

ARISTOTLE

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DE ANIMA

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND COMMENTARY BY

CHRISTOPHER
SHIELDS

GENERAL EDITOR LINDSAY JUDSON

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Near the beginning of his *De Anima*, Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) remarks with an arresting candour that ‘Grasping anything trustworthy concerning the soul is completely and in every way among the most difficult of affairs’ (*De Anima* I 1 402a10–11). This judgement is striking not least because *De Anima* is a fully mature work, most likely written near the end of Aristotle’s life, during his second stay in Athens, when he was director of his own school, the Lyceum (334–323 B.C.). If that is correct, then this appraisal issues from a thinker of surpassing depth and acumen who had spent virtually all of his adult life engaged in philosophical inquiry and biological investigation, a great bulk of which took as its subject matter the nature and faculties of living beings.

Aristotle thus regards his task in *De Anima* as a formidable one. This may be due in part to his refusing to limit consideration of the soul to the human soul alone. Rather, he presumes that because the soul is a principle of life in general, any investigation into the soul (*psuchê* in Greek, or *anima* in Latin) will need to consider all animate beings, that is, all living beings, including plants and animals no less than humans. This he does in *De Anima*, even devoting some energy to determining the nature of life itself along the way. In this sense, the subject matter of this work is broad in scope, broader than either the modern discipline of psychology or contemporary philosophy of mind, with whose domains of inquiry *De Anima* has only a partial, if instructive, overlap. Aristotle seeks to uncover the nature of soul and its relation to the body; to explore perception and the perceptual faculties; to explain the character of representation in thought; to analyse thinking and the nature of mind; to assay the aetiology of human action; to characterize the nature of life; and to do all of this in a historically informed manner sensitive to the *phaenomena*, that is, to the governing appearances pertaining to living systems and their distinctively psychological traits. It is for these reasons understandable that Aristotle should find his undertaking in *De Anima* a daunting one.

I. THE PLACE OF *DE ANIMA* IN THE ARISTOTELIAN CORPUS

Any determination of the degree to which Aristotle succeeds in meeting the demanding tasks he sets for himself in *De Anima* will be, inevitably, a matter of exegetical and critical controversy. Fortunately, whatever determinations we make, it remains clear that he brings his most sophisticated philosophical framework to bear on the issues he investigates. Judged by the terms of the psychological theory and the overarching framework within which he espouses it, Aristotle's *De Anima* clearly belongs to the last phase of his productive life. The case for treating *De Anima* as a late work of Aristotle is threefold: (i) inter-textual references to other works in the corpus recommend a relatively late date;¹ (ii) the technical vocabulary seems to place it in association with other presumptively late works;² and most importantly, (iii) the content of the theory propounded draws regularly upon the highly technical apparatus of hylomorphism characteristic of Aristotle's late period.³

¹ *De Anima* contains possible back references to two early Aristotelian dialogues, *De Philosophia* (404b19) and *Eudemus* (407b29); and fairly clear references to both *Gen. et Cor.* (417a1 and 423b29) and *Phys.* (417a17). Back references, or apparent back references, to *De Anima* are almost exclusively confined to works deemed to be late, primarily the *Parva Naturalia*: *De Sensu* (436a1–5, 436b10, b14, 437a18, 438b3, 439a8, a18, 440b28); *De Mem.* (449b3); *De Somno* (454a11, 455a8, a24); *De Insom.* (459a15); *De Iuv.* (467b13); *De Resp.* (474b11); as well as *Motu Anim.* (700b5, 21) and *Gen. An.* (736a37, 786b25, 788b2). There is also a clear but apparently anomalous reference to *De Anima* in a work commonly regarded as early, *De Interp.* (16a8).

² Crucial in this respect is the frequent use of the word 'actuality' (*entelecheia*), a term key to Aristotle's statement of his own positive view of soul and body. Strikingly, the word *entelecheia* is absent in the *Organon*. Of all Aristotle's works, it occurs most commonly in *DA* (thirty-four times), but also figures prominently in the *Phys.* (twelve times), the *Met.* (twelve times), and *Gen. et Cor.* (fifteen times). It shows up twice in *Gen. An.* and once each in *DC*, *Meteor.*, and *De Part.* The general fact of the frequency of this diction was noticed already by Zeller (1879) and emphasized by Ross as well (1961), though neither charts its frequency accurately.

