

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Aristotle on Desire

Desire is a central concept in Aristotle's ethical and psychological works, but he does not provide us with a systematic treatment of the notion itself. This book reconstructs the account of desire latent in his various scattered remarks on the subject and analyses its role in his moral psychology. Topics include: the range of states that Aristotle counts as desires (*orexeis*); objects of desire (*orekta*) and the relation between desires and envisaging prospects; desire and the good; Aristotle's three species of desire: *epithumia* (pleasure-based desire), *thumos* (retaliatory desire), and *boulêsis* (good-based desire – in a narrower notion of 'good' than that which connects desire more generally to the good); Aristotle's division of desires into rational and non-rational; Aristotle and some current views on desire; and the role of desire in Aristotle's moral psychology. The book will be of relevance to anyone interested in Aristotle's ethics or psychology.

GILES PEARSON is Lecturer in Philosophy at Bristol University. He has published a number of articles on Aristotle's ethics and philosophical psychology, and is co-editor of *Moral Psychology and Human Action in Aristotle* (with Michael Pakaluk, 2011).

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE CLASSICAL STUDIES

General editors

R. L. HUNTER, R. G. OSBORNE, M. MILLETT,
D. N. SEDLEY, G. C. HORROCKS,
S. P. OAKLEY, W. M. BEARD

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

ARISTOTLE ON DESIRE

GILES PEARSON



Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press,
New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107023918

© Faculty of Classics, University of Cambridge 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Pearson, Giles.

Aristotle on desire / Giles Pearson.

p. cm. – (Cambridge classical studies)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-02391-8 (hardback)

1. Aristotle. 2. Desire (Philosophy) I. Title.

B485.P385 2012

128'.4–dc23

2012015438

ISBN 978-1-107-02391-8 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in
this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	ix
Introduction	I
PART I DESIRES AND OBJECTS OF DESIRE	15
1 The range of states Aristotle counts as desires (<i>orexeis</i>)	17
2 Some general considerations about objects of desire (<i>orekta</i>) for Aristotle	33
3 Desire (<i>orexis</i>) and the good	62
PART II ARISTOTLE'S CLASSIFICATIONS OF DESIRE	89
4 Species of desire I: <i>epithumia</i> (pleasure-based desire)	91
5 Species of desire II: <i>thumos</i> (retaliatory desire)	111
6 Species of desire III: <i>boulêsis</i> (good-based desire)	140
7 Rational and non-rational desire	170
PART III FURTHER REFLECTIONS	199
8 Some reflections about Aristotle's broad and narrow notions of desire	201
9 Aristotle's moral psychology	227
<i>Bibliography</i>	256
<i>General index</i>	263
<i>Index locorum</i>	269

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-02391-8 - Aristotle on Desire
Giles Pearson
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PREFACE

This book is distant descendant of a Ph.D. I completed at Cambridge University in January 2004. The book bears only a superficial resemblance to the original thesis, however. Half of the chapters do not correspond to anything in the dissertation, and although the spirit and some of the organisation of the thesis is apparent in Part II, very few of the conclusions or the details in the argumentation have survived in that part either.

A number of people have greatly helped me at various points in writing this book. First, the scholars who supervised the initial Ph.D.: Gisela Striker, who inspired my interest in Aristotle's moral psychology, Robert Wardy and Malcolm Schofield, the latter skilfully guiding me through the last year or so and the tricky final stages. Second, the thesis examiners, who provided detailed and thought-provoking comments (both in discussion and in writing) on the Ph.D.: Sarah Broadie and Nick Denyer. Third, the initial readers for Cambridge University Press for their extensive written comments: David Sedley and Michael Reeve. Fourth, David Sedley once again for reading and commenting on the penultimate version. Fifth, a good number of other people who have either provided me with written comments on parts or sections of the material (whether directly in this form or in much earlier guises), or helped me through discussion on particular matters at various points: Harry Adamson, Peter Adamson, Arif Ahmed, David Charles, Angela Chew, Ursula Coope, Jimmy Doyle, Jessica Moss and Michael Pakaluk. I also received helpful feedback on material that fed into this book at certain points from audiences at Bristol, Oxford and UCL and thank them for their comments.

I have also received support from a number of different institutions along the way: St John's College, Cambridge; Christ's College, Cambridge; the AHRB; the AHRC; and Bristol University. In particular, I would like to thank the AHRC and Bristol University for

PREFACE

the financial support that allowed me to have research leave for the academic year 2009–10, enabling me finally to bring the project to fruition, and my colleagues in the Philosophy Department at Bristol for supporting my leave.

Finally, I would like to thank a number of people for their personal support over the years I have composed this book: my parents, the rest of my family and friends, and above all Olga Simakova. I would also like to thank my mother, Maureen Pearson, for compiling the Index locorum.

I have spent a fair bit of time thinking about Aristotle's views on desire and motivation over a number of years and my ideas have certainly transformed over this period. I cannot help but feel that if I spent another five or ten years thinking about the topic, I would be able to write a much better book still. But, in the words of my old supervisor Malcolm Schofield (and of course Shakespeare), 'that way madness lies'.

As we shall see, Aristotle thinks that desire extends far beyond bodily appetites – he includes rational motivations and even hopes and wishes as desires – but the statue on the cover of this book – a copy of Praxiteles' *Aphrodite* – provides a particularly poignant reminder of the power of bodily desire. The original statue (which is now lost) was acquired by the city of Knidos in the mid-fourth century BC and attracted so much attention that the city became famous on its account alone. Indeed, it appears to have driven some of those who first encountered it wild with desire: Pliny reports that a certain man was so 'seized by love' for the statue that one night he hid himself in the temple where it was housed and 'embraced' it, and that consequently 'a spot bears witness to his desire'.

ABBREVIATIONS

For works of Aristotle

‘†’ = dubious

<i>An. post.</i>	<i>Analytica posteriora</i>
<i>De an.</i>	<i>De anima</i>
<i>De motu an.</i>	<i>De motu animalium</i>
<i>EE</i>	<i>Ethica Eudemia</i>
<i>Gen. an.</i>	<i>De generatione animalium</i>
<i>Hist. an.</i>	<i>Historia animalium</i>
<i>Insomn.</i>	<i>De insomniis</i>
<i>Int.</i>	<i>De interpretatione</i>
<i>Mem.</i>	<i>De memoria et reminiscentia</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>Ethica Nicomachea</i>
<i>Part. an.</i>	<i>De partibus animalium</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politica</i>
† <i>Pr.</i>	<i>Problemata</i>
<i>Rh.</i>	<i>Rhetorica</i>
<i>Sens.</i>	<i>De sensu et sensibili</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somno et vigilia</i>
<i>Soph. el.</i>	<i>Sophistici elenchi</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica</i>