Aristotle on Phantasia

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Research Article

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Abstract: Born as φαντασία (*phantasia*) in Greek philosophy, the concept of imagination that today we understand from has a different meaning and contains different functions. This study attempts to reveal the conceptual contents and functions by examining the conceptual transformation of the concept in Ancient Greece and Aristotle's terminology and epistemological function.

Keywords: Aristotle, phantasia, imagination, On the Soul, Ancient Greek philosophy.

Introduction

The concept of imagination is one of the concepts that have undergone many contextual changes in the history of philosophy. The first conceptualizations take place in Ancient Greece Philosophy. However, the concept born as $\phi\alpha\nu\tau\alpha\sigma(\alpha$ (phantasia) in Ancient Greek Philosophy contains different meanings and functions than we understand from imagination today.

This study, which will examine the concept of imagination tries to reveal the conceptual content and functions, considering the birth of the concept in Ancient Greece, the terminology of Aristotle, and the contextual transformation of the epistemological function.

The Concept of Phantasia in Pre-Aristotle Period

Phantasia-phantasma means "to make visible" in general and derived from the verb of phantazein. The concept used before Plato in Ancient Greek philosophy is included in an epistemological discussion for the first time with Plato. There is no clear distinction between impression, image/phantasmata, sensation/aisthesis and phantasia in the pre-Socratic period.¹

There is no terminology of the concept of *phantasia* in Plato. Although concepts such as looking, appearing, being visible, which derive from the same root as *phantasia* in Plato frequently pass, phantasia is very rare.² By addressing the passages in *Theaitetos* and the *Sophist* dialogues, which are frequently used in studies related to *phantasia* to show the position of *phantasia* in Plato in epistemological discussions, Plato has some unexplained gaps in Aristotle, as will be seen in later chapters.

In the section where the Protagorean arguments in the *Theaitetos* dialogue are discussed, Socrates says:

Thus, temperature and appearance (phantasia) and perception

Ahmet Emre Dağtaşoğlu, "Antik Yunan Felsefesi'nde 'Fantasia'nın Epistemolojik Rolü," FLSF Felsefe ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi 17 (2014), 266.

² Dağtaşoğlu, "Antik Yunan Felsefesi'nde 'Fantasia'nın Epistemolojik Rolü," 267.

(aisthesis) are the same for all such situations. Because how a person perceives something should be so for him. 3

Although *phantasia* and *aisthesis* are used side by side here, since the subject is discussed within the framework of Protogorasian claims, no clear information can be obtained from this passage about how Plato establishes a connection between *phantasia* and *aisthesis*. So, it is necessary to look at *Sophist*, another dialog where Plato deals with phantasia. Here at the *Sophist*, we quote the passage he tries to reveal the distinction and partnership between *dianoia*, *doxa* and *phantasia*:

Stranger: What more? Whether thinking (*dianoia*), opinion (*doxa*) and representation (*phantasia*) are false or true, are these not all types of events that occur in our souls?

Theaetetus: How?

Stranger: First, if you grasp what each of them is and how they differ, then you will understand this more easily.

Theaetetus: Come on, tell me!

Stranger: So, thinking and speaking (logos) are the same thing. The first, however, is that he speaks to himself in the soul, without sound. So, we call it "thinking".

Theaetetus: No doubt.

Stranger: On the other hand, flushing out of the soul and getting out from the mouth is called speech.

Theaetetus: Right.

Stranger: And there is something else known in the speech.

Theaetetus: What?

Stranger: Benevolence.

Theaetetus: Yes, we know that.

Stranger: This means that if it is formed by thinking directly without making any noise in the soul, it can only be stated as opinion.

Theaetetus: Exactly.

³ Platon, *Theaitetos*, Tr. trans. Birdal Akar (Ankara: Bilgesu Yayıncılık, 2016), 32.

Stranger: Now, if such a phenomenon is formed in the soul not only on its own, but through reverse perception, then "visual representation (*phantasia*)" is the only true symptom for him.

Theaetetus: Of course.

Stranger: Now there is a true and false statement (*logos*); thinking in this field, the soul talking to itself; the thought is the result of thinking; As we call "visual representation" (*phainatai*), these phenomena must be partly and in some cases necessarily wrong in terms of being related to speech and relativity as they are seen as a combination of perception (*aisthesis*) and opinion.⁴

Plato associates the concepts of thinking, perception and phantasia with the occurrence in the soul. If the phenomenon in the soul occurs because of a perception, it is called *phantasia*. Phainatai, the product of phantasia, is seen as a combination of perception and opinion, neither is necessarily true nor necessarily false. It can be right or wrong. In addition, thoughts may occur spontaneously in the soul, phantasia occurs in the soul through perception, that is, it is presented in a close relationship with the sensation. We chose to quote the context of the dialogue as it is, in order to understand the criticisms brought by Aristotle as a combination of perception and opinion of phantasia. However, it should not be forgotten that Plato's view of phantasia was effective in Aristotle's definitions of phantasia and that the terminology of the concept was built on this view. The proofs related to this will be given in the section where we discuss Aristotle's concept of phantasia.