³ These criteria omit by design the vexed question of whether Aristotle's hylomorphism embraces, eschews, or is indifferent to some manner of cardio-centrism, that is a view according to which the soul has a specific bodily location, namely the heart. According to an influential study of Nuyens (1948), one can discern a clear development in Aristotle's psychology along this dimension. Nuyens agreed with Poppelreuter (1892) in holding that *De Anima* is positively

While no one of these points secures a late date for *De Anima* unquestionably, taken corporately they do suggest that the work is a mature production, one whose understanding and assessment consequently require a prior familiarity with the basic tenets of Aristotle's technical vocabulary and his most highly developed philosophical theory. Indeed, in one sense, little pertaining to a contemporary assessment of the theses propounded in *De Anima* turns crucially on the question of its dating relative to the rest of Aristotle's considerable output. It is, however, prudent to appreciate that *De Anima* draws freely on the technical terminology and apparatus developed, sometimes haltingly, in Aristotle's other theoretical works. Most important in this regard is that *De Anima* makes heavy use of the principles of *hylomorphism*, including centrally the paired notions of: (i) *form* (*eidos* or *morphê*) and *matter* (*hylê*) and (ii) *actuality* (*energeia* or *entelechia*, the latter of which is sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes not with the former) and *potentiality* (*dunamis*). It is accordingly necessary to have a ready grasp of these sometimes complex concepts before a proper appraisal of the theories of *De Anima* can be undertaken.

incompatible with cardiocentrism, which they both further understood to be an indication that it eschews that presumptively more primitive view and thus must represent a later phase of Aristotle's development. Nuyens might be criticized (and indeed *has* been criticized by Block (1961) and more recently by Tracy (1983)) on a number of grounds. First and foremost is the question of whether in *De Anima* Aristotle in fact and intentionally rejects cardiocentrism, but then also whether—whatever Aristotle's view of the matter—hylomorphism is in fact consistent with the localization of the soul, as, for instance, already in antiquity Alexander of Aphrodisias understood it to be (*DA* 23.6–24.10, 38.15–66.8, 100.13–17). Deuretzbacher (2014) considers the evidence and argues (i) that Alexander is himself a cardiocentrist; (ii) that he ascribes the same view to Aristotle's *De Anima*; and (iii) that he is right to do so—that Aristotle is himself a cardiocentrist, and so, under pains of inconsistency, must regard cardiocentrism as consistent with hylomorphism after all. Given these controversies, while the philosophical question of whether hylomorphism is compatible with any manner of localization retains a great interest, any attempt to date *De Anima* predicated upon these contentions should be set aside as at best inconclusive. As a purely philosophical matter, it is instructive, if unsurprising, that allied questions about localizations—of properties such as being alive, of thoughts, of emotions, of pains, of consciousness, and so forth—continue to exercise philosophers and psychologists down to the present day.

II. SOME PRINCIPLES OF HYLOMORPHIC EXPLANATION

When approaching his investigation into the soul and its faculties, Aristotle draws upon a highly nuanced metaphysical framework whose basic tenets are easily grasped but whose applications and extensions are sometimes vexing. This is, indeed, all the more true given that in *De Anima* itself Aristotle develops and refines some of his basic technical apparatus, in some instances straining his terminology almost beyond recognition. Thus, for instance, when he puts forth his most general account, Aristotle contends that the soul is a ‘first actuality of a natural organic body’ (*DA* II 1, 412b5–6), that it is a ‘substance as form of a natural body which has life in potentiality’ (*DA* II 1, 412a20–1) and, similarly, that it ‘is a first actuality of a natural body which has life in potentiality’ (*DA* II 1, 412a27–8). In so speaking, Aristotle relies on a series of technical terms introduced and, in some cases, explained in his physical and metaphysical treatises, including most notably the *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *On Generation and Corruption*. Thus, the soul is a first actuality (*prôtê entelecheia*), a substance (*ousia*), and a form (*eidos*), while the body is organic (*organikon*), something having life in potentiality (*en dunamei*) and serving as the matter (*hylê*) of the soul.

When appealing to these and other like terms, Aristotle presumes that his reader is already familiar with his basic hylo-morphism, the fundamental features of which are drawn from his broader explanatory schema, his *four-causal explanatory framework*.⁴ As introduced and illustrated in *Physics* I 7–II 8, this framework advances a thesis about the features necessary for adequacy and comprehensiveness in explanation; it is motivated initially by the simple thought that every kind of change, whether mere alteration (as when Socrates alters from being pale to being sunburned after a day at the beach) or generation (as when Socrates first comes into existence at his birth), involves two factors: *something remaining the same* and *something gained or lost*. In the case of alteration, this is plain. Socrates is the continuing subject, while the quality lost is pallor and the quality gained

⁴ Shields (2014), Ch. 2, offers a comprehensive introduction to Aristotle’s four causes.

is being sunburned. In the case of generation, it is best to follow Aristotle's own example: a statue is generated not from nothing, but from something, say, bronze. The bronze persists and gains the shape or form of the statue. In these cases, the two factors are the matter, that which persists through change, and the form, the feature gained or lost in the change. Since Aristotle will eventually treat both perception and thought as attenuated sorts of alterations (*DA* II 5, 416b33–4), it is natural for him to appeal to the notions of matter and form in their explications.

