectly, through reproduction (415b2–7), those mortals who have intellect have a unique way of partaking in what is always and is divine: they can know it and contemplate it.¹⁴ The problem is to understand how intellect can be *both* an element of an individual human soul *and* capable of partaking in what is eternal; or to put it otherwise, how the human being can be both merely natural and yet exceed the natural limits of finite creatures in its communion with the divine. As Jonathan Lear observes, “It seems part of man’s nature to transcend nature: to organize his soul into a shape which would not arise by nature.”¹⁵ This problem comes down to a question about the separability of the intellect: as merely a part of a mortal soul, it should be separable only the way the parts are separable from each other, that is, in account but not in place or *simpliciter*. As somehow eternal, intellect should be separable “as the everlasting from the perishable” (413b26).

In what sense, then, is intellect separable? It should be noted at the outset that there are two issues of separability here: separability from the body and separability from the rest of the soul. These two issues are closely related: if intellect is separable from the body, it will also be separable from the other parts of the soul, which are not separable from the body.¹⁶ I will address the issue of separability from the body first and afterward consider the implications of the separability from the rest of the soul.

At the heart of the problem that intellect poses for Aristotle's account of soul is the principle that the nature of the parts of the soul is determined by their objects. Aristotle introduces the features of intellect by means of an analogy with perception: as what perceives is to perceptible objects, so too intellect is to intelligible objects (*De anima* 429a17–18): it is impassive but receptive of form and potentially such as the form is (429a15–16). But this very analogy reveals a disanalogy: unlike perceptible objects, which are specific materially constituted objects, the objects of thought include all things (429a18), and so intellect cannot be under bodily constraints the way perception is (429a20–21); therefore intellect is unmixed with body (429a24–25) and separable (429b5), and its nature is nothing other than potential (429a21–22), which means that it is nothing in actuality before it thinks (429a24).¹⁷

The limit of the analogy with perception speaks to the heart of the problem of interpreting intellect: what distinguishes *nous* from perception is the nature of its object, and it is the object that determines the nature of the part. But intelligible objects are not *simply* part of the (material) natural world—intellect thinks all things, including the nature of souls, animals, trees, and also the Pythagorean theorem and the unmoved mover. Because of the principle that the capacities of soul are defined by their objects, the variety of objects seems to imply different things about how intellect is related to materiality: in the case of becoming identical in thought with the unmoved mover, it seems that intellect must be separable *simpliciter* from body, but in the case of contemplating the essence of a deer, it cannot be utterly separate from body. Aristotle recognizes something like this ambiguity, when discussing what faculty it is that discerns the being of flesh, water, and the straight (*De anima* 429b10–22). The conclusion he reaches is that “in general, then, as things are separable from matter, so it is too with what concerns intellect” (429b21–22).

In what follows, I will address, first of all, the dependency of human intellect on the body for thinking, and I will argue that this implies that human intellect is separable only in account from the body. I will then address the challenge posed to this interpretation by the discussion of intellect in *De anima* III.5. There is, of course, a great deal of controversy over whether Aristotle is introducing divine intellect in this chapter, or whether he is describing human intellect.¹⁸ This controversy stems from a real ambiguity about the nature of thinking: it is an activity of a particular, embodied person, but by its very nature thinking is an impersonal and nonparticular activity. I do not intend (or attempt) to reinvent the wheel on this difficult subject; instead I will follow those accounts I find most insightful and persuasive. For the most part, I follow Aryeh Kosman's (1992) argument, although I

will discuss positions that are in various ways similar to this position (Wedin [1988] and Gerson [2004]). I am persuaded by Kosman (1992) and Victor Caston (1999) that III.5 lays out a necessary condition for human thinking provided by divine intellect. But, as Kosman concludes, it describes divine intellect *as* related to human thinking, and so it is ambiguously describing divine intellect and human intellect.¹⁹ It is not, I will argue, *human* intellect that is eternal and immortal when separate (430a22–23), but that which makes human thinking possible. This analysis will prepare me to conclude that human intellect is separable from the rest of the human soul only in the sense that its activity exceeds the limits posed by the body; that is, that it achieves a nonperspectival activity.²⁰

Separability from Body

The question of separability peppers almost the whole of *De anima*:²¹ as early as I.1, Aristotle notes that thinking (*to noein*) seems to belong to the soul alone, separable from the body (403a3–15), and as late as III.7 he wonders whether or not it is possible for something to think what is separate from material without itself being separate (from material) (431b18–19). In II.1, Aristotle argues that the soul is the form and actuality (*entelecheia*) of the body, and because it is its *entelecheia*, body and soul are one (412a11–412b9), but he reserves the possibility that this argument only applies to some parts of the soul. Intellect, for instance, cannot simply be said to be inseparable from the body by virtue of being the *entelecheia* of it because it is not the form of any part of the body: intellect has no organ (429a23–27). Aristotle concludes his argument concerning the relation of body and soul by saying:

But just as the pupil and sight are an eye, so in this case the soul and body make up an animal. That, therefore, the soul or certain parts of it, if it is divisible, cannot be separated from the body is quite clear; for in some cases the actuality is of the parts themselves. Not that anything prevents at any rate *some* parts from being separable, because of their being actualities of no body. (*De anima* 413a2–7)

And indeed, in his discussion of intellect in *De anima* III.4, Aristotle argues that if intellect is to think all things, it must be unmixed with body (429a23–27) and separable (*chōristos*) (429b3–5). On this basis, one might conclude that intellect is separable from the body.

As the long history of scholarship attests, the issue cannot be decided so simply. *De anima* II.1 is not the first time that Aristotle has suggested that

a part of the soul is separable from the body, and the reason he suggests it earlier, in I.5, is relevant for the interpretation of the separability of intellect from body. At 411b15–18, Aristotle considers an impasse:

One may be at a loss concerning the parts of the soul, about what power each has in the body. For if the whole soul holds together the whole body, then it is fitting that each part hold together some part of the body. But this seems impossible: for it is hard even to imagine what sort of part intellect holds together, and in what way.

Despite the aporetic context, here Aristotle denies that what is true of the relation of the soul as a whole to the body as a whole is also true of the relation of parts of the soul to parts of the body. We may take him at his word here because the further argument he offers in support of this claim—that for the soul to unify the body, it need not correspond with it part to part—is one that he reiterates in his positive account of the soul, namely, that severed creatures live when divided (see *De anima* 413b17–23). It is not right, then, to infer from the soul's holding together the body that each part of the soul holds together a corresponding part of the body. This undermines the inference from the immaterial nature of the intellect to its separability, at least *simpliciter*, from the body. The soul as a whole may be inseparable from the body, even if some part of it does not directly inform some part of the body. Insofar as intellect is a part of a *soul* that is inseparable from a body, it, too, may be inseparable.

It may be objected that, in passage 413a2–7 quoted above, Aristotle does not unequivocally conclude that the soul as a whole is inseparable from the body as a whole. Rather, he concludes that *either* the soul is inseparable from the body *or* whatever parts are the actuality of some body part are inseparable, and that if there is a part of the soul that is not the actuality of some part of the body, it might be separable. More precisely, he says that nothing *prevents* such a part from being separable. Yet this is hardly an endorsement of the intellect's separability from the body; at this point, all that can be concluded is that Aristotle is holding open that possibility. This possibility appears to be forestalled later by Aristotle's insistence that mortal thinking requires the use of images (*phantasmata*) and imagination (*phantasia*) (*De anima* 431a16–17, 432a7–10). Imagination is a result of perception (428b30–429a2), and perception is a bodily process; imagination, then, is not without body, and by extension human thinking is not without body.²² Aristotle himself offers this argument in I.1: thinking *seems* most of all to belong to the soul by itself, but if it is a kind of imagination or not without imagination, it is not able to

exist without the body (403a5–10). It would seem, then, that something *does* prevent intellect from being separable from the body: its dependence upon imagination.²³

Why does human thinking require an image? A person engaged in pure mathematics might object to Aristotle's assertion—surely, abstract mathematical thinking is only *hindered* by images. Moreover, the course of education that Plato prescribes for the philosopher in the *Republic* describes a move *away* from images to pure conceptual thinking.²⁴ There seem to be two ways that thinking depend upon the perceptual part of the soul, that is, on perception itself, *phantasia*, and memory. First, perception is the faculty that provides the prior “knowledge” from which first principles are learned.²⁵ In *Posterior Analytics* II.19, Aristotle expresses a familiar difficulty concerning the acquisition of first principles: we must acquire them, but learning seems to require prior knowledge (99b26–28). He famously responds to this difficulty by naming perception (*aisthēsis*) as the innate discriminating faculty (99b35) that offers the prior “knowledge” from which first principles are learned. Perception gives rise to memory (100a3),²⁶ and from many memories of the same thing a single experience emerges (100a4–6). The emergence of a single experience, insofar as it is the emergence of a one out of many, constitutes a universal “that has come to rest in the soul” (100a6–7).²⁷ This universal is the prior knowledge necessary for coming to know the first principles.²⁸ Aristotle expresses a similar thought in *De anima* III.8. In examining how it is that “the soul is in a way all existing things” either as objects of thought or of perception (431b20–24), he argues:

Since there is no actual thing which has separate existence, apart from, as it seems, magnitudes which are the objects of perception, the objects of thought are included among the forms which are objects of perception, both those that are spoken of in abstraction and those which are dispositions and affections of objects of perception. And for this reason unless one perceived things one would not learn or understand anything. (*De anima* 432a3–8)

Perception is necessary for learning about those things that are not separable from magnitude because the object of thought is in the objects of perception (see also *De anima* 430a6–7).

By itself, the role of perception in acquiring knowledge does not secure intellect's inseparability from the body, for it does not establish that intellect *continues* to depend upon perception once it has acquired knowledge. Indeed, the universals, once learned, “are somehow in the soul itself. For this reason, it

is open to us to think when we wish, but perceiving is not similarly up to us; for there must be the object of perception” (*De anima* II.5 417b23–25). But Aristotle goes further than this. The passage above continues: “and when one contemplates [*theōrein*] one must simultaneously contemplate an image; for images are like perceptions, except that they are without matter” (432a8–10). Why is it that, once one acquires the object of thought, one still cannot think it without an image? The reason that practical thinking requires an image is fairly straightforward. One always acts with regard to *specific* objects, not essences or definitions; one drinks water, not the being of water. If one is to decide how to act, that is, what to pursue and what to avoid, in the future or in general when one is not presently perceiving, one must employ images of the things with regard to which one will act. So, Aristotle says, “Perceiving, then, is like mere assertion and thought; when something is pleasant or painful, one pursues or avoids it, as it were asserting or denying . . . and that which can desire and that which can avoid are not different, either from each other or from what can perceive . . . To the thinking soul images serves as perceptions” (431a8–15).²⁹ The case is similar with empirical science: in the same way that perceiving is not up to us, but instead requires and depends upon the presence of an external, perceptible object, “the situation is similar with the sciences dealing with the objects of perception, and for the same reason, that the objects of perception are particular and external things” (II.5 417b25–27).

