INTRODUCTION

1. General remarks

This work is entitled *Aristotle on Desire*, rather than, say, *Aristotle's Account of Desire* or *Aristotle's Philosophy of Desire*. This is because, strictly speaking, Aristotle does not provide us with a specific worked-out account of desire. There is, for example, no text in the Aristotelian corpus, in the form in which it has been passed down to us, entitled *Peri Orexeôs*, *On Desire*.[1] The account I offer is, therefore, in part a piece of detective work. It involves piecing together Aristotle's views on desire from his various scattered remarks about the subject, in particular from his ethical and psychological works.

I should say why I think this task is a worthwhile one. First, I believe that many aspects of Aristotle's views about desire have either been misunderstood or received little or inadequate discussion. Although many commentators have provided interpretations of Aristotle's remarks about desire, frequently these interpretations are made in passing or at the service of understanding other parts of his thought.[2] Consequently, when the interpretations they have offered are put under close scrutiny, they often fail to portray Aristotle's views accurately. A second reason for undertaking this study, suggested by the first point, is the importance the concept of desire assumes in other key areas

[1] In *Sens*. 1, which refers to *De an*. as already completed (436b10), Aristotle lists desire as one of the attributes of animals that still needs to receive separate treatment (436a5–10), but no such treatment materialises in what follows, i.e. in the remainder of the corpus as it has come down to us (although we do find some germane discussion in *De motu an*.).

[2] There are exceptions, of course, as we shall see; but still Aristotle's views on desire have yet to receive the attention they deserve. This book attempts to remedy that to some extent.

of Aristotle's ethical and psychological thought. Desire seems either central or at least relevant to understanding his accounts of, for example, virtue, akrasia, choice (*prohairesis*), deliberation, voluntary action, moral education, and animal locomotion. It will therefore be important to get as clear an understanding as possible of Aristotle's views about desire, in so far as they may affect our interpretations of these other key aspects of his philosophy. Consequently, the results of my inquiry should be of interest to philosophers and classicists working on a variety of topics in Aristotle; and indeed to scholars concerned with the history of philosophy more generally, given the influence Aristotle's philosophy had on subsequent western thought. In addition, I believe that Aristotle's views about desire, especially in certain key areas, are of more than merely historical interest. Thus, a final motivation for considering Aristotle's ideas on this subject is provided by certain developments in contemporary philosophy, in particular the interest that the notion of desire has received in much contemporary work in ethics, the philosophy of action and the philosophy of mind. It has widely been thought that an understanding of desire is particularly important in so far as it is a state that sits between cognitive states, such as perception and thought, on the one hand, and action, on the other. This seems to make desire significant not only with respect to our understanding of how cognitive states can be translated into action, but also with respect to the mind–body relation itself, since desire, apparently a mental state, appears capable of issuing in physical output, i.e. action. Again, desire is significant in that it seems to be a state that we can share with non-rational animals, but which can have instances that are beyond the capabilities of such creatures (for example, the desire to buy a lottery ticket next Thursday). Furthermore, desire seems required to explain not only rational actions (for example, via choices), but also irrational actions, such as weak-willed behaviour. Indeed, desire seems significant for our understanding of the moral psychology of an agent more generally. Although discussing all the ways in which Aristotle's account may be of philosophical interest is beyond the scope of this book, I shall make a start in that direction in the last two chapters.

I should also say something about the general approach of this book. It is not my aim to provide a detailed analysis of all the texts in which Aristotle discusses desire (a large number, across many works of the corpus),[3] as if my book were a compendium of the relevant passages with commentary. Although my argument will obviously involve close examination of particular passages, my approach is thematically organised, with chapters attempting to ascertain a specific aspect of Aristotle's view. Of course, with this approach there is a danger of attributing to Aristotle a more systematically worked-out view than he in fact had. But (a) I firmly believe that in general the texts reveal a fairly systematic, worked-out, account of desire, and (b) any respects in which this is not the case can be accommodated by being prepared to acknowledge tensions in the account, and not insisting that Aristotle must always have ironed out every aspect of his theory. Indeed, at several points in my account (e.g. Chapters 4 and 7), I allow that various texts indicate different notions of a key idea or perhaps a change or development in Aristotle's view. Thus, although my general aim is to attempt to reconstruct the theory that seems latent in Aristotle's remarks, I seek to do so while remaining sensitive to the fact that in certain places it may only exist in embryonic form.