Plato divides the art of painting (*eidolopoiike*) into two styles immediately after the chapter on phantasia for the *Sophist* dialogue. One of them is copying (*eikastike*), and the other is art (*phantastike*).⁵ In Plato's *Republic*, he talks about the concepts of *eikone* and *eikasia*, which come from the same root as eikastike. Their distinction with *phantasia* and *phantasma* is as follows:

⁴ Platon, Sofist, Tr. trans. Ömer Naci Soykan (İstanbul: Pinhan Yayıncılık, 2015), 288-9.

⁵ Platon, *Sofist*, 292.

while *phantasia* and *phantasma* belong to our mind, *eikasia* and *eikone* are their counterparts in external objects. The possibility of being evaluated in terms of epistemologically true-false value pair by considering *phantasia* in terms of the sense within the context of the meaning in the effort to find the sophist in the sophisticated dialogue, this time coincides with the fact that it finds an equivalent in the ontological view as an eikon, and its real representation. The quality of the sophist's showing as if it is true is in harmony with Aristotle's effort to place phantasia between sensations and thoughts, as we will see later, as attributed to *phantasia*.

The Concept of Phantasia in Aristotle

Compared to the previous period, the concept of phantasia in Aristotle is defined more clearly, and its functions are made more distinctive. However, despite efforts to develop this terminology, there are uncertainties about how phantasia works in Aristotle and whether it has a mental ability independent of other abilities. Even Aristotle expresses this uncertainty as follows:

But assuming that there are separate divisions in the soul, the imaginative part (phantastikon) which we cannot easily tell with which is identical with and which one is different.⁷

Aristotle, who uses *phantastikon* here for the faculty of imagination, usually uses *phantasma* as the product of *phantasia*. However, it is stated that Aristotle used *phantasia* to include all three meanings.⁸ Unlike Plato, in Aristotle, *phantasia* is distinctively clearly separated from aisthesis, dianoia, and doxa, but is functionally presented in close contact with aisthesis and dianoia. "It is clear that my imagination is neither a thought nor a belief: it really depends on us, our imagination …" Aristotle says on the other hand, "When it comes to the dianoetic spirit, the

⁶ Dağtaşoğlu, "Antik Yunan Felsefesi'nde 'Fantasia'nın Epistemolojik Rolü," 270.

Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, Tr. trans. Zeki Özcan (Ankara: Sentez Yayıncılık, 2014), 185.

⁸ Dağtaşoğlu, "Antik Yunan Felsefesi'nde 'Fantasia'nın Epistemolojik Rolü," 271.

⁹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 155

imaginations replace it with sensation"¹⁰ and thus he makes the thought that makes inference impossible without fantasy.

According to Aristotle, *phantasia* takes its name from light (*phaos*); because it is impossible to see without light. Due to the consistency of images and their resemblance to sensations, animals perform many acts with the effect of imagination. ¹¹ Due to the similarity and tight relation between sensation and imagination in Aristotle, it is necessary to start with sensation in order to fully understand the concept and function of imagination. Because there is no image without sensation.

In Aristotle, senses cannot create a sensation without external sensible. 12 In Peri Psukhe He explains that the concept of "sensible" refers to three types of objects. While two of these objects can be perceived by the way of itself, the third is accidentally perceivable. In general, the three objects of sensible in Aristotle can be divided into private sensible (idia aistheta), common sense (koina aistheta) and accidental sensible (aistheta kata sumbebekos). Private sensible is a special kind of sensation that is not sensed by any sense other than its own sense and that it is impossible to be mistaken about it.¹³ These are the five senses that have their own objects. For example, the eye cannot sense a sound, the eye can sense a color. Sound can be heard by hearing. Private sensible have a sense organ corresponding to each sensation. However common sense is common to every sense, although they are not specific to any sense. These are motion, stagnation, number, form and magnitude.¹⁴ Aristotle says "Every sensation judges at least about their own senses, and even if it is wrong about the nature and location of the colored object, it is not wrong about the presence of color or sound."15 He states that it is not possible to be mistaken in private sensible, and that

¹⁰ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 177.

¹¹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 161.

¹² Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 95.