The case is less straightforward for theoretical, abstract, thinking. In what respect might contemplating, say, mathematical truths or divine mind depend upon an image? In general, what role might images/*phantasmata* play in the thinking of nonmaterial, nonparticular, theoretical matters? Commentators have offered various explanations aiming to explain how theoretical thinking is dependent upon images. Dorothea Frede argues that the function of *phantasia* with regard to abstract thought is to provide something like a Gestalt, an overall impression, within which the formal understanding of, say, the definition of a circle is situated. Without such a Gestalt, one may know the definition of a circle without being able to recognize any, which would surely be an imperfect understanding of what it is to be a circle.³⁰ According to Frede, Aristotle’s insight is that “our thinking cannot be entirely abstract but always needs a kind of *Gestalt*”³¹ and it is this that *phantasia* provides. Even more strongly, Victor Caston argues that *phantasmata* are “representations that underwrite the content of mental states,” serving as the vehicle by which our mental states are *about* something.³² Images are thus necessary quite generally, no matter what sort of thinking (practical/theoretical, discursive/simple) is under consideration. Much less strongly, abstract thinking may incidentally depend on images for the reason that images are necessary for

calling to mind an object of contemplation. In *De memoria*, Aristotle argues that even memories of objects of thought are not without images (450a12–14), and furthermore that memory belongs to that to which *phantasia* belongs (450a22–25). This suggests that bringing to mind an object of thought that one has learned requires memory, and therefore an image.³³

If it can be established that intellect depends upon the body by virtue of its dependence on images in one of the ways mentioned, what are we to make of Aristotle's claim, in *De anima* III.4, that intellect not only lacks an organ, but it is also separable (*chōristos*)? Here we must consider the sense in which intellect is separable from the body. There is already reason to doubt that intellect is separable *simpliciter*, that is, that intellect is capable of existing independently from the human body, at least insofar as intellect is a part of a *human* soul: the dependence on imagination seems to preclude this. And, indeed, at the opening of his discussion of intellect, Aristotle postpones the question of “whether this [part of the soul by which one knows and understands] is separable or not separable in place but only in *logos*” (429a11–12).³⁴ Aristotle's question with regard to intellect concerns only separability in place or *logos*, not separability *simpliciter*. Neither can Aristotle mean that human intellect is separable in magnitude or place—this kind of separability would require that intellect itself be bodily. Unless Aristotle is using *chōristos* loosely in this instance, he must mean that human intellect is separable from body only in account. Aristotle argues that intellect is nothing actual before it thinks, and when it thinks it is identical with its object. Its object, however, is not bodily. Even though human thinking requires images, the essence of that thinking is not imagistic: when taken in itself, the account of intellect does not involve the body. By contrast, the account of perception must include reference to the bodily organs.³⁵

De anima III.5

This sort of argument concerning the separability of intellect is complicated by the endlessly vexing text of *De anima* III.5, wherein Aristotle says of intellect, “in separation it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal” (430a22–23). As is commonly noted, interpreters of this text do not even agree about what the subject is, some taking it to describe divine intellect,³⁶ others taking it to describe human intellect.³⁷ Advantages and difficulties accompany both sides: those who understand the subject to be divine intellect are freed from the need to explain how a divine nonbodily faculty is consistent with Aristotle's hylomorphic account of soul,³⁸ but are then taxed with the need to explain why Aristotle invokes divine intellect in a treatise concerned with *mortal* natures, seemingly out of nowhere and without

calling attention to the shift in topic.³⁹ Those who argue that the subject of III.5 is human intellect avoid saddling Aristotle with the mysterious introduction of divine intellect, but must explain how human intellect is divine, eternal, and bodiless without undermining the unity of soul.⁴⁰ With respect to the issue of separability, if the subject of III.5 is divine intellect, we may be satisfied that human intellect is only separable from the body in *logos* and not *simpliciter*, and it is divine intellect that is separable *simpliciter*. If the subject is human intellect, that interpretation is fatally threatened.

It seems to me that III.5 is unavoidably ambiguous. Let me offer an example of the ambiguity: one good reason for taking Aristotle to be describing human intellect in *De anima* III.5 is found in the opening thought: “Just as in the whole of nature there is something which is matter to each kind of thing (and this is what is potentially all of them), while on the other hand there is something else which is their cause and is productive by producing them all . . . so there must also be these differences *in the soul* [*en tēi psuchēi*]” (430a10–14). This suggests that Aristotle’s topic concerns the *soul*, not divine mind. However, Caston offers a compelling argument for reading III.5 as introducing divine mind as the final cause of human thinking, arguing that Aristotle uses “*en*” here in the sense of “in the case of” (*Physics* IV.3 210a14–24),⁴¹ on the basis of the parallel with “in the whole of nature.” According to Caston, then, Aristotle is distinguishing *kinds* of soul, not making a distinction within an *individual* soul. Gerson, who denies that the subject of III.5 is divine intellect, simply denies that this is the correct sense of “in” on the basis that “chapter five is right in the middle of the section of *De anima* that discusses thinking in the human soul and it would be extremely odd if Aristotle were here introducing divine thinking.”⁴² “*En*” is doubly situated: the sense of “*en*” differs if one considers it in the immediate context or in the arc of the argument as a whole, and as a result this piece of the puzzle can be positioned in different wholes, with different implications regarding its topic.

Rather than attempt to defuse the ambiguity by deciding upon one or the other of divine intellect or human intellect as the subject, I propose to let the ambiguity stand: the subject of *De anima* III.5 is ambiguously human/divine because the nature of *thinking* is ambiguously human/divine. Because intellect is the same as its object (430a3–4, 431a1, 431b17), and its object is the universal (417b22–23), *thinking* is always the same, whoever (or whatever) the subject is. Of course, this is not unqualifiedly true—human thinking requires an image (431a16–17)—but the thinking *itself*, say, thinking the Pythagorean theorem, is identical whether Euclid thinks it or Abraham Lincoln thinks it or divine intellect thinks it. In other words, it is incidental to intellect itself that it is some particular person who thinks. If we uphold

the ambiguity of III.5, we may avoid the difficulties attendant on settling the issue one way or the other: we may say that human intellect does not threaten the hylomorphism of the soul because of its dependence on the body for the images that support its thinking, but that it may be described as divine and eternal by virtue of being identical to the activity of divine mind.

I am not the first person to uphold the ambiguity of *De anima* III.5 (even if the matter is not usually put this way), and my arguments follow those of Michael Wedin (1988), Aryeh Kosman (1992), and Lloyd Gerson (2004), all of whom allow (in different ways) that III.5 is concerned with *human* thinking, but that human thinking is importantly related to the divine. Wedin allows this perhaps least of all, concerned, as he is, to provide a nontranscendentalist reading of Aristotle's account of human intellect.⁴³ Nonetheless, he proposes two ways of reading the passages in III.5 that most strongly suggest that the subject is divine intellect (that is, those passages that describe intellect as separable, unaffected, unmixed, and its being is activity [430a17–19], and as always thinking [430a22], and as immortal and eternal when separated [*chōristheis*] [430a22–23]). On the first reading, Wedin proposes “that we relativize ascription of divine properties, counting them as indicators of the most divine thing in us, not of anything absolutely divine.”⁴⁴ The divinity features describe human intellect taken in abstraction, just as the objects of mathematics, which are not separable *simpliciter* from material objects, when separated in thought are treated as if they were separate, changeless, and eternal. “Thus, just as separation in thought is what gives the objects of mathematics apparent transcendental characteristics, so also is this the ground for attribution of immortality and eternity to productive mind . . . And just as the objects of mathematics are not extensionally separate so also for productive mind.”⁴⁵ On this proposal, the subject of III.5 is simply human intellect. But Wedin countenances another reading: human and divine intellect share certain general features, while also differing in certain respects, namely, in that divine intellect is immortal and eternal.⁴⁶ On this reading, divine intellect is introduced in order to *contrast* divine intellect with human intellect. (It is worth mentioning that this is similar to the line that Victor Caston takes. He remarks, “Normally, [Aristotle] eulogizes our likeness to the divine. But he also recognizes the difference and here [in III.5] he chooses to emphasize it.”)⁴⁷ Wedin concludes his reading by saying: “In short, separating is something *we* do when we consider one rather than another variant of productive mind. This means, of course, that divine mind makes an appearance in *De Anima*. But it does so by way of removing itself from the sort of productive mind that's germane to the *De Anima* account. So that account remains stubbornly naturalistic.”⁴⁸

Gerson upholds the divinity of human thinking with an intriguing proposal that there is a distinction to be drawn *both* between intellect and divine intellect *and* between intellect and human soul.⁴⁹ Intellect in itself (i.e., not as a part of a composite human being) makes possible human thinking: “It is not owing to a part of the soul that soul thinks, but owing to something distinct from soul that is, however, able to function in relation to soul when soul accesses its activity.”⁵⁰ This activity, intellect, that human soul has access to, is divine without being the divine mind that is God.⁵¹ Similarly, Kosman argues that, while Aristotle is concerned with human thinking in III.5, the principle or source of human thinking, active intellect (or, as he calls it, maker mind), is both “an element in Aristotle’s psychological theory, [and] an element in his theology as well.”⁵² Even Caston, who offers a compelling case for taking the subject of III.5 to be divine intellect, sees it as the final cause of all human thinking.⁵³

Despite significant differences in their accounts of what active intellect/productive mind/maker mind *is*, in spirit it seems that Wedin, Kosman, and Gerson *agree* that the activity of human thinking is divine by virtue of its relation (in the case of Kosman and Gerson) or likeness (in the case of Wedin) to something divine (divine intellect for Kosman and possibly Wedin, intellect in itself for Gerson). It is this spirit that I follow, too.

i. The Purpose of III.5

Let me begin with some general comments about what I, following these scholars, see to be the purpose of introducing active intellect in *De anima* III.5. As Wedin, Kosman, and Gerson argue, III.5 serves to flesh out solutions to a couple of problems that Aristotle raises at the end of III.4.⁵⁴ III.4 concludes with two questions concerning thinking:

Given that the intellect is something simple and unaffected, and that it has nothing in common with anything else, as Anaxagoras says, someone might raise these questions: how will it think, if thinking is being affected in some way? And can it itself also be thought? For either everything else will have intellect, if it can itself be thought without this being through anything else and if what can be thought is identical in form, or it will have something mixed in it which makes it capable of being thought as other things are.
(*De anima* 429b22–29)

These questions arise from the designation of intellect as nothing other than potential (*De anima* 429a21–22) and nothing in actuality before it thinks

(429a24), in order to be receptive of the form, that is, the object of thought (429a15–18). Aristotle's answers to these questions are, first, that intellect is potentially such as its objects, and this makes it possible to be affected by them, and, second, that intellect is intelligible just as its objects are, for in thinking them it is identical to them, in the case of objects without matter (429b29–430a5). But this leads to a further question, that Aristotle notes but does not immediately address: why is thinking not always happening (430a5–6)? In the case of perceiving, parallel to the case of thinking, the sense is potentially such as its object and it is impassive, but the question of how it will perceive does not arise in the same manner because there is a straightforward story to tell about how the sense comes into contact with its object—both enter the same physical space under appropriate conditions. But the story is more difficult to tell with regard to intellect and *its* objects: how is it that intellect *comes* into contact with its objects, and why is it not always being in contact with them? Unlike the objects of perception, which are external, the objects of intellect are in a way *in* the soul (II.5 417b19–23). But if this is so, what is the distinction between intellect and the objects of thought such that we should speak of thinking as a kind of receptivity or being affected?