An additional point about method is that I shall not, for the most part, be concerned with attempting to trace the origin of Aristotle's views about desire from ideas he may have been influenced by. In particular, Aristotle's tripartite division of desire (epithumia, thumos, boulêsis) obviously owes much to Plato's tripartite analysis of the soul as developed especially in Book 4 of the *Republic*, but although the relation of Aristotle's ideas to Plato's will crop up from time to time in the chapters that follow, for the most part I shall just focus on what Aristotle has to say about the various desires. This is not because I think that the question of the relation of Aristotle's account to his predecessors' views is an uninteresting one, but rather because to attempt to integrate such discussion into my book more systematically would have made it grow exponentially.

[3] Although *NE*, *EE*, *De an*., *De motu an*. and *Rh*. harbour the great majority of the key passages.

2. Aristotle's desire terminology and some terms I shall leave untranslated

Aristotle's various desire-terms have received a number of different translations, and this can prove confusing for Greekless readers consulting translations or books about Aristotle's views. My general strategy in this book will be to explain Aristotle's various desire-terms in this section and then for the most part leave these key terms untranslated in unitalicised transliterations. This will have the positive consequence of introducing the key terms as technical ones to be fully specified by subsequent analysis, without having potentially misleading translations that could possibly push the investigation in a false direction or cloud an interpretation that would otherwise have revealed itself. Of course, the terms in question standardly have well-established meanings in everyday Greek (I shall supply a range of them as examples below), but in a work such as this we are attempting to specify Aristotle's account in a more precise way. Aristotle is a philosopher who employs his terminology in specific, often technical, ways – and he sometimes even appears to introduce his own terminology to specify a given phenomenon, as is perhaps the case with his broadest term for desire, orexis (see Chapter 1) – and so general Greek usage of the terms in question is of limited relevance. Indeed, most translations attempt to capture Aristotle's usage of a particular term, rather than more general Greek usage, but it is the former that is precisely what this study is attempting to ascertain. The best translations of Aristotle's key terms should, therefore, be something that would emerge from this study, rather than something presupposed by it.

I shall now indicate some of the common translations of Aristotle's key desire-terms. As mentioned, I shall transliterate these words. Although it is usual practice to italicise transliterated words, I shall refrain from doing so with these key terms (and a few others mentioned below), not only because it would make the book appear unnecessarily abundant with italicised words, but also because it would then make it difficult to use italics for emphasis. **Orexis** is Aristotle's most general term for desire, and indeed orexis has often been translated by 'desire', and I shall have cause to so translate it on occasion in this book. Other translations that have

been employed are 'appetite' and 'appetition'.[4] I shall also use the plural, **orexeis**.[5] Aristotle claims that orexis has three species: epithumia, thumos and boulêsis. We shall investigate what these desires pick out in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six. **Epithumia** is usually translated by 'appetite', but 'desire', 'bodily desire' and 'wanting' have also been used or suggested.[6] Again, I shall also use the plural, **epithumiai**.[7] Even with only two of Aristotle's desire-terms mentioned, we can quickly see one instance in which the translations can prove confusing, since 'appetite' and 'desire' have been used both for orexis and for epithumia. As mentioned, I shall generally be employing transliterated Greek, but when I do translate the terms, I shall use 'desire' for orexis, and 'appetite' for epithumia. **Thumos** has been variously translated by, for example, 'spirit', 'anger', 'temper', 'impulses of temper', 'passion' and 'emotion'.[8] Each of these can seem appropriate at some points. Equally, although it may seem somewhat surprising to readers with Greek, Aristotle also employs the plural, **thumoi**, on some occasions,[9] and it will prove useful for me to use it sometimes as well. As we shall see, thumos is closely associated with **orgê**, 'anger', a term I shall also leave untranslated in transliteration.[10] Aristotle's third species of orexis, **boulêsis**, is often translated by 'wish', but 'volition' and 'rational wish' have also been used.[11] As we shall see, 'wish' seems appropriate as a translation for 'boulêsis' only on certain occasions. Again, I shall also use the plural, **boulêseis**.[12]

