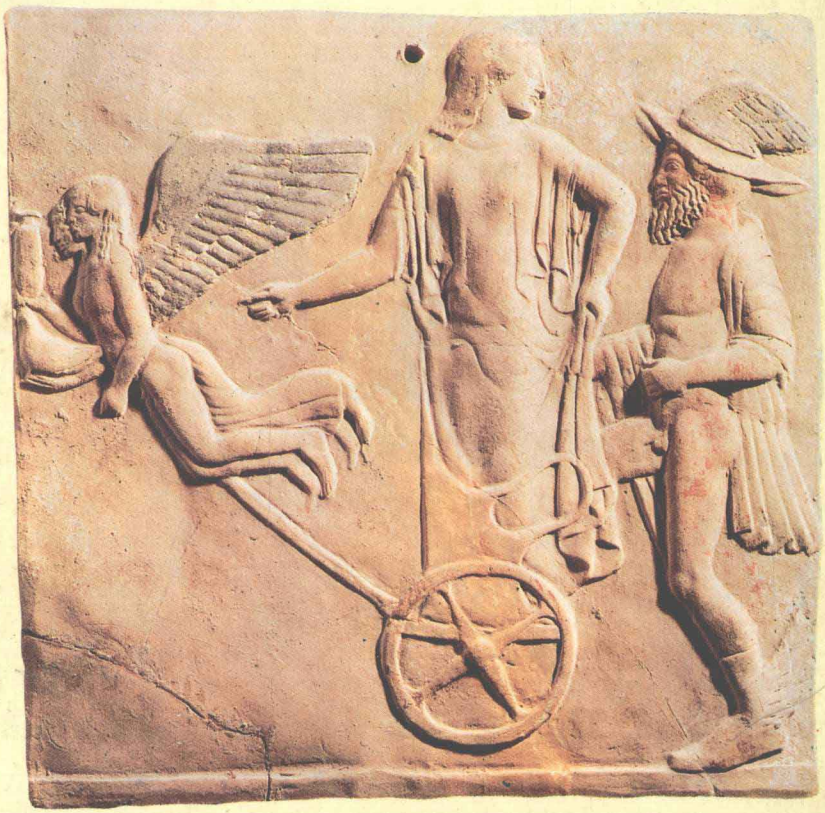
PENGUIN CLASSICS

ARISTOTLE

DE ANIMA
(ON THE SOUL)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

DE ANIMA

ADVISORY EDITOR: BETTY RADICE

ARISTOTLE was born at Stageira, in the dominion of the kings of Macedonia, in 384 B.C. For twenty years he studied at Athens in the Academy of Plato, on whose death in 347 he left, and some time later became tutor of the young Alexander the Great. When Alexander succeeded to the throne of Macedonia in 336, Aristotle returned to Athens and established his own school and research institute, the Lyceum, to which his great erudition attracted a large number of scholars. After Alexander's death in 323, anti-Macedonian feelings drove Aristotle out of Athens, and he fled to Chalcis in Euboea, where he died in 322. His writings, which were of extraordinary range, profoundly affected the whole course of ancient and medieval philosophy, and they are still eagerly studied and debated by philosophers today. Very many of them have survived, and among the most famous are the *Ethics* and the *Politics*.

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HUGH LAWSON-TANCRED was born in 1955 and educated at Eton and Balliol College, Oxford. After a *stage* with the European Commission in Brussels and a subsidiary of the Dresdner Bank in Hamburg, he joined the Investment Department of the London merchant bank Singer and Friedlander. He is now Head of the Classics Department at Mander, Portman, Woodward and is reading for a Ph.D in the Philosophy of Mind at Birbeck College in the University of London, where his supervisor is Roger Scruton.

ARISTOTLE

DE ANIMA

(ON THE SOUL)

TRANSLATED,
WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES,
BY HUGH LAWSON-TANCRED

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IN PIAM MEMORIAM
W. G. WILLIAMSON

(And) of the soul the body form doth take;
For soul is form, and doth the body make

CONTENTS

ON THE SOUL

FOREWORD

In this rendering of Aristotle's *De Anima*, I have tried to produce a version at once accessible to the layman and tolerable to the initiate. However, even if I had discharged this task with unexampled felicity, readers unfamiliar with Aristotle's thought would, if confronted with an unsupported text, have at times been left wondering what was going on. For these readers I have provided a fairly long Introduction, in which I have tried to offer a conspectus of recent discussion of the work. I hope its central themes will have been thrown into perspective, although it goes without saying that I offer the serious student no more than a starting-point to further inquiry.