The purpose of III.5 is to probe the distinction between intellect and the objects of thought, to provide the resources for maintaining, with respect to *human* thinking, the distinction between the active intelligible object and the receptive intellect. Again, this is a distinction that is easy to maintain in the case of perception, because the power to perceive is *within* the soul, while the object that activates that power is external. III.5 ought to provide a new distinction, parallel to the internal/external distinction that maintains a difference between the human power of intellect and the objects of intellect.⁵⁵

So, what does III.5 introduce, and how does it resolve the question of why intellect is not always thinking? III.5 opens with these lines:

Just as in the whole of nature there is something which is matter to each kind of thing (and this is what is potentially all of them), while on the other hand there is something else which is their cause and is productive by producing them all—these being related as an art to its material—so there must also be these differences in the soul [*en tēi psuchēi*]. (*De anima* 430a10–14)

The distinction between productive and material causes is just the *sort* of distinction required if we are to explain how intellect comes into contact with what is intelligible. We might expect Aristotle to be embarking on an

exposition of the relationship between the objects of intellect, as the productive cause, and intellect, as the material cause, of actual instances of thinking. This may not be exactly what Aristotle has in mind, however. The passage continues:

And there is an intellect which is of this kind by becoming all things, and there is another which is so by producing all things, as a kind of disposition, like light, does; for in a way light too makes colors which are potential into actual colors. And this intellect is separable, unaffected, and unmixed, being in essence activity. (*De anima* 430a14–18)

Aristotle does not seem to be talking about the *objects* of intellect as the productive cause—rather, what produces all things is *intellect*. However, we may recall that the objects of intellect are in the soul, and, furthermore, Aristotle compares the relationship between active and passive intellect to that between an art and its material. As Caston argues, art—medicine, say—is productive in the sense of being the final cause of health, that which governs the bringing into being of this instance of health.⁵⁶ Similarly, we may say, active intellect is productive of all things insofar as it is a final cause (so argues Caston), and it is the final cause because it thinks (or is) the form of all intelligible objects. The distinction thus holds between the intellect that receives the intelligible object and the intelligible object: active intellect is (or is thinking) the intelligible object, and active intellect is the productive cause.

In what sense, though, is active intellect *in* the soul? If it is simply within an individual soul, we have not resolved the problem of why thinking is not always happening; but if we take it, as Caston does, to be in the *genus* soul, that is, to refer to a *kind* of soul distinct from human soul,⁵⁷ we are indeed left with an unremarked-upon switch in topic in the middle of the argument about human thinking. It is preferable to maintain the ambiguity of this “in,” in a manner close to Wedin’s two readings of the subject of divine attributes outlined above. It is justified to do so if we adopt the interpretation of active intellect that Kosman offers, supplemented by Caston’s argument concerning the role of divine intellect in human thinking.

ii. Kosman’s “What Does Maker Mind Make?”

Kosman (1992) poses the question, “What does maker mind make?” The answer that he offers develops out of a standard answer: the standard answer, based on the analogy with light, is that active intellect/maker mind makes both what is potentially intelligible and what is potential intellect (in the

first sense of potentiality) into the first sense of actuality, “that is, into what is actually *able* to think and what is actually *thinkable*.”⁵⁸ This is a straightforward way to interpret the analogy with light: just as color is potentially but not actually visible in a dark room—even if a perceiver were in the presence of color, without light color would not be seen—so the presence of light is necessary for vision, it brings what is potentially visible into actual visibility. So too on the side of the perceiver.

Kosman takes a step beyond this interpretation, noticing that Aristotle “sometimes appears to claim not that light creates *visibility*, but that it creates *vision*” (citing *De sensu* 447a11 and *De anima* 419a7).⁵⁹ He takes this to suggest that light may produce *both* transitions, from potentially visible to actually visible, and from actually visible to actually seen (and the same on the side of the perceiver). “On this view, light is a third *hexis* necessary to the activity of vision and on par with the other two [the visible object and the potential seer].”⁶⁰

Kosman confirms and specifies this interpretation by bringing the conversation about light in *Republic* book VI to bear on Aristotle’s analogy, wherein light is said to bring together the actually visible and the actual seer (507d, 508c). What this means, on Kosman’s interpretation, is that “the *primary* actualization [light] effects is from first to second actuality; it is by virtue of *that* actualization that the eye is then said to have sight, and things said to be visible.”⁶¹ We may point out, in addition to Kosman’s considerations, that this accords well with Aristotle’s characterization of light: it is not *light* that makes a perceiver have the capacity for vision—this capacity is present from birth (417b16). It is rather that light effects the actual vision when a perceiver and color are both present. The upshot of this analogy for intellect is that active intellect is primarily responsible for bringing what is potentially known and a potential knower into an instance of *actual* thinking.

Active intellect, then, is not *simply* responsible for the acquisition of intelligible objects—this happens through some process of discovery and learning—and therefore is not *simply* responsible for bringing about the first actuality of the ability to think in a given soul. But Kosman develops a sense in which it is *mediately* responsible for the acquisition of the intelligible objects. Becoming actually able to think—acquiring intelligible objects—requires *first* that one is able actually to think them; it is by first *actually* thinking of the Pythagorean theorem that one comes to know it in a habitual way. Analogously, it is by *actually* swimming that one learns how to swim. A lot of other things need to happen to learn—having a teacher, working on problems, and so on—but ultimately it is active intellect, that which brings the potentially known and potential knower into an actual instance of thinking, that makes learning possible.

Finally, Kosman argues that, just as light in the *Republic* is both itself most visible and the source of visibility, so too is active intellect both most intelligible, which is divine intellect, and also the source of intelligibility.⁶² But this raises the further question: if intellect is the source of intelligibility, why are not all intelligible things also thinking? This is how Kosman reads the question at the end of III.4 (the more standard alternative is “why is intellect not always thinking?”), and with it he sets aside the question of why *humans* are not always thinking. As Kosman interprets it, this question is parallel to the question Aristotle raises about why perceptible things are not also perceivers (424b2).⁶³ The answer Kosman gives in the case of perception is that perception is a “mode of *consciousness*” while being perceptible is not; similarly, active intellect signifies “a distinction between the merely intelligible, and *nous*, which we now understand to be at once intelligible and, more significantly, capable of *actual thinking*, that is, capable of *theōria*, the fully realized second actuality of *nous*.”⁶⁴ Active intellect, that is, is the faculty of *awareness* of the intelligible object.⁶⁵ This is a faculty that, like the faculty of perceptual awareness, is not a separate faculty from human intellect, but its paradigm is divine mind, that always-active thinking.⁶⁶

In a word, Kosman takes active intellect in III.5 to be an element of the human psyche, and the element that, like light, unites the intelligible object and intellect in the activity of thinking. It is *also* divine intellect, which serves as the paradigm⁶⁷ and ultimately the source⁶⁸ of this activity. Kosman thus preserves the ambiguity of active intellect being “in” the soul. We may say, with Caston, that in one sense active intellect is in the *genus* soul insofar as it is a distinct kind of soul—divine intellect—while also saying, with Kosman and Wedin, that in another sense active intellect is an element of the activity of human thinking. Active intellect is both of these by virtue of the relationship between divine and human intellect. Divine intellect is (with Caston) the final cause of human thinking, or (with Kosman) ultimately the source of intelligibility and the paradigm of human thinking.⁶⁹ If we maintain this ambiguity of “in the soul,” we may then say, with Wedin, that what is separated, divine, and eternal is *either* this aspect of human intellect taken in abstraction *or* it is divine intellect as compared to human intellect. Better, active intellect is both.

iii. Supplements to Kosman

More needs to be said if we are to make more explicit the distinction between human intellect and the objects of thought and address the question of why humans are not always thinking. Doing so will also further support the stance that the subject of *De anima* III.5 is both human and divine intellect

ambiguously. Kosman's vision of active intellect is of that which joins intellect and intelligible object. Through the processes of learning, say, observing the behavior of bees, one gains possession of the form of bee by virtue of active intellect. The intelligible object, which is potentially in the bee, comes to be actually thought by virtue of active intellect. Active intellect accomplishes the identity of intellect and its object.