¹³ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 102.

¹⁴ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 103.

¹⁵ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 102.

common sense makes us open to error. Aristotle's example of accidental sensible is the perception of white as the son of Diaries. ¹⁶ It is possible to know that a singular which is open to our sensation is known in a singularity by sensed accidentally. When a table is known as a table, it happens when it is perceived together with its accidents. While the color of the table is sensed as private sensible and the shape is perceived as common sense, it is realized by the recognition of the table as a table and its difference from other tables is perceived as accidental sensible. These last two objects of the sensible (common sense and accidental perceptions) will serve as a basis for the possibility of being mistaken in the thought caused by *phantasia*.

In Aristotle, the sense is the accumulation place of substanceless forms.¹⁷ The function of storing these substanceless forms is performed by *phantasia*. Scheiter makes the subject clear with an excerpt from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Aristotle says:

Thus, what we call the memory comes from the sensation, and experience is constituted by the memory of something repeated many times. Now, the principle of art as related to being, and the principle of science as existence, is derived from experience (that is, as a unity and wholeness in all particular matters, except in plurality and as a unity, entirely calm in spirit).¹⁸

According to Scheiter, the memory here is the function of preserving sensory perceptions, which is the function of *phantasia* in Aristotle. Mneme was used by Plato to see the same function that Arsitotle gave to *phantasia*. In the *Theaetetus* dialogue, Socrates likens the recall in the "wax bump" metaphor to a stamping process, which is the "imagination" itself. This wax metaphor, which we will remember from Descartes, is also used

¹⁶ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 103.

¹⁷ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 132.

Aristoteles, İkinci Analitikler, Tr. trans. Hamdi Ragip Atademir (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1996), 135.

¹⁹ Krisanna M. Scheiter, "Images, Appearence and *Phantasia* in Aristotle," *Phronesis: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy* 57 (2012), 262.

²⁰ Platon, *Theaitetos*, 102.

to explain the material-sensible forms with the trace left by the sensible in Aristotle.²¹

Another perspective of phantasia is in the section of Peri Psukhe's "Hearing and Sound". The determinative condition of sound in Aristotle is that solid objects hit each other and vibrate the air.²² Describing hearing as a physical event, Aristotle distinguishes between the human voice (phone) and the physical sound (psophon). Although physical conditions such as impact and air vibration are required for the human voice to emerge, the difference between human beings and other creatures is that they can make meaningful sounds. In addition to physical conditions, the soul plays an active role in the emergence of this meaningful voice. According to him, the human voice is a certain voice of the living being. In reality, none of the inanimate beings have a pronounced voice.²³ However, even though the voice becomes when breath hits what we call the trachea, and the reason for this impact is the soul found in these parts of the body. Not every sound (psophon) made by the animal is a voice (phone). The noise we make with our tongue or cough is not a voice. What is necessary for the voice is that the colliding body is alive and any representation accompanies it. Because the voice is definitely a meaningful sound and it differs from being just a noise of air like a cough.²⁴ According to Portelli, the reason for the impact here is phantasia, which is meant by the soul.²⁵ Because this function can only be achieved thanks to phantasia that Aristotle has clearly stated that a representation accompanies this multiplication with the colliding living thing.

Victor Carson stated the functions Aristotle uploaded to *phantasia* and why he needed this concept, "Why Aristotle needs imagination?" in his work, *phantasia* as an aid in explaining the

²¹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 132.

²² Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 113.

²³ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 115.

²⁴ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 117.

²⁵ John Peter Portelli, *The Concept of Imagination in Arsitotle and Avicenna*, MA Dissertation (Montreal: McGill University, 1979), 16.

possibility of error in thinking. The foundations of Carson's argument are found in Peri Psukhe's "Thought, Perception, Imagination-Imaging Analysis" section. In this episode, Aristotle criticizes the arguments that identify thinking (noein) and perception and subject them to a theoretical refutation. By extracting from Empedocles and Homer, he summarizes those arguments that they identify the thinking and perception as the same and thinking is also a material thing, perceive and think with a similar likeness.26 However, perception and thinking with similar analogues are insufficient to explain the error that is encountered many times in animals. Accordingly, two conclusions can be reached: Either all appearances are correct, or the reason for the mistake is related to the unlike.²⁷ While thoughts can be true or false, the truth of the sensation belonging to private sensible cannot be doubted. So how can thinking and perception be identical? According to Aristotle, this is impossible. While the sensation is true and common to all animals, though thinking may be wrong, it is found only in beings that take a share from the logos. So, if our senses are true, and thinking cannot function without senses, how is the contingency of being true or false in our thoughts explained? At this point, Aristotle places phantasia in the middle of thinking and sensation. Phantasia is something separate from both sensation and thinking. However, there is no phantasia without sensation, and judgment is not possible without phantasia.28 It becomes clear from here that phantasia has neither thought nor sensation nor belief. It functions as a synthesis that constitutes the source of the error between the accuracy of our senses and the possibility of inaccuracy in thinking. In the words of Aristotle, "Phantasia is an ability or a situation that makes us think that our judgment is right and wrong."29 Aristotle also talks about the correlation of appearances with falseness in *Metaphysics* and refers to *phantasia*:

²⁶ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 153.