In addition to citing material and formal causes, Aristotle also demands for completeness in explanation the specification of the two remaining causes—the final and efficient. Both notions play prominent roles in the explanatory schema of *De Anima*. Briefly, focusing first on a favourable example, an artefact, Aristotle will expect specifications of two features of, say, a computer in addition to mention of its matter and form. Because bits of plastic, metal, and silicon do not spontaneously arrange themselves into the form of a computer, an explanation of the existence of a computer must cite the agent which brought it about that the form is in the matter. This agent he calls the *efficient* or *moving cause* or the *source of motion* (*archê tês kinêseôs*). Still, knowing even the material, formal, and efficient causes does not suffice for completeness in explanation. This can be appreciated most readily by imagining an encounter with a computer of a unique and unexpected shape and material composition: we might know that the object before us is made of tungsten and ceramic, that the odd malleable dodecahedron shape was put into the material by means of an intricate mould-injecting robotic machine, while yet lacking any understanding of what the structure before us *is*. When and only when we learn that it is an ingenious voice-activated computer, functionally equivalent to an ordinary laptop, do we know what it is. We learn what it is when we learn what it is for, when we learn its function, or in Aristotle's terms, when we learn its *final cause*.

Taken altogether, then, Aristotle's explanatory schema demands the specification of the *material, formal, efficient, and final causes*. Nor does he doubt that the sort of explanation appropriate for artefacts generalizes to organisms and their parts. Indeed, he takes it as obvious that understanding, e.g., what an eye is involves appealing to its final cause: knowing

that eyes are *for seeing* will prove for him an ineliminable component of any adequate explanation of the eye. That said, Aristotle does not take as his primary objective in *De Anima* the explanation of the *perceptual organs* (*aisthêtêria*); rather, he is concerned primarily with the nature of *perception* (*aisthêsis*) itself, and with the individual sensory modalities considered as capacities or faculties. He takes an interest in the organs used in perception only to the degree that a description of their characteristics may help to illuminate his primary concern with the activities of perception and thinking.⁵ Their analyses, as we shall see, require technical terminology in addition to the four-causal explanatory framework already adumbrated. So too will his account of thinking, where, for reasons peculiar to that activity, Aristotle also displays considerable interest in the nature of the agent of thought, reason (*nous*).

Thus far, however, we may reasonably expect to find Aristotle appealing to his four causes when engaging in psychological explanation. This he does, relying most centrally throughout *De Anima* on the notions of matter (*hylê*) and form (*eidos* or *morphê*), for which reason his account of soul and body is referred to as a kind of *hylomorphism*.

In fact, Aristotle's positive theorizing in *De Anima* is rightly understood as consisting of three successive deployments of his general hylomorphism, each more particular and attenuated than the last: (i) he first articulates soul-body relations by claiming that soul and body are related as form and matter; (ii) he then analyses perception (*aisthêsis*) and the individual sensory modalities by appealing repeatedly to his hylomorphic account of alteration in terms of form reception; and, finally, (iii) he characterizes *thinking* or *reasoning* (*noêsis*) and *reason* (*nous*) on the same model of form reception to which he appeals in his analysis of perception, though now in terms of *intelligible* rather than sensible forms. It

⁵ The orientation of *De Anima* thus contrasts with the more empirically involved *Parva Naturalia*, a collection of short treatises investigating living systems and their features. In those works, Aristotle understands himself to be investigating 'the phenomena common to soul and body' (*De Sensu* 436a6-8), whereas in *De Anima* he introduces as matter for investigation 'whether all affections are common to what has the soul or whether there is some affection peculiar to the soul itself' (*DA* I 1, 403a3-5), 'This,' he observes, 'is necessary to grasp, but not easy' (*DA* I 1, 403a5).

is striking how in this progression Aristotle extends his basic notions of form and matter in ways which alienate them from their elementary characterizations as, roughly, *shape* and *stuff*.

III. SOUL AND BODY

A. SOUL-BODY HYLOMORPHISM

Aristotle's approach to soul-body relations has stimulated interest—and has occasioned fierce exegetical and philosophical debate—since antiquity. Some of the reasons for this interest may not redound to Aristotle's immediate credit: he seems to commit himself to a parcel of theses which, while not inconsistent, do not sit easily with one another. Thus, for instance, when, after considering in detail the views of his predecessors in *De Anima* I, Aristotle turns in *De Anima* II 1 to a first introduction of his own hylomorphism, he famously dismisses as unnecessary the question of whether soul and body are one (*DA* II 1 412b6–9)—though he had evidently earlier in the same chapter already asked and answered it: they are not (*DA* II 1, 412a17). Similarly, he concludes that it is clear that the soul is not separable from the body—but then hastens to add that some of its parts may yet be, if it is indeed appropriate to say that it has parts at all (*DA* II 1, 413a3–7). He eventually, rather surprisingly, closes this same introductory chapter by wondering aloud (in a passage which has commended itself to emendation because of its evident incongruence with what has immediately preceded it) whether the soul bears the sort of relation to the body which a sailor bears to his ship (*DA* II 1, 413a8–9). This seems an odd concern for the author of hylomorphism. If he thinks that he has good grounds for denying that the soul is separable from the body, then why should he wonder how it might be like a sailor in a ship? Sailors sail ships, steer them into port, and then disembark for shore leave.