The obvious question to ask here is *how* active intellect joins intellect with intelligible object. This is something that Caston's interpretation of how divine intellect may operate in human thinking can answer. Just as the form of art in the artisan's soul is the final cause of the production of art, so too the divine mind—that which is eternally thinking all things—is the final cause of an individual's coming to think any particular thing, that toward which thinking yearns.⁷⁰

On Kosman's account, active intellect in the human soul is that which accomplishes the activity of thinking, the meeting of intellect and object, and this is in a way the same as divine intellect. If we add to Kosman's account Caston's principle that active intellect is that toward which thinking strives as the final cause, we may say why a person does not always contemplate what she knows. The art of medicine, while being *in* the soul of the doctor, governs the production of health in another; the nontemporal form in the soul of the doctor governs a temporal process that aims at the form. (Being healthy is also a temporally extended condition.) Similarly, the person who has learned the Pythagorean theorem will have that form in her soul as the final cause, that is, as active intellect. But if it is in her soul *as* the final cause, it will be in the soul as that which governs a temporally extended process of thinking. Gerson points out that *De anima* III.5 emphasizes that temporality applies only to individual thinking: "Actual knowledge is identical with its object; but potential knowledge is prior in time in the individual but not prior even in time in general" (430a19–22).⁷¹ Furthermore, Aristotle addresses the temporality of human thinking in *De anima* III.6, arguing that what is thought is only potentially divisible, even though thinking is temporally extended. Aristotle writes: "It is not possible to say what one was thinking of in each half of time; for these do not exist, except potentially" (430b10–11). He makes a similar point in *Metaphysics* IX.6, illustrating activities that have an end in themselves by saying that "at the same time we are seeing and have seen, are understanding [*phronein*] and have understood, are thinking [*noein*] and have thought" (1048b23–24). The identity of intellect and object, in human intellect, is temporal, but the temporality is an aspect of human mind, not of thinking itself. Rather, thinking is always complete, only potentially interrupted. Unlike divine intellect, then, human intellect is subject to time and

therefore will not perfectly instantiate divine thinking, that is, it will not always be thinking but will be able to take up the process of thinking at will.

iv. The Consequences

In effect, this interpretation of active intellect as both divine and human permits us to take *both* of Wedin's interpretations of the separability of intellect to be true: human intellect is derivatively immortal and eternal *when taken* as separate, while divine intellect *just is* immortal and eternal. We can understand it both ways because, insofar as active intellect governs a *temporal* process that a person engages in, it is not eternal or immortal, but as an activity that is in content identical to that of divine intellect, it *is* immortal and eternal.

More importantly, what happens when a human thinks is in an important way not a *personal* accomplishment, but an accomplishment made possible by an impersonal principle that defines human intellect.⁷² Kosman argues that active intellect "is simply *nous* understood in its role of self-actualization in *theōria*," by which he means that it is the principle that makes intellect *intellect*, capable of *knowing* and being *aware of* forms, rather than simply something that embodies a form.⁷³ Just as perception contains within itself a principle or awareness, which explains why air does not become sensitive when it takes on odor, so too human intellect contains within it a principle of awareness by which it *knows* forms rather than merely takes them on.⁷⁴ In the same way that the principle of perceptual awareness is not something that an individual *accomplishes*, yet is a principle *within* the perceptive soul, so too is the active intellect a principle that is *within* the soul but not something personal.

Separability from the Soul

This interpretation of *De anima* III.5 allows us to maintain that intellect is not separable *simpliciter* from body because of its dependence on images for thinking, while also allowing that it is separable in a different sense, in that when thought of as abstracted from the temporality necessary for human thinking, it is identical with divine intellect which *is* separable *simpliciter*. We have still to consider, however, the separability of intellect from the rest of the soul. Aristotle has already decided that the parts of the soul are separable from each other in account only, yet the other parts of the soul are clearly inseparable, *even* in account, from body. What does the conceptual separability of intellect from the body mean for the separability of intellect from the rest of the soul? I will argue that separability in account in this case expresses that the particularities of the individual are incidental to intellect, when intellect is considered in itself.

In *Metaphysics* VII.8 Aristotle argues that matter is what individuates particulars. He concludes the chapter by saying, “But the whole, this particular form in these particular bones and flesh, is already Callias or Socrates; and they are different on account of their material (since it is different), but they are the same in form (for the form is indivisible)” (1034a2–8).⁷⁵ The individuation of any particular person is the result of the differences in their matter, *hulē*, that is, their bodies. Thus, Callias may be hot tempered due to an excess of heat around his heart, and Socrates may be calm by reason of an even distribution of humors. But such physical explanations are only a part of the story.⁷⁶ Callias may be *inclined* to be hot tempered because of the disposition of his body, but that he *is* hot tempered is the result of the habits that he has formed. In other words, the individuality of Callias is not fully explained by his body alone. What makes Callias this particular human being, one who differs from Socrates, is his bodily disposition *and* his personal history: his choices, memories, education, and so on. Even though Socrates and Callias are one in form, and their form is human soul, their souls take on particular habits and encompass particular experiences and knowledge in their memories, and so on. Soul *as* form is one, but soul *as* this individual here is singular. Aristotle acknowledges just such a distinction between the form and the form *of* a particular individual in a comment in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.4: “just as with Anthropos, the Olympic victor: in his case, the common *logos* differed little from the *logos* peculiar to him, but nonetheless it was different” (1147b35–1148a2).

What bearing do these comments have on the separability of intellect from the rest of the soul? The lack of a bodily organ suggests that intellect *in itself* is not personal or individuated: it is not directly related to matter, which is what individuates Socrates and Callias. Indeed, Aristotle tells us in *De generatione animalium* that while soul is transmitted by means of seed, intellect is generated “from outside,” that is, it is not present nascently in the material of generation (736b22–29). Intellect, then, is separable from the rest of the soul in the sense that in itself it is not touched by what individuates the soul. When an individual thinks, it is incidental to the thinking that it is *this* individual that is doing the thinking.⁷⁷ In I.4, Aristotle distinguishes between the soul itself as the subject of activities and the ensouled individual that is so:

. . . to say that the soul is angry is as if one were to say that the soul weaves or builds. For it is surely better not to say that the soul pities, learns, or thinks, but that the man does this with his soul; and this not because the movement takes place in it, but because

sometimes it reaches as far as it or at other times comes from it; e.g., perception starts from particular things, while recollection starts from the soul itself and extends to movements or persistent states in the senses. (408b11–17)⁷⁸

Christopher Shields (1988) explains this passage by arguing that the soul itself is not the subject of such activities because the soul is not subject to motion *kath' hauto*, and these activities either are themselves motions or involve motions (and therefore require a body, an embodied subject). We may employ this distinction to understand the separability of the intellect. Just as the soul *itself* is not the subject of pity, but instead it is the person who pities *with* her soul, so too it is not (active) intellect *itself* that is the subject of learning and thinking, but the person who learns and thinks *with* her (active) intellect.

We may infer from this that intellect is separable in the sense that thinking is the activity of a part of the soul that is not in itself affected by anything particular to the individual who is thinking; Joe's active contemplation of the Pythagorean theorem differs not at all from Alice's. By contrast, Joe's memory of his meal with Alice *does* differ from Alice's memory of the same event. On the other hand, that Joe and Alice both know the Pythagorean theorem in particular, and how they came to know it and how they recall and use the knowledge, is particular to them and their personal histories. Intellect is a part of the human soul, that is, it is still an individual who engages in the impersonal activity of contemplation. Intellect exists independently from body and the rest of the soul *only* in those nonbodily living things—gods, and especially the god of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.⁷⁹ But it is not separable for me in my lifetime: the identity of intellect with its object is accomplished in *my* soul, but it is accomplished by a principle that is indifferent to me in my particularity.

This strange separability of intellect is expressed in a passage in *De anima* I.4:

Intellect, however, seems to come about in us as a sort of substance [*ousia tis*], and not to be destroyed. For, though it would be destroyed most of all by the dying of light that comes with old age, in fact it is in the same case as the organs of sense: if an old man could get an eye like this one, he would see just like a youth. Thus old age consists in something that has happened not to the soul, but to that in which the soul is, just as inebriations and diseases. And indeed, thinking [*to noein*] and contemplation [*to theōrein*]

fades away when something else within is destroyed, while it is in itself imperturbable; but being thoughtful [*dianoesthai*] and loving or hating are conditions not of this but of what possesses this, and in the way it possesses this. Thus when the latter is destroyed, one neither loves nor remembers, for these did not belong to that other thing, but to the combination, which has perished. But perhaps intellect is something more divine and imperturbable [*apathēs*]. (*De anima* 408b18–29)⁸⁰

Aristotle is here drawing a distinction between the deterioration of the body—that which has soul—and the deterioration of soul. Despite what one might suppose, Aristotle claims,⁸¹ the deterioration of old age does not consist in deterioration of soul, but of the body that has soul. Thus, just as sight would be restored if one could acquire a new pair of eyes, so thinking, too, does not deteriorate in itself, but when “something else within” deteriorates. Just as seeing relies on the good condition of the organ of sight, so thinking relies on the good condition of those faculties of soul that facilitate thinking: imagination and memory. But these faculties rely on the body, and their activities belong to the composite; when the body deteriorates, therefore, these deteriorate as well and impede the activity of thinking. In itself, however, intellect is not affected by the deterioration of the body and the faculties directly entwined with it: “And indeed, thinking and contemplation fades away when something else within is destroyed, while it is *in itself* imperturbable [*apathēs*].” This is exactly because intellect is indifferent to the particularities of the individual that thinks: even if the forgetfulness of old age makes it more difficult for a particular person to contemplate what he knows, nonetheless his activity of contemplating, once achieved, is exactly the same as the contemplation of his younger self.⁸²

Intellect is separable from the rest of the soul in the sense that in itself it transcends the personal and the particularities of the person thinking, by virtue of its identity with its object. Of course, this argument relies on the claim that the object of intellect is itself not particular—what is intelligible is the form, which is universal, not the particular instantiation of the form. As a result, it is both possible and, in some respects, suited to the nature of thinking that a person can think, know, and arrive at conclusions without this thinking having any bearing at all on the thinker *qua* person. Thinking by its nature is impersonal, nonperspectival, whereas perceiving is by its nature particular, personal, and perspectival. This leads to the possibility that one’s knowledge conflicts with one’s perception, as in the case of the akratic character; for example, one may recognize the health benefits of exercise without

thereby thinking that one should exercise oneself. The akratic person *knows* the universal, but he fails to act on it because his perceptual experience, which provides the minor premise, drives him to do otherwise (*Nic. Eth.* VII.3). Because intellect is separable in the sense of being impersonal, it is possible for someone to *know* something without being impelled to action by that knowledge: because intellect is in itself impersonal, it does not necessarily implicate the individual who contemplates it. Another way of saying this is that the akratic person *has* the human form in his soul (insofar as he knows it), but he does not have the human form in the sense of *being* it (insofar as he *is not* virtuous). I will address this in further detail in section 4; for now, let it suffice to show that the separability of intellect from the perceptive part of the soul is the basis for the duality of the human soul.

3. The Duality of the Soul and the Ethical Task

In the previous chapter, I argued that human perception is characterized by an indeterminacy of significance: one perceives an object in the world as a site of possibility, both one's own individual and idiosyncratic possibilities that arise within and refer to one's perspective and also impersonal, nonperspectival possibilities. This indeterminacy is consistent with the separability of intellect, as I have interpreted it. Because intellect is separable from the perceptive part of the soul, it *need not* be brought to bear in perceptual experience: the particular is incidental to intellect. In this case, the nonperspectival context for human perception may remain merely a possibility, and one's perception will be determined by the particular desires, emotions, and so on that make up one's perspective. However, one *can* realize the possibility of perceiving intellectually; it is, after all, an individual who thinks, even if it is incidental to the thinking itself that it is *this* individual person who is thinking. In other words, one can develop the *habit* of actively perceiving intellectually, and to do so will be to integrate the perceptual and intellectual parts of the soul. In what follows, I will explain how the conflict between perception and intellect figures into Aristotle's ethics.