[4] By e.g. *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. *De an.* 3.9–11 *passim*), Freeland (1994: *passim*) and Bostock (2000: 34).
[5] Aristotle employs this at e.g. *NE* 10.5.1175b30–31, *De an.* 1.5.411a28, 3.10.433b5, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a4.
[6] E.g. 'desire': Bostock (2000: 34); 'bodily desire': Crisp (2000); 'wanting': Hamlyn (1993).
[7] Aristotle uses this at e.g. *NE* 3.11.1118b8, 15, *De an.* 3.10.433b6, *Rh.* 1.10.1369a22, 1.11.1370a18.
[8] E.g. 'spirit': Bostock (2000: 34); 'anger': Mele (1984: 140), *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. at *EE* 2.10); 'temper': Broadie and Rowe (2002); 'impulses of temper': Broadie (1991: 106); 'passion': Hamlyn (1993), Hutchinson (1986: 75), Mele (1984: 140), *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984: e.g. *NE* 3.8), etc.; 'emotion': Irwin (1985), Sherman (1989: 65n.15).
[9] E.g. *Rh.* 2.13.1390a11, *Hist. an.* 8.1.588a23, *Part. an.* 2.4.651a2, †*Pr.* 27.3.947b23, cf. *Rh.* 2.12.1389a10.
[10] For more on orgê, see Chapter 5, n.2.
[11] E.g. 'volition': Kenny (1979:13); 'rational wish': Urmson (1988: 40).
[12] Aristotle uses this at e.g. *NE* 10.8.1178a30, *Soph. el.* 12.172b36, 173a2, *Rh.* 2.2.1378b18, 2.12.1389a8.

Aristotle also refers to capacities or faculties of the soul which issue in these desires. These are formed with a neuter article (*to*) and the termination '–ikon'. Again, I shall often leave these terms (but not their articles) untranslated and unitalicised. So I shall refer to the **orektikon**, the desiderative capacity; the **epithumêtikon**, the appetitive capacity; and the **thumikon**, the spirited capacity.[13] In the case of thumos, Aristotle sometimes also refers to the thumikon as the **thumoeides**.[14] With respect to the capacity that issues in boulêseis, Aristotle does not refer, as one might expect, to the **boulêtikon**, but he does sometimes refer instead to the **logistikon**, the rational capacity, or the part that has reason.[15] We shall investigate the sense in which boulêsis belongs to the logistikon in Chapter 7.

Aristotle also has words for objects of desire, terms that pick out 'the thing desired' in a way corresponding to each kind of desire he recognises. These are generally formed with a neuter article and the termination '–on'. Again, I shall often leave these terms (but not their articles) untranslated. So I shall refer to the **orekton** (pl. **orekta**) the object of desire; the **epithumêton** (pl. **epithumêta**), the object of epithumia; and the **boulêton** (pl. **boulêta**), the object of boulêsis.[16] I do not, however, find him using a term for the object of thumos.

Aristotle also uses verbal forms of his desires. These are sometimes awkward to translate. For example, in *NE* 3.12 Aristotle writes:

> The temperate man *epithumei* for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (1119b16–18)

[13] Orektikon: e.g. *De an*. 2.3.414a32, b1–2, 3.9.432b3, 3.10.433b10–11, *De motu an*. 6.701a1, *NE* 1.13.1102b30; epithumêtikon: e.g. *Top*. 2.7.113b2–4, 5.1.129a12–14, *De an*. 3.9.432b25–26, *NE* 1.13.1102b30, 3.12.1119b14–15; thumikon: e.g. *Top*. 5.1.129a12–15, *De an*. 3.9.432a25.

[14] E.g. *Top*. 2.7.113a36–b1, 4.5.126a8–10. Aristotle is following Plato (e.g. *Republic* 4).