²⁷ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 154.

²⁸ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 154.

²⁹ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 156.

"Fake" or "false" [pseudos] are used on the one hand as the "wrong thing"... on the other hand, it is something that does not exist or seems to exist (such as a perspective picture or dreams, indeed, they are something, but what they dream of not). So things are called "false" or "fake" in these contexts: either because they appear to exist even if they don't exist, or because they appear to be something they don't have.³⁰

According to Aristotle, if there is no sensation, we cannot learn and understand anything. However, the use of reason comes with an image. In this state, images resemble sensations.³¹ Aristotle also reveals the most obvious difference that makes it clear that Phantasia is not sensation. Actually, sensing is either potential or actual, such as the sense of sight or the act of seeing. However, the image can be found even if it is not one or the other of the sense of seeing or the act of seeing. These are the images we perceive in sleep. Sensation always exists, however, phantasia is not so. Sensation and phantasia are not identical. If they were identical, phantasia should have been present in all animals, just as the sensation was found in all animals. However, according to Aristotle, phantasia is not found in all animals (such as ants, bees). Another distinction is that the sensations (in the field of private sensible) are always true, and the images are often false. Phantasia cannot be a process that can always be true as knowledge and understanding Since phantasia can be false.32 So how does this error occur? How can images be true and sometimes false?

At this point, it is necessary to remember the three types of sensors that are explained earlier. These three objects of sensation underlie the fact that images are sometimes true and sometimes false. The sensation of private sensible is always true in Aristotle. Unless there is a deficiency or disease in the sense or-

³⁰ Aristoteles, *Metafizik*, Tr. trans. Y. Gurur Sev (İstanbul: Pinhan Yayıncılık, 2017), 131.

³¹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 183.

³² Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 156-7.

gans, there is no error in them. I cannot perceive green as red. But I can be wrong about which object is green or red. The reason for this error is movement, number, etc. like common sense. It is also possible to be wrong in the senses that I perceive accidentally. I can be wrong about whether this person from afar is Kleonos' son. Phantasia, which Aristotle referred to by saying "... the act that actually occurs with the effect of sensation...", varies according to whether it comes from one or the other of these three types of sensations. The first (private sensible) is correct as long as there is sensation; Whether sensation exists or not and especially when sensible is far away, others will be wrong.³³ Thus, the definition of *phantasia* takes the form of "a movement created by the sensible sensation". Therefore, phantasia cannot be realized without any sensation, cannot exist without any sensation, and belongs to the sensing beings and must be true or false.

Continuing a Platonic discussion, Aristotle continues the discussion by leaving Plato. So, it remains to discuss whether phantasia is an opinion or not (doxa) because it can be right or wrong. According to him, opinion coexists with belief, because it is impossible for the person who does not believe his opinion. However, phantasia is found in many animals, no belief is encountered. From here, Aristotle concludes that *phantasia* cannot be an opinion adjacent to sensation, opinion created by sensation, and a combination of opinion and sensation. But we also perceive unreal things about which we have a true belief. Aristotle gives the example of the sun here. In this example, which we will also remember from Descartes, it is about the conflict of the image of the sun in us and the opinion we have acquired about the sun. The diameter of the Sun appears to us one foot, and yet we firmly believe that the Sun is larger than the world we live on.³⁴ Based on the image of the Sun, this would be quite misleading if we had a view of the Sun. What will lead us to the right opinion here will

³³ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 160.

³⁴ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 157-8.

be to conclude about the sun by making an inference.