Arguably, Aristotle's central idea in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is that the development of habit underlies the development of virtue. This idea is sometimes expressed by calling virtue a "second nature,"⁸³ which succinctly suggests that the virtuous character for Aristotle is like a natural state; that is, that the virtuous person has surpassed the "neither by nature nor contrary to nature" structure of soul grounded in the separability of intellect. Moreover, Aristotle's claim that the virtuous person takes pleasure in and deliberately chooses the virtuous action suggests that her perceptive soul—the part of

the soul responsible for feelings of pleasure and pain (*De anima* 413b23–24 and 414b1–5)—is aligned with the intellectual soul, which is responsible for deliberation⁸⁴ and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).⁸⁵ If the human soul is originally dual, the development of virtue will be a transformation of soul such that it overcomes this duality and achieves a “natural” unity. I will defend this thesis by arguing that the nonrational part of the soul that Aristotle identifies as the basis for the virtues of character is the perceptive part of the soul, and that it is necessary that perception be brought under the auspices of intellect if one is to apprehend the good of any particular situation.

Aristotle attributes the virtues of character to the nonrational part of the soul that is amenable to reason (*Nic. Eth.* 1102b28–1103a10).⁸⁶ Although Aristotle decides that it is not necessary to treat the soul with precision in this work (1102a18–28) and he therefore adopts a popular division of the soul that he does not hold to be accurate, it should be clear to the student of *De anima* that this nonrational part must be the perceptive part of the soul. In *De anima* III.9 Aristotle rejects the division of the soul into a rational and a nonrational part, partly on the basis that the perceptive part “could not easily be set down either as nonrational [*alogon*] or as having reason [*logon echon*]” (432a30–31), just as the nonrational part of the soul is not *simply* nonrational because it is susceptible to reason. Similarly, Aristotle characterizes imagination, itself an operation of the perceptive part, as a kind of quasi-thinking (433a9–10). Further, the nonrational part of the soul is contrasted with the other parts of the soul familiar from *De anima*: the fully rational part, that is, intellect, on the one hand, and the vegetative nonrational part on the other (*Nic. Eth.* 1102b29–1103a3), mirroring the division of soul that Aristotle adopts in *De anima*. One might object that at 1098a1–3 Aristotle dismisses the perceptive as the basis for human virtue. This objection is met by noticing that Aristotle is not dismissing the perceptive *part of the soul*, but rather the perceptive *life* (*zōiē*) as the proper basis for virtue. This supports my earlier claim that the life governed by perception—a life that is *available* to human beings by virtue of the relative independence of the perceptive part of the soul—is not the properly human life.

Finally, in *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle characterizes this nonrational part as appetitive and desiring (1102b30), which corresponds to Aristotle’s description of the perceptive part of the soul in *De anima* as necessarily including desire and appetite (413b22–24).⁸⁷ For these reasons, we ought to understand the nonrational part of the soul that is obedient to reason to be the perceptive part of the soul.

Clearly, virtue is accomplished when this part of the soul is obedient to reason. Aristotle indicates this as early as I.13 in *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Yet there seems to be also a certain other nature of the soul that is non-rational, although it does share in reason in a way. For in the case of the self-restrained person and of the one lacking self-restraint, we praise their reason and that part of their soul possessing reason, since it correctly exhorts them toward the best things. But there appears to be something else in them that is by nature contrary to reason, which does battle with and strains against reason . . . In the case of the self-restrained person, at any rate, it is obedient to the commands of reason—and perhaps it heeds those commands still more readily in the case of the moderate or courageous person, since then it is in all respects in harmony with reason. (*Nic. Eth.* 1102b13–28)

For the virtuous person, this nonrational part of the soul is “in all respects in harmony [*homophōnein*] with reason [*logos*],” but initially and for the less-than-virtuous person, these elements of the soul conflict with each other. If this is ultimately a conflict between the dictates of the perceptual part of the soul and the dictates of the intellectual part of the soul, we will be better able to understand the harmony of the soul of the virtuous person by looking into the conflict between intellect and perception.

It is clear that the perceptual and intellectual modes of encounter with an object in the world sometimes conflict with one another; for example, as Aristotle notes in *De anima*, the sun does not cease to appear small even when one has knowledge of its true size (428b3–4). In keeping with my interpretation of the separability of intellect, this conflict arises because, generally, our perceptual access to the world is relative to us, reflecting and being informed by our particular desires and states, whereas intellect is not: the sun *looks* small because *we* are so far away from it; the wine tastes bitter because I am sickly; the pizza smells good because I am hungry. Broadly speaking, the objects of perception are perceived as being pleasant or painful, that is, desirable or undesirable, to be pursued or fled, according to what is (merely) apparently good *for* the perceiver.⁸⁸ This relativity is both natural and necessary for nonrational animals. It is natural insofar as the relativity derives from the physicality of perception: it is because my body is comported in a certain way that my perceptions take on the character that they do, and it is necessary because it is through the medium of perception that an animal is able to preserve its life by pursuing beneficial things and avoiding harmful things (*De anima* 434a27–b2, 434b11–25). By contrast, intellect has no bodily substratum; Aristotle argues (429a18–29) that it *cannot* have a bodily organ because bodily nature would restrict its capacity to “think all things” (429a18).

Our account of human perception contains the possibility that perception be resituated in a nonperspectival context, a possibility afforded by the presence of intellect. And indeed, Aristotle suggests that, for rational animals, there is a kind of true perception, a perception of something pleasant that is not relative to one's appetites and desires. Aristotle affords to humans alone the capacity to perceive not only what is apparently good to the perceiver, but also what is pleasant or good in itself, which is possible only by virtue of the intellect. This is a distinction Aristotle draws in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and illustrates in the *De sensu*. The *Nicomachean Ethics* passage reads: "Now, some things are pleasant by nature—and of these, some are pleasant without qualification, others are such according to various kinds of animals and human beings involved. Certain things, by contrast, are not pleasant by nature but do become pleasant, some on account of people's defects, others through habits, and still others on account of people's corrupt natures" (VII.5 1148b15–19). This distinction is illustrated in a set of comments he makes about the sense of smell in *De sensu*, where Aristotle describes what I take to be a natural harmony between perception and intellect. There are two species of smell, he tells us: one that garners its pleasantness from appetites, just as the scent of pizza is good not in itself but only because it signifies the pizza for which I am hungry, and another that is pleasant in itself, as, for example, the scent of flowers (*De sensu* 5 443b19–444a8). Scents that are pleasant in themselves "have no effect, great or small, as incitements to eat, nor do they contribute anything to appetite [*epithumia*]" (443b28–30). The pleasantness of the scent of flowers derives not from anything specific about the perceiver; rather, it reflects something true about the perceptible object. But this kind of smell "is peculiar to man, [whereas] those which correspond to flavors are perceptible to all other animals" (444a4–5).⁸⁹ This is a kind of perception that is not essentially determined by the particular condition of a particular perceiver. It operates *not* in a context introduced by the desires and states of the perceiver, but instead in an "impersonal" context: it is perceived as *anyone* would perceive it (unless one has corrupted one's sense for the scent that is pleasant in itself by too frequently adding it as perfume to our food, and coming to conflate the two pleasures [444a1–3]). As we have seen, intellect is just such an impersonal faculty. It stands to reason, then, that it is the presence of intellect, that power that distinguishes human beings from other animals, that enables human beings uniquely to perceive what is good in itself. If perception is naturally bound up with desire, pleasure, and pain, it naturally includes a reference to the perceiver; but the intellectual grasp is not so bound up and does not include such a reference. The perception of what is pleasant in itself must be a perception made possible by the presence

of intellect. I propose that this is a natural instance of intellectual perception, analogous to the kind of perception that is achieved by the virtuous person.

This instance of intellectual perception can be generalized to the apprehension of all forms instantiated in material. Aristotle argues in *De anima* that the intelligible objects are present in the perceptible forms (432a3–5): just as perception receives the perceptible form of things, intellect receives the intelligible forms⁹⁰ *of those same things*. Moreover, not everything is separable from its material such that intellect *could* grasp it independently of perception, for example, the snub nose. Aristotle concludes a consideration of the mode by which the snub nose is grasped by saying, “In general, then, as things are distinct from matter, so too with what concerns intellect [*ta periton noun*]” (429b21–22) (where the matters concerning intellect are grasping the intelligible objects and their perceptible instantiation). Perception apprehends the particular whereas intellect apprehends the universal, exceeding the merely particular to apprehend its truth. But what is true must also be grasped in its particular instantiation, and for this to happen perception must work together with intellect: one must intellectually perceive what is true.

In a manner similar to the snub nose, what is virtuous for Aristotle is not extractable from the particular situation in which one does the virtuous thing: the ethical good is in this way not separable from its material. To grasp the good, then, intellect and perception must cooperate, just as they do to understand snubness and to perceive the pleasant scent of flowers. Yet, unlike the pleasure that we naturally take in the scent of flowers, which must be corrupted in order to perceive the pleasure relative to desire, perceiving the ethical good is a power that must be cultivated. This would take the form of a transformation of our animal nature; rather than operating within its natural context of desire and appetite, the perceptive soul will be brought to operate in the context of the intellect. The perceptive soul will be rendered *potentially* within the intellectual soul.⁹¹ But it is up to us to forge this relationship.

4. *Akrasia*

We find confirmation that the task of ethical development is to integrate the perceptual and intellectual parts of the soul, that is, to develop the habit of perceiving intellectually, by way of contrast, in the account of *akrasia*, “lack of self-restraint.” The account of *akrasia* reveals the nature of the conflict that can arise between perception and intellect; it is an account of a divided soul. In what follows, I will argue that akratic action consists in a failure of perception to supply the minor premise to the correct practical syllogism because it apprehends the present circumstance as the “mere” present, rather than a

moment in a whole life. This manner of perceiving, that is, perception apprehending the mere present, is natural to nonhuman animals, but it signals a failure to integrate intellect and perception and therefore a failure to fully realize *human* perception. It is a failure to perceive intellectually.