[15] See e.g. *Top*. 4.5.126a13, *De an*. 3.9.432a25; cf. also *Rh*. 1.10.1369b7 (discussed in Chapter 7 below). Again, Aristotle is following Plato (e.g. *Republic* 4).

[16] Orekton: e.g. *De an*. 3.10.433a28, 433b11, *De motu an*. 6.700b24, *EE* 7.2.1235b25–27; epithumêton: *EE* 7.5.1239b26, *Metaph*. Λ.7.1072a27; *Rh*. 1.11.1371a3; boulêton: *NE* 3.4, *NE* 3.5.1113b3, *EE* 7.2.1235b26. Aristotle also uses *epithumêma* at *NE* 3.10.1118a13, 16, and *boulêma* at *NE* 9.6.1167b7.

As mentioned, the most common translation of epithumia is 'appetite'. But English does not have a verbal form of 'appetite' with the right connotations.[17] *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984) resorts to 'crave', in this instance, but that fails to reveal that this is the verbal form of the noun epithumia (which it translates as 'appetite'). However, rather than proliferate untranslated words beyond all limits, in this case I have adopted the strategy of translating verbal forms of the desires with noun phrases. So, in my hands, the above lines become:

> The temperate man has epithumiai (*epithumein*) for the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs. (1119b16–18)

Nonetheless, when I translate verbal forms in this way, I shall, as here, always mark the verbal form (in the infinitive) in brackets, so that the reader can track when I am simply rendering a noun in the original or translating a verbal form with a noun phrase.

We can, then, summarise Aristotle's key desire-terms that I shall leave untranslated as follows:

Desire	**Capacity of desire**	**Object of desire**
orexis (pl. orexeis)	orektikon	orekton (pl. orekta)
epithumia (pl. epithumiai)	epithumêtikon	epithumêton (pl. epithumêta)
thumos (pl. thumoi)	thumikon/thumoeides	
boulêsis (pl. boulêseis)	< logistikon >	boulêton (pl. boulêta)

I shall also leave a few other non-desire-terms untranslated and unitalicised throughout this book. First of these are **akrasia** ('incontinence', 'lack of self-control') and **enkrateia** ('continence', 'self-control'). Again, these terms have been translated in different ways by different commentators, and it seems to me less confusing to stick to the Greek terms. I shall also form adjectives from these nouns: **akratic** and **enkratic**. Second, I shall often

[17] 'Appetise' does exist (although it is rare), but it does not mean 'to have an appetite for', but 'to create or whet the appetite in'; cf. appeti*ser*.

leave **eudaimonia** (happiness, flourishing, well-being) untranslated for the same reason. Finally, for the same reason once again, I shall also leave **phantasia** ('imagination', 'appearance'), pl. **phantasiai**, and the object of phantasia, **phantasma** (imagining, representation), pl. **phantasmata**, untranslated. My understanding of Aristotle's notion of phantasia, at least in so far as I need it for this book, is explained in more detail in Chapter 2, §2.

The translations that appear in this book are usually modified versions of those that are found in *The Revised Oxford Translation* (Barnes 1984). Two notable exceptions are that my translations of *De anima* are based on Hamlyn (1993), again with a number of modifications, and my translations of *De motu animalium* are based on Nussbaum (1978), with modifications. Where the reader encounters translations from these works, he or she should assume that they are based on those versions. On the few occasions where my translations are based on some other source, I shall mark that either in a footnote or at the point of translation.

3. The plan of this book

I shall now provide a brief map of this book to help orientate the reader. The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, I provide some general reflections about the range of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis; consider his basic understanding of objects of desire and the means through which agents grasp them; and examine the general connection that he thinks holds between orexis and the good. In Chapter 1 I illustrate the range of states that Aristotle counts as orexeis by highlighting several dimensions to his usage of the term. Orexeis can be rational or non-rational (see below); can be for a variety of 'objects' ontologically speaking, e.g. actions, processes, states of affairs; can be occurrent psychological episodes, like feeling thirsty, or dispositional states, like a desire for health which may manifest itself in certain circumstances; can be emotionally felt states, as e.g. thirst or hunger can be, or calm passions, as e.g. a desire to learn something may be; and can range over action-prompting wants (e.g. a desire to get an

apple one sees on the other side of the room), hopes (e.g. that an athlete win a race) and wishes (e.g. that one is immortal).