One of *phantasia*'s most important functions in Aristotle emerges in its relationship with the practical reason (nous praktikos) and will (oreksis). When the sensible object is pleasant or annoying, the soul, which is the source of some kind of affirmation or denial, pursues or escapes the sensible object. When the sensible object is accompanied by pleasure or pain, the sensation about it cannot judge good or bad. Making these judgments is the job of the practical reason. In the dianoetic spirit, imagery replaces sensation, and when this soul approves or denies good or evil, it escapes or watches. Therefore, the soul can never think without an image.35 Practical reason (nous praktikos) thinks of the forms in images and decides what to pursue and why to escape. By perceiving that a torch is from fire and seeing it move, we know with the help of common sense that the torch informs that an enemy is approaching. On the other hand, we predict future events based on current events by images in the soul or more. And when we judge what makes it nice or not, we run away from it or go after it.36 As can be seen, here the phantasia has a central position on the road to actions. Actions are a kind of movement, and each movement is based on a specific goal. Whether the goal of the object is nice or annoying, there is a desire or disgust against it. If the request occurs, it is followed by the goal of the object, and if there is disgust or scare, the goal of the object is removed.

Aristotle asks "What gives the animal the movement to move?" This is not nutritious because there is no progression in plants. This movement in animals is always done for a goal³⁷ because the movement is the action of incomplete.³⁸ This movement is accompanied by phantasia or desire; because unless an animal wants an object and runs away from it, it will not move if

³⁵ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 177-8.

³⁶ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 180-1.

³⁷ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 186.

³⁸ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 177.

there is nothing that forces it.³⁹ What moves it is not what we call mind. Because theoretical reasoning thinks of nothing to do with practice, and while the movement of progress is always the movement of the being that avoids or follows anything, this mind does not say anything about what to avoid and watch. There is a fundamental difference in action between animals and humans. While animals move according to appetite, humans can choose the way of behaving restraint using his reason and do what he wants.⁴⁰ So the moving abilities can be divided into two: will and practical reason.

Every will is a tool of goal because what the object of the will is the principle of practical reason.⁴¹ Actually what is desired moves, and therefore practical reason moves, since its principle is desirable. Aristotle, who said, "There is only one principle that moves, the ability to will"42, though he seems to be in contradiction with his explanation that divides the moving abilities into two, in fact, he sees that as the main reason for the movement, which has various forms in various abilities. He diversifies oreksis as epithumia, thumos and boulesis, saying "If we divide the soul into three parts, the request will take place in all three parts". 43 These are all varieties of willingness, and they appear in different abilities. "The source of epithumia, thumos and boulesis is oreksis," says Aristotle.44 While Epithumia is about delightful sensual things, thumos appear in our desires about anger, which is often non-reasonable. Boulesis, on the other hand, is the mental will that involves the process of thinking and moving and approaches the conscious choice, proairesis. In this context, the reason for the movement is linked to oreksis, which includes all three types of will. Because practical reason does not move without desire. Boulesis is actually a form of will, and when we act as

³⁹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 186.

⁴⁰ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 187.

⁴¹ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 188.

⁴² Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 189.

⁴³ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 186.

⁴⁴ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 83.

a result of reasoning, we act according to *boulesis*. Apart from that, *oreksis* can move outside of reasoning, because *epithumia* is also a variant of will. However, practical reason is always right, *phantasia* is sometimes right and sometimes unfair. But it can be either real goodness or seemingly goodness. Because practical good is contingent and otherwise.⁴⁵

To the extent that it is equipped with the will, the animal moves on its own; But if the animal does not have *phantasia*, it has no desire, and every *phantasia* is either rational or sensory. Other than humans, animals get a share from sensory *phantasia* (*phantasia aisthetike*). ⁴⁶ The reasonable *phantasia* (controversial) is found in intelligent beings. Animals do not have rational judgment, because they do not have this reasonable *phantasia* (*phantasia bouletike* or *logistike*). However, this *phantasia* includes judgment. ⁴⁷

Conclusion

Phantasia cannot function without sensation. It is therefore found only in animals. However, it is still not found in some animals. One of phantasia's primary duties is to preserve the forms that are subject to sensory perception. Phantasia is neither sensation nor belief nor thinking. It stands between sensation and thinking.

Standing between perception and thinking *phantasia* provides the opportunity to explain the error in thoughts. If the sensations are right and the thinking is wrong, there must be another skill that reveals the error. There is no error in sensations (private sensible). *Phantasia* operate in the field of common and accidental sensible. As it is obvious from the hearing and sound part, *phantasia* functions as a synthesis by making the senses into a meaningful whole.

Phantasia is oriented towards the past with its closeness to

⁴⁵ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 189.

⁴⁶ Aristoteles, Ruh Üzerine, 191.

⁴⁷ Aristoteles, *Ruh Üzerine*, 192.

memory, to the present with its derivation from sensation, and to its future by making meanings by self-processing. Dianoetic soul cannot think without images. In this sense, the object of thinking is images.

Phantasia is either rational or sensory. It can be diversified by taking a share from both reason and sensation. Phantasia has a close relationship with oreksis. Without images, there is no will. There is also no act without voluntary action. Therefore, it also provides a basis for actions.

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