There is a straightforward way in which *akrasia* is a conflict between intellect and perception. The akratic *knows* the good in the sense that he has apprehended the universal premise—this is an operation of the noetic part of the soul (*De anima* 417b22–23); the akratic *thinks* correctly about virtuous action. But the akratic does not *act* on his knowledge and instead pursues the present pleasure—an object of the perceptive part of the soul (*De anima* 431a10–11). Thus we may say that when the akratic behaves akratically, he is following the lead of the perceptive part of the soul instead of his reason. His perception⁹² tells him “this thing here is good—pursue this,” but his intellect tells him “this kind of thing is not good—avoid this,” and he pursues.

One may object to this characterization of the akratic conflict because Aristotle describes the akratic action as the result of a practical syllogism, a kind of reasoning that employs a universal premise. However, of the two syllogisms mentioned at 1147a24–b19, the universal premise of the syllogism urging pursuit of the sweet is a generalized perceptual principle: all sweet things are pleasant. Indeed, Aristotle concludes *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3 by saying, “For it is not when science in the authoritative sense seems to be present that the experience of the lack of self-restraint occurs, nor is it this science that is dragged around on account of passion, but rather that [knowledge] which is bound up with perception” (1147b15–17). What is dragged by passion in an akratic act is a generalized principle governed by perception, not by intellect. Moreover, while a practical syllogism may be used to describe the action, Aristotle’s use of the practical syllogism need not describe a process of reasoning that is the activity of intellect. In *De motu animalium*, Aristotle describes the motion of a nonrational animal as a practical syllogism (701a30–33). We may, then, safely say that the akratic responds to a particular situation perceptually and intellectually, but these constitute two opposing responses, rather than one unified response.

In this straightforward way, we see that intellect and perception are operating quasi-independently of one another in the soul of the akratic person. But there is also another, deeper conflict between these two elements in the soul of the akratic: the akratic has not made the choice to live a certain *kind* of life, and in the absence of that kind of choice, he is vulnerable to the tyranny of the temptations of perception. In what follows, I will argue that this failure to make a comprehensive choice of life is the root of *akrasia*, and it results in a failure to develop the capacity for intellectual perception.

My argument will proceed thus: I will prepare my discussion of the accounts of *akrasia* given in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3, Aristotle's response to the Socratic position that *akrasia* is a form of ignorance, by discussing Aristotle's account of the source of animal motion in *De anima* III.9–11.⁹³ This discussion will establish that the desire that motivates movement is determined by the way the object of desire is apprehended, either as the good or as the merely present pleasure, according to the different faculties of apprehension. I will then turn to *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3 and argue, first, that *akrasia* is a result of a failure of perception to supply the minor premise to the right practical syllogism, and that this failure is due to the manner in which the object is perceived. I will then argue that *akrasia* has a double aspect: it is both an inability to abide by one's choice in the moment, as a result of faulty perception, and that this inability is ultimately caused by being in a state of passion. I will conclude by considering how the akratic character is developed, and I will argue that the akratic is vulnerable to such states of passion because he has taken refuge in arguments concerning what is good rather than acting by their guidance, out of ambivalence about the sort of life he wants to lead. The akratic has failed to take hold of his own development, failed to overcome the natural duality of his soul, and as a result, his perceptual faculty operates like the perceptual faculty of a nonrational animal, beholden to the mere present, and (temporarily) without the ability to distinguish between the apparent good and the true good.

Let me offer one final remark before embarking on this argument. Generally, there are two ways of understanding the akratic's failure to act according to what she knows to be best. The first way, referred to as either the intellectualist or cognitivist interpretation,⁹⁴ understands the akratic's failure as a failure of practical reasoning, similar to a failure of theoretical reasoning.⁹⁵ The second way, the nonintellectualist or Humean interpretation, places the blame for the akratic's failure on a failure to have right desire, independently of having right reason.⁹⁶ I have framed the question of the akratic's failure in terms of a conflict between intellect and perception, which may suggest that I favor the intellectualist interpretation, but my interpretation rather falls in with the camp of interpreters who propose a third alternative, wherein having the right desire is not separable from cognizing objects of desire well and vice versa.⁹⁷ On this interpretation, having the right desire and having knowledge are intertwined states. This approach has prima facie appeal because it harmonizes Aristotle's view, on the one hand, that only the virtuous person truly desires the good, while others are deceived by the object of their desire; and his view on the other hand, that acting well because one *knows* that it is the right thing to do does not make the act virtuous—one must *be* virtuous

to *do* virtuous deeds. Accomplishing virtuous acts is neither simply a matter of having knowledge, nor simply a matter of desiring rightly.

Desire and the Desired in Animal Motion

Aristotle offers two characterizations of the phenomenon of *akrasia*: (1) it is a conflict of desires, and the akratic's nonrational appetite, her *epithumia*, overpowers her rational desire, her *boulēsis*; or (2) *akrasia* is a kind of ignorance: at the critical moment of acting, the akratic is in some sense ignorant of the principle supporting her rational intention, and this leaves her vulnerable to being led to act by a present appetite.⁹⁸ Underlying both of these characterizations and linking them is Aristotle's discussion of animal motion. Indeed, we find the characterization of *akrasia* as a conflict of desires most clearly articulated in the discussion of animal motion in the third book of *De anima*.⁹⁹ Similarly, in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3, wherein we find the account of *akrasia* as a kind of ignorance, Aristotle invokes the account of motion when he explains, "*epithumia* leads the way, for it is able to set in motion each of the parts [of the body]" (1147a33–34). By briefly sojourning to the discussion of animal motion in *De anima* (III.9–11) I will lay the groundwork for the argument that the akratic follows the lead of an independent perceptual principle in her soul. In *De anima* III.9–11 Aristotle offers a single account of animal motion that explains the movement of both rational and nonrational animals, but he draws important distinctions between human movement and nonrational animal movement. Highlighting these differences will lay the groundwork for the argument that when the akratic person behaves akratically, she is literally moving on the basis of the animal aspect of her soul: she behaves animalistically, operating, as an animal does, on the independent guidance of the perceptual part of her soul.

At the end of *De anima* III.9 Aristotle invokes the phenomenon of *akrasia* and from it he infers, at the beginning of III.10, that both intellect (*nous*) and desire (*orexis*) appear to be movers (*kinounta*). Aristotle is here counting imagination (*phantasia*) as a kind of thinking (*noēsis*). It is clear from the discussion surrounding this remark that desire is not an independent capacity of soul that stands alone; rather, desire always accompanies imagination or practical thinking. That is, desire is present to both the perceptual part of the soul responsible for imagination and to the intellectual part of the soul responsible for practical thinking. Aristotle begins the discussion of animal movement with an invocation of the *aporia* regarding what the parts of the soul are, and he proceeds to argue that none of the parts of the soul that he posits—nutritive, perceptive, intellectual—are in themselves the causes of movement (*De anima* 432b14–433a6). Instead, Aristotle concludes

III.9 saying, “And in general we see that the man who has the art of healing does not always heal [for example], this implying that there is something else which is responsible for action in accordance with knowledge and not knowledge itself. Nor is desire [*orexis*] responsible for this movement; for the *enkrateis*, even when they desire and want things, do not do those things for which they have the desire, but they follow intellect” (433a4–8). The implication is that neither intellect alone nor desire alone is sufficient to produce movement; rather, only intellect accompanied by desire is sufficient to cause movement. Of course, Aristotle is using intellect broadly to include *phantasia*, the sort of “thinking” available to nonrational animals, and the same principle holds in their case: neither *phantasia* alone nor desire alone can produce motion; only imagination accompanied by desire does. This is hardly surprising: desire must aim at some object, present or thought of, and so it must accompany those faculties of soul that apprehend objects.

The kinds of desire that accompany these two activities, imagining and thinking, differ: *epithumia*, appetite, accompanies imagination; and rational desire, *boulēsis*, accompanies thinking. At *De anima* 433a20, Aristotle confirms that “whenever *phantasia* produces movement, it does not do so without desire [*orexis*].” He does not explicitly identify appetite as the kind of desire that accompanies imagination in these chapters, perhaps because he draws a distinction between perceptual imagination (*aisthētikē*) and rational imagination (*logistikē*) (433b30) and would reserve appetite for perceptual imagination in particular. However, the association of imagination with appetite is seen in two parallel remarks: at 433a1–3 he says, “Again, even if the intellect [*nous*] enjoins us and thought [*dianoia*] tells us to pursue or avoid something, we are not moved but we act according to appetite [*epithumia*], as do those who are akratic.” Shortly afterward, Aristotle remarks that “many follow their imaginations in spite of [*para*] their knowledge [*epistēmē*], and in the other animals thought and reasoning do not exist, although imagination does” (433a10–11). These two remarks describe cases of acting contrary to reason—in one case, it is appetite that one follows; in the other, it is imagination. Because desire accompanies the parts of the soul, I take this to imply that when a person acts not according to her reason and its accompanying rational desire, she acts according to her (perceptual) imagination and its accompanying appetite.

According to the general Aristotelian principle that actuality precedes potentiality, the object of desire—whether perceived, imagined, or thought of—must be present in order for the desire to become actual. Insofar as imagination and thinking apprehend their objects differently, so too will the desires that accompany them differ.¹⁰⁰ It would be strange to say, for example,

that one desires a cookie simply because it is a *cookie*; rather, one desires a cookie because it is sweet or smells good, or because it will satisfy one's hunger, or because it will please the friend who baked it. Desiring a cookie for these various reasons depends upon grasping the cookie in various ways: as a source of pleasure, as a source of nourishment, as an occasion for friendship. Thus, what the object of desire is apprehended *as* will determine the sort of desire that arises for it. The manner in which the object of desire is apprehended as good—what is considered good *about* it—will determine what sort of desire one has for it, and this in turn will produce the movement one undertakes. And so Aristotle offers a general conclusion at the end of *De anima* III.10, saying, “In general, therefore, and as we have said, *as* [*hōsper*] the animal is capable of desire so is it capable of moving itself” (433b27–28, my emphasis).

Of course, a person, unlike a nonrational animal, may apprehend a particular object in multiple ways simultaneously, creating a conflict of desire. Aristotle characterizes such a conflict in this way: “But desires [*orexeis*] arise which are opposed to one another, and this happens when reason [*logos*] and appetites [*epithumiai*] are opposed and it takes place in creatures that have perception [*aisthēsis*] of time (for intellect [*nous*] bids us resist on account of the future, while our appetites bid us to act on account of what is immediate [*to ēdē*]; for what is immediately pleasant appears [*phainetai*] both absolutely pleasant and absolutely good, because we do not see the future)” (*De anima* 433b5–10). With this remark, Aristotle makes us privy to the sort of object that gives rise to appetite, and, by contrast, the sort of object that would give rise to rational desire: appetite aims at an object as the source of immediate pleasure, which it takes to be simply good, whereas intellect's rational desire aims at an object considered as a moment of a larger temporal whole.¹⁰¹ The nonrational animal, by contrast, has no rational desire and therefore no conflict of desires. The nonrational animal moves simply on the basis of *phantasia* and *epithumia*. Aristotle remarks that “it is always the object of desire which produces movement, but this is either the good or the apparent good” (433a27–29), but such a distinction applies only to rational animals.¹⁰² Nonrational animals are constituted by nature to pursue what is good for them, that is, what will promote the continuance of their lives and species (434a30–b8). A person, however, can distinguish between the good and the apparent good, and both may cause motion. We may expect that one who acts contrary to her conception of the true good is, then, pursuing the merely apparent good.