In Chapter 2 I consider Aristotle's basic understanding of objects of desire. As I see it, by 'object of desire' (orekton) he does not mean to refer to the action or state of affairs desired since, without further specification, these lack the evaluative dimension that he thinks requisite. Instead, in a particular case, the object of desire picks out the action or state of affairs desired under the guise of a general desirability feature (or a more specific manifestation of that feature). On my reading, Aristotle thinks that desires require envisaging prospects or at least counterfactual scenarios, and so I argue against one commentator's claim that Aristotle would allow that some behaviour can be explained in terms of desire without reference to prospects. I also argue that Aristotle thinks that in order to grasp a prospect or counterfactual scenario the animal must at least possess the capacity of phantasia, since even if perception can by itself grasp prospects (on one reading it can, on another it cannot), it can only do so by employing phantasia in a perceptual predication. Thus I resist the view that Aristotle would allow that creatures that only possess the capacity of perception can nonetheless possess the capacity of desire.

In Chapter 3 I examine Aristotle's claim in *De an*. 3.10 that the general correlative object of orexis, the orekton, is 'the good or the apparent good'. Against some other interpretations, I argue that the context of Aristotle's discussion reveals that the 'apparent good' disjunct of this specification is required because creatures might be in error about what actually *is* good for them. 'Apparent good' thus refers to something appearing *as* good even if it is not in fact good. This might seem problematic: Aristotle's account of orexis is meant to apply to animal as well as human desire, and yet much of what he claims elsewhere suggests that he thinks that animals cannot desire things *as* good. I argue that the resolution to this problem is that Aristotle possesses two different notions of 'good', one which includes pleasure (and the object of the thumos), and one which does not, but instead picks out the object of boulêsis. Animals can desire things *as* good in the broad sense, since in this sense pleasure counts as a good, but it does not follow that they can desire things as good in the narrow sense, since to do

so may require rational capacities they lack. Aristotle sometimes claims that pleasure is an apparent good. I argue that this reveals that 'apparent good' does not signify 'something that appears good, even though in fact it *is* not', but rather 'something that appears good, even though it *may* not in fact be good'. And I specify the kind of error that Aristotle has in mind.

In Part II, I turn to consider Aristotle's classifications of desire. Aristotle sub-divides orexis along two axes; into the three species, epithumia, thumos and boulêsis; and into rational and non-rational orexeis. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6 I investigate the correlative objects of Aristotle's three species of orexis. Epithumia is orexis for the pleasant, but what range of pleasures can it aim at? I argue that in fact there are good textual grounds to think that Aristotle possesses two notions of epithumia. First, a narrow notion, in which it is connected to bodily pleasure, indeed, *specific kinds* of bodily pleasure, namely, those that are connected, whether directly or indirectly, to tactile pleasures that arise from ameliorating painful disruptive bodily states. Second, a broad notion, in which epithumia retains its connection to pleasure, but extends to include other kinds of bodily pleasures and also non-bodily pleasures besides, such as the pleasure of learning or victory. I close Chapter 4 by examining two different senses in which an epithumia can 'aim' at some object. This distinction enables me to explain a sense in which epithumia can 'aim' at things besides pleasure (e.g. noble things) even though in each instance it involves desiring its object *as* pleasant.

In Chapter 5 I consider thumos. I begin by examining the connection between thumos and orgê ('anger'). I argue that Aristotle often uses thumos and orgê as synonyms, and even when orgê is not explicitly mentioned his usage of thumos is frequently so closely tied to his official account of orgê in the *Rhetoric*, or the physical account of orgê we find in *De anima*, that it seems most likely that he has orgê in mind. I then consider some putative broader significations of thumos and, in particular, examine a role Aristotle may assign to thumos in the virtue of courage. I argue that there is a sense in which courage could, in at least many instances, be assigned to the thumoeides; but not because acts issuing from thumos would *eo ipso* count as virtuous, but rather owing to the fact