More often than not, however, the seeming incongruities in Aristotle's hylomorphism eventually prove not to be inconsistencies so much as challenges to facile first interpretations of his intended meanings. Indeed, the dominant reason Aristotle's hylomorphism has sparked exegetical controversy stems not from any initial unclarity on his part, but from an admirable form of

philosophical risk-taking: Aristotle is not content to reject Platonic dualism only to embrace an expedient form of reductive materialism. On the contrary, he finds all forms of materialism articulated up to his own time explanatorily inadequate. His hylomorphism is calculated to walk a middle course between two extremes. His middle course is inevitably more nuanced than the extremes it replaces, which, however extreme they may be, nonetheless share a virtue common to all forms of uncompromising extremism: easy clarity purchased at the expense of some percentage of the phenomena. Thus, for instance, the materialists Aristotle considers have an easy time with the soul by simply identifying it with this or that element, or combination of elements. Heading in the other direction, the Platonists, recoiling from these forms of reduction, make the soul an immaterial entity, capable of existing beyond the dissolution of the body. Aristotle sees the virtues and vices of both poles; he seeks to craft a theory which embraces their strengths while eschewing their weaknesses without lapsing into the muddle of blurry compromise.

This, at any rate, presents the situation as Aristotle seems to conceive it. Hylomorphism, as he sees it, is non-reductive but also non-Platonic: it is intended to embrace the insights of the materialists without accepting their view that the soul just is this or that element, and to join Plato in contrasting the soul and body, but without inferring on that basis that the soul can exist without being embodied.

That leaves Aristotle some room for manoeuvring, though not a lot. By straddling a divide separating the least reductive forms of materialism and the most modest forms of dualism, Aristotle looks to capture the phenomena of living beings in all of their varied complexity. He takes it as given—and so accepts as *explananda*—that living things take on nutrition and grow (*DA* 434a22–434b18; cf. *Part. An.* 687a24–690a10; *Met.* 1075a16–25), that animals perceive (*De Sensu* 436b10–11), and that human beings think (*DA* 414b18, 429a6–8; cf. *Met.* 980a21). He accordingly takes it as his task to explain these activities, rather than to explain them away by reducing them to a distinct class of activities, such as material processes, or, failing that, by eliminating them altogether. At the same time, it is plain, he thinks, that the vast majority of these activities are in some sense or other matter-

involving. Hence, he seeks also to explain their relation to the sorts of elements to which others theorizing before him had wanted to reduce them.

For Aristotle, the middle ground sought is soul-body hylomorphism. As applied to soul and body, hylomorphism is easy to state, but difficult to comprehend completely:

soul : body :: form : matter

The soul is the form of the body and the body the matter of the soul (*DA* II 1, 412a19–20). Together they yield one living being, just as a quantity of bronze and Hermes shape yield exactly one bronze statue of Hermes.

The initial consequences of this view, highlighted by Aristotle himself, are reasonably direct. First, he contends, given hylomorphism, the question of whether soul and body are one loses some of its force:

It is not necessary to ask whether soul and body are one, just as it is not necessary to ask whether the wax and its shape are one, nor generally whether the matter of each thing and that of which it is the matter are one. For even if one and being are spoken of in several ways, what is properly so spoken of is the actuality (*DA* II 1, 412b6–9).

It is easy to suppose, on the basis of this contention, that it is not necessary to ask whether the soul and body are one because they so obviously are one—or at any rate yield just one thing, one living being, just as a cylindrical shape and a quantity of wax yield exactly one candle.

Note, however, that we have already two distinct grounds for dismissing as unnecessary questions of soul-body unity. The first response has it that they are one; the second has it that they *yield* one entity. The first response, however natural, seems incompatible with something Aristotle himself very plainly holds, in the same chapter of *De Anima*, that soul and body are not one (*DA* II 1, 412a17). So, if it is unnecessary to engage questions about soul-body unity, it cannot be for that reason. Perhaps, then, Aristotle's first main corollary of hylomorphism is rather that one need not ask whether soul and body are one because according to his theory soul and body come together to make just one entity, in the case of human beings, then, just one rational animal.