This will be confirmed in Aristotle's analysis of *akrasia*, to which I now turn. Most basically, *akrasia* is an inability to act according to what one thinks

or knows to be best. It is a common enough experience: one may decide, as the conclusion of deliberative reasoning about what is best, say, to get up early in the morning, but once morning comes, this decision holds no sway as one hits snooze for the fifth or sixth time. According to Aristotle, this is a uniquely human problem, and a problem made possible by the presence of intellect: a rational decision (and its attendant rational desire) can only be taken to be abandoned by means of thinking. But *akrasia* is not a universal human problem—not all people abandon their decisions—and so we must ask: what is it that renders practical thinking and rational desire ineffective when it comes to producing action? I will argue that the cause of the inefficacy of practical intellect is the independent operation of the perceptual element of the soul, that is, the failure to achieve a “natural” unity of soul. In nonrational animals, the faculty of perception is an adequate means by which an animal preserves its life. Perception is naturally sufficient to supply the guiding principle by which an animal determines what it should pursue and what it should avoid, and this principle is pleasure, the apparent good. If the human soul has not been developed so as to achieve a “natural” unity, perception will continue to supply the apparent good as a guiding principle of action, and in so doing it will come into conflict with the principle supplied by the intellect, the true good. I will argue, further, that this disorganized state of soul is the result of the failure to take charge of the development of one’s character; *akrasia* is the state of soul that develops “naturally,” when one fails to decide what the ultimate good is, the good which constitutes the aim of all one’s actions, and shapes one’s character in pursuit of that good. The result is a soul in a state of disunity: a soul that can understand the distinction between the merely apparent good and the true good, but cannot bring the appearance of the good and the understanding of the good into harmony. As a result, the akratic will be led to pursue as the object of desire what is merely pleasant.

Akratic Ignorance

I begin with a preliminary discussion of an argument Aristotle offers early in his investigation of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*, which will shed some light on the problem of the akratic’s knowledge that is Aristotle’s primary concern in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII.3. Aristotle begins his account of *akrasia* and *enkrateia* by considering what is distinctive about the akratic and the enkratic characters: are they distinguished by *what* they are concerned with or by the *way* they are concerned with it (1146b14–18)? He argues that they cannot be distinguished by *what* they are concerned with, because if that were the case the akratic person would, contrary to fact, be identical with the

licentious person (*akolastos*)—both are concerned with pleasure. Rather, they are distinct by virtue of the *manner* in which they are concerned with pleasure: “For the licentious person is led on by what he chooses, holding that he ought *always* to pursue the present pleasure, whereas the person lacking self-restraint does not think that, but pursues the pleasure anyway” (1146b22–24, my emphasis). The akratic person differs from the licentious person in the way he holds himself toward pleasure: the licentious person *decides* that he will *always* pursue pleasure; the akratic person pursues the present pleasure without choosing it. This is an important difference: not only does the akratic person act contrary to the rational deliberation and the rational desire that constitute choice (III.3 1113a9–12),¹⁰³ but the sort of choice that defines the licentious person concerns what he ought *always* to do. The contrast between the akratic person and the licentious person is not merely that the latter chooses, in this moment, to pursue pleasure while the former does not; it is that the latter chooses the pursuit of pleasure as a *way of life*, while the former fails to abide by his choice in this *moment*. I will argue that the inefficacy of the akratic’s knowledge is a result of his *lack* of choice of a way of life: the akratic is vulnerable to the seduction of the present pleasure because he has structured his life as a series of individual choices, not governed by an overall structure of the *kind* of life he thinks one ought to live. And in the absence of this comprehensive choice, the akratic is led to act upon the dictates of his undeveloped perceptive soul.

After arguing that the akratic is distinctive by virtue of the manner in which he is concerned with pleasure, Aristotle turns to address the Socratic impasse: how can a person have knowledge (*epistēmē*) of the good thing but act otherwise, without implying that this noble knowledge is “[overpowered] and [dragged] around like a slave” (*Nic. Eth.* 1145b24) by something as ignoble as passion (*pathos*)? Aristotle employs a familiar strategy in setting up his response, invoking the general point that there are different modes of knowing: knowers can be actively using their knowledge or they can have the knowledge but not be using it (1146b31–33). Aristotle then specifies one way in which one can have knowledge without using it: one can actively have the universal premise of a practical syllogism, but not have or not use the knowledge of the relevant particular premise (1146b35–1147a10).¹⁰⁴ In these remarks leading up to his own account of *akrasia*, Aristotle thus draws our attention to the two components of practical knowledge: the opinion that apprehends the universal and the perception that apprehends the particular. Aristotle concludes these introductory remarks by pointing out that acting contrary to knowledge is remarkable only when both these components are actively held (1147a8–10).

Aristotle proceeds to provide two accounts of the akratic's epistemic state. (1) The akratic *ordinarily* has the knowledge that, for example, one ought not to eat sweet things for the sake of one's health, but a fit of passion overtakes him that causes him to lose his grip on that knowledge. He becomes like a drunk man who recites the verses of Empedocles without understanding his own words (*Nic. Eth.* 1147a10–24): the akratic person may recite the principle that he ought not to eat sweet things while eating his cake, but this does not mean that he *knows* what he is saying. (2) The akratic has two competing universal premises, one that forbids and one that commands eating sweets, and, in the face of a sweet thing, appetite (*epithumia*) happens to be present which leads him to eat the sweet, contrary to the premise that he ought not to eat sweets (1147a24–1147b5).

Aristotle's aim in providing these two accounts of *akrasia* is to show how one can act contrary to one's *epistēmē* without directly contravening it, so that he is not committed to the absurdity that something as powerful as *epistēmē* can be overcome by something as base as passion, and (what is the same thing) to reveal the nature of the ignorance out of which the akratic acts (*Nic. Eth.* 1145b21–29). He seems to think that he is successful in achieving this aim: he concludes his discussion of the epistemic state of the akratic by saying, "And because the ultimate term [*eschatos horos*] is not universal and seems not to be knowable as the universal is knowable, it seems also that what Socrates was seeking turns out to be the case. For it is not when science in the authoritative sense seems to be present that the *pathos* occurs, nor is it this science that is dragged around on account of *pathos*, but rather that [knowledge] which is bound up with perception [*aisthētikē*]" (1147b13–17).¹⁰⁵ How do these two accounts warrant this conclusion?

The first account, which explains the akratic's lack of knowledge as the result of being in a state of passion, analogous to being drunk or asleep, renders the correct universal premise ("one ought not to eat sweets") dormant. In a fit of passion, the akratic "has" this knowledge only as something foreign to him and empty, just as a drunk person "knows" Empedocles's verses (*Nic. Eth.* 1147a19–20, 1147b11–12). He knows it, we may say, *only* intellectually, which is to say only impersonally and abstractly, not as something that bears on *him* personally in his present circumstances. What is affected by the state of passion is not the knowledge that one ought not to eat sweets per se, but rather the knower: one who is in a fit of passion no longer has meaningful or concrete access to that knowledge, and, indeed, to any knowledge.¹⁰⁶ Aristotle compares the akratic state to sleeping: in both cases, one's condition is altered such that one cannot use one's knowledge, although one still "has" it in some sense. As a result, Aristotle is not committed to the absurdity

that *epistēmē* itself is vulnerable to the vicissitudes of passion (“For it is not when science in the authoritative sense seems to be present that the *pathos* occurs . . .”). It is rather that the akratic person is so vulnerable. As Moss puts it, in this state intellect is “covered over.”¹⁰⁷

This first account describes the general state of ignorance that the akratic is in, and this prepares Aristotle to explain more exactly what produces a particular act of *akrasia*, which is precisely what the second account supplies.¹⁰⁸ It is this account that warrants Aristotle’s conclusion that what passion drags around is perceptual knowledge (“ . . . nor is it this science that is dragged around on account of *pathos*, but rather that [knowledge] which is bound up with perception [*aisthētikē*]”). The akratic, Aristotle explains, has two universal premises within his soul, one that forbids eating sweets (Aristotle does not provide a formulation of this one), and one to the effect that “everything sweet is pleasant.” As I already noted, this latter premise is a generalization of perceptual experience, and it is the sort of premise that would be available to nonrational animals with experience, were they able to articulate premises. So, for example, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* III.10 Aristotle describes the behavior of a lion that smells his prey and takes pleasure in the scent because it signifies eating. This is something like operating with a universal premise generalized from perception (“things with this scent are pleasant to eat”). Since the akratic person is in a state of passion (as we just learned), he does not have proper access to the kind of knowledge that supplies the correct universal premise. His powers of thinking about what he ought to do when faced with the sweet thing are impaired by the passion; he is not able to *consider* which practical syllogism the perceptual knowledge “this here is sweet” should complete.¹⁰⁹ Because the intellect has been “covered over,” the akratic is restricted to the present moment, similar to the manner in which a nonrational animal is beholden to his present experience.¹¹⁰

With these two complementary explanations, Aristotle has identified two aspects of the ignorance out of which the akratic acts. He is, on the one hand, in a state of general ignorance, in the same way that one who is asleep is in a general state of ignorance. But on the other hand, he is also in error concerning his perceptual knowledge. Aristotle appeals to animal motion by way of explaining how the *epithumia* produces the akratic action: *epithumia* leads the way because “it is able to set in motion each of the parts [of the body]” (*Nic. Eth.* 1147a35). As discussed above, the *epithumia* that happens to be present must arise in light of the desired object. This is where we come to realize that there is a kind of misperception at the core of *akrasia*, wherein the akratic, because of the state of passion he finds himself in, apprehends the sweet thing only as a potential source of pleasure.¹¹¹ The object of *epithumia*

is pleasure, and perception offers up this object, the merely apparent good. This is a misperception in the sense of being blind to some relevant aspect of the thing seen; it is like missing the forest for the trees, or meeting a person and being unable to see beyond her appearance. It is not a misperception in the sense of being *false*—strictly speaking, the sweet *will* be pleasant, the trees are there, and the person does look this way—but it is a failure to see the whole picture. Because the akratic's experience is confined to the mere present in the absence of intellect, "an appetite [which] happens to be present" (1147a33) is able to lead the way, "dragging" the perceptual knowledge "this here is sweet" into the syllogism that would command the consumption of the sweet. Aristotle can therefore conclude that "it is not when knowledge in the authoritative sense seems to be present" that one behaves akratically, and that it is perceptual knowledge that is "dragged around on account of passion." By contrast, Aristotle remarks that when sleeping—a state similar to the passion of the akratic, wherein intellect is "covered over"—virtuous people have better dreams than nonvirtuous people (*Nic. Eth.* 1102b8–11). This suggests that the perceptual part of the soul responsible for dreams (*De insom.* 459a20–21) is in a better condition in virtuous people than in non-virtuous people; analogously, the virtuous person would not be tempted by the present pleasure, even if her intellect lay dormant and could not instruct otherwise.¹¹²

This brings us back to the claim I made at the outset: that the akratic is vulnerable to the temptations of the present pleasure because he has not situated his actions within the context of life as a whole. All desire is for a particular object, but *epithumia* is for the object *as* the immediately present pleasure. The object sought after by *epithumia* is perceived in its sheer immediacy, merely as the potential for an immediate pleasure. Appetite arises when the salient thing about the perceptual object is its merely present possibilities, that is, a potential source of pleasure; intellect makes the salient thing about the perceptual object its place in one's life as a whole. The akratic is thus acting on the basis of a kind of misperception. It is not, so to speak, a *factual* misperception—the object the akratic perceives is indeed sweet; it is rather the *character* of the perception that has gone awry. The relevance of the sweetness speaks only to the pleasure to be gained by eating it: the perception is situated in the mere present. The nature of the misperception is, then, in taking the apparent good—the pleasant—to be the true good, that is, the good as it contributes to one's life as a whole.¹¹³

This double aspect of *akrasia* is confirmed by the contrast Aristotle draws between *akrasia* and corruption (*mochthēria*): "For corruption seems to be like such diseases as dropsy and consumption; whereas lack of self-restraint

is like epileptic seizures, the former defective condition being continuous, the latter not continuous" (*Nic. Eth.* 1150b32–35). The akratic person does not persist in his state of partial ignorance; rather, his *akrasia* emerges only intermittently and then subsides, whereas the vicious person persists in his state. The structure of vice, just like the structure of virtue, is such that an act is only truly vicious if it is done from a vicious character; in a sense, all the acts of a vicious person are vicious, because vice is a persistent state of character. The episodic nature of *akrasia*, however, reveals that the state from which the akratic acts when she acts akratically comes upon her and then departs. The akratic person is she who acts contrary to her choice, but more fundamentally the akratic person is she who is vulnerable to the fits of passion within which she is *unable* to abide by her choice due to the presence of appetite. Why is the akratic susceptible to such states of vulnerability to appetite? My position is that this is due to a fundamentally passive way of living, as I hope to show, and that in the face of this kind of passivity, one's animal, that is, perceptual soul takes the lead.¹¹⁴

The Development of *Akrasia*

We will find confirmation in this interpretation of *akrasia* as a failure to develop one's intellectual perception when we consider the problem of how *akrasia* is developed.

Aristotle's general account of the formation of character uses the model of the development of an art: one *becomes* a poet by writing poems. In general, one becomes what one does, and then what one does comes naturally. Virtues and vices are *hexeis*, character states, that are developed by engaging in acts that are virtuous or vicious, just as one becomes a good or a bad carpenter by building well or building poorly (*Nic. Eth.* II.1). To a certain extent, this account explains the development of *akrasia* and *enkrateia*. *Akrasia* and *enkrateia* are also *hexeis* (e.g., 1151a27, 1151b29) that result from habit (*ethos*) (1152a25–29), yet *akrasia* is not a vice (1151a5), nor correlatively is *enkrateia* a virtue. Moreover, the *acts* that the akratic person engages in are the *same* as the acts of the licentious (*akolastos*) person (1151a5–6). Why, then, does one person who engages in licentious behavior become licentious while another merely becomes akratic? Aristotle argues that the difference between the akratic and the licentious lies in the *way* they each pursue pleasure: the latter chooses it, the former acts contrary to his choice (1146b22–24). Aristotle draws a distinction, however, between the choices that establish one's character and the choices one makes at any given time: one is responsible for a single act from start to finish, whereas one is primarily responsible for the establishment of one's character—once established, it

takes on a momentum of its own (1114b30–1115a3). Did the akratic person make choices that resulted in a character whose choices are ineffective? How would these choices differ from the choices that result in licentiousness?

One response is that there is a physiological explanation for the akratic person's character. In several respects, Aristotle associates *akrasia* with certain physiological conditions or alterations. First, he considers the melancholic especially likely to be impetuously akratic (*Nic. Eth.* 1150b25–28), and he likens this character to one who gets drunk on little wine (1151a2–5), grounding at least this type of *akrasia* in a certain physiological condition. Second, he likens the passionate state of the akratic to being drunk, mad, or asleep, specifically with respect to the bodily alteration suffered in these conditions (1147a11–18).¹¹⁵ The licentious person, on the other hand, is one who pursues excessive pleasures either without an appetite for them or with only a mild appetite (1148a17–20). The akratic, then, would be one who tries to achieve virtue—he comes to *learn* what one ought to do—but is prevented from developing virtuous habits by a physiological susceptibility to fits of passion. Even though the akratic engages in licentious acts, he does not develop the habits that result in that vice because, we might say, he is not himself when he engages in those acts (as signified by the regret he feels afterward).

Appeal to the physiological condition of the akratic may serve to explain why the akratic did not develop licentiousness, but it is not enough to explain the development of *akrasia*. Aristotle is quite clear that *akrasia* properly speaking is a result of habit, distinguishing between those who are akratic by nature from those who are akratic as a result of habit (*Nic. Eth.* 1152a27–31). Moreover, one aspect of virtue is to have organized and appropriate passions (1106b16–23), which is achieved as a result of habituation.¹¹⁶ We are not born with appropriate passions, and no doubt one of the things that differentiates individuals is the degree to which we are susceptible to anger, desire, and so on, on the basis of our bodily conditions.¹¹⁷ Why, then, does the akratic not habituate his passions? What are the acts by which a person develops *akrasia*, if he neither develops licentiousness through his licentious acts, nor habituates his passions so as to develop virtue?

The answer, I believe, is to be found in a remark that Aristotle makes in *Nicomachean Ethics* II.4, when he is elucidating his claim that people become virtuous by engaging in virtuous acts. He concludes the chapter with the following remark:

It is well said, then, that as a result of doing just things, the just person comes into being and as a result of doing moderate things, the moderate person; without performing these actions, nobody would

become good. *Yet most people* [hoi polloi] *do not do them; and, seeking refuge in argument* [logos], *they suppose that they are philosophizing and that they will in this way be serious*, thereby doing something similar to the sick who listen attentively to their physicians but do nothing prescribed. Just as these latter, then, will not have a body in good condition by caring for it in this way, so too the former will not have a soul in good condition by philosophizing in this way. (*Nic. Eth.* 1105b9–18, my emphasis)

The many have some sense that they ought to be virtuous, and they develop some *logos* of what virtue would entail, but they *fail to act*. As a result, they leave their souls in bad condition, just as one who fails to heed the prescriptions of one's doctor will be left in poor health. Both the soul and the body require active care if they are to be healthy, not merely lip service. This point reflects Aristotle's hylomorphic view of body and soul: to a certain extent, caring for the soul and caring for the body are one and the same project. One is caring for one's nutritive soul by caring for one's body when one follows the doctor's orders. However, as we have seen, intellect occupies a unique position in the soul and requires special cultivation through learning. One might mistakenly suppose, on the basis of intellect's special position, that to bring the soul into good condition one need only educate oneself. The development of *akrasia* would then stem from a basic folly; Aristotle accuses those who do not see what is obvious of extraordinary carelessness: "To be ignorant, then, that the corresponding *hexeis* come from engaging in a given activity is exactly the mark of someone who is insensible [*anaisthētos*]" (*Nic. Eth.* III.5 1114a9–10).

Perhaps we can take the analogy further. What it means not to follow the prescriptions of the doctor is to allow one's body to follow its natural course: if one fails to take the medicine prescribed by the doctor, one's illness will worsen. Similarly, what it means not to actively care for the soul is to let the soul follow its natural course, that is, to allow oneself to act on whatever desires one happens to find within oneself. Wouldn't habitually taking such a passive stance lead to the condition of *akrasia*? Such a person would fail to habituate her passions, while at the same time (intellectually) learning what she ought to do. When this person comes to act, she will find within herself two competing impulses: the impulse that has developed naturally (i.e., without interference or supervision) to pursue pleasure, and the impulse to follow her rational account of what she ought to do—this person is akratic. The poor condition of soul that results from this practice of the *hoi polloi* is the akratic condition, and it is developed precisely by failing to act. Moreover,

this failure to act while learning about the good is to embody an ambivalence toward what kind of life one will lead: it is to halfheartedly choose both the life of virtue and the life of ease, and in choosing both, one chooses neither. In the absence of a serious choice about what kind of life one will live (which is the same thing as choosing what kind of character one wants to develop), one develops *akrasia* as if by default, and this failure to choose has the consequence of restricting one's *ability* to choose, that is, to act according to one's rational desire.

Conclusion

In summary, I have argued that human beings, as rational animals, are initially and naturally characterized by a duality of the soul, having both a perceptual soul and an intellectual soul, both supplying principles sufficient to govern one's life. The virtuous person, however, is characterized by a harmonious soul, which, I argued, means a soul in which the perceptual and intellectual parts are integrated with one another. In the terms set forth in the previous chapter, this is to say that the virtuous person's perception is informed by intellect; it is an intellectual perception in the sense that the particular object apprehended perceptually is apprehended in light of what it really is, not merely in light of what it is to the perceiver. In terms more common in the ethical context, the apparent good offered by perception represents what is truly good. I then confirmed, by way of contrast, that the nonvirtuous soul suffers from having a perceptual principle independent from an intellectual principle by examining the phenomenon of *akrasia* and Aristotle's explanations of it. In the following chapter, I will further confirm the harmony of the virtuous soul in terms of intellect and perception by examining the intellectual virtue of *phronēsis*, "practical wisdom" or insight. I will argue that *phronēsis* is a power for good practical reasoning because it enables a person to rightly apprehend her particular circumstances, and that this right apprehension *is* intellectual perception.