My debt to many writers will be abundantly clear and I have mentioned in the Bibliography some of the works that I have found most useful. I must, however, single out Professor Hamlyn's stimulating notes in the Clarendon edition for especial acknowledgement. I am no less indebted to Professor Hamlyn's kindness in reading through my typescript and suggesting a large number of improvements at which I would scarcely have arrived without his assistance, but this expression of gratitude should not be taken as an attempt in any way to bring this still very imperfect work under the shadow of his authority. A debt of a different order I owe to Roger Scruton. He has encouraged me to what reflections I have reached in connection with the subject of this work and has saved both Translation and Introduction from some conspicuous blunders. I must, however, firmly exclude him from any responsibility for the many that remain. Two friends, Edward Jenkyns and Andrew Radice, also read the Translation in draft, and their comments on its readability were valuable and engagingly discreet. Finally, I would like

to thank Miranda Dear for a contribution that has evolved from being of clerical to being of editorial scope.

Hugh Lawson-Tancred
Holland Park
London

INTRODUCTION

I. Entelechism

It was the opinion of Hegel, not a philosopher conspicuous for his sympathy of outlook with Aristotle, that the present work was the only text earlier than his own writings worth serious attention on the subject of the soul.[1] This judgement, strikingly original in its day, would have been almost a commonplace in thirteenth-century Paris or ninth-century Baghdad. Today mental philosophy bears a very different cast from that which it bore for the Schoolmen, and Hegel's verdict has a paradoxical air. The air of paradox will be increased, not diminished, for many readers by confrontation with the text. There will be some who will be at a loss to see the connection between the subject-matter of this treatise and its title. For the English word 'soul' is, in the title of this translation, being made, in deference to convention, to stand proxy for the Greek term *psyche*. This word had a wide variety of meanings for various Ancient Greeks at various times, but most of them were remote from the usual associations in English of the word 'soul'. This is certainly the case with Aristotle's use of the term, and, inevitably, the difference in meaning between the English word 'soul' and the Greek word *psyche* is responsible for the difference between the subject-matter of the present work and that which might be expected from a tract with the English title 'On the Soul'; but it can plausibly be argued that it is in many ways a more worthy subject of philosophical reflection and that the value of Aristotle's remarks during the course of the work for contemporary mental philosophy is not diminished by their being primarily intended as contributions to an account of an entity of which we have no habitual cognizance.

What, then, is the exact meaning for Aristotle of the Greek word *psyche*? What precisely is the subject of this work? The

answer to this question is in fact simple. The psyche, for Aristotle, is that in virtue of which something is alive. The most accurate translation of the term into English would be 'principle of life' or 'principle of animation'. Stylistic reasons, however, clearly render this unacceptable in practice. Now, it should be clear after only brief reflection that 'psyche' so defined is a much wider concept than the English terms 'soul', 'mind' or 'consciousness' denote. This being so, the study of psyche will correspondingly be wider than that of these concepts, and since it is they that form the principle subject-matter of modern philosophy of mind and psychology (along with such terms as 'self', 'personality' and so on which are dependent on them), it is clear that Aristotle is addressing himself in this work to a broader topic than is usually discussed by modern philosophers. Since the time of Descartes, the central problem of human nature has seemed to be the subjectivity with which each individual is aware of the world. If, with Descartes, we take this subjective viewpoint as our starting-point, so that I, for instance, will be concerned to show how my view of the world is itself to be found a place within my general theory of the world, we soon arrive at the intractable difficulties of Dualism, at the need to coordinate the content of our consciousness with our objective conception of the world itself. Now, even if Descartes' starting-point is not in fact a legitimate one, it at least seems reasonable and it requires a philosophical argument to show that it is not. In our century such arguments have been produced, and it would not be wrong to say that contemporary philosophy of mind centres on the question of whether or not they are successful. Thus our debate distracts us from the subject-matter of Aristotle's inquiry. For we are interested in a problem which only fully arises in the case of human beings, Aristotle in a feature of all animate creatures. The Cartesian controversy is a controversy about that vague entity, the mind. It is an assumption of that controversy that the peculiar features of mental life are more philosophically important than the general features of all life. Aristotle, however, reverses this order of relative importance. He certainly considers those features

of human life that might come under the Cartesian heading of 'Mental Properties', but he considers them strictly within the context of a general survey of all the features of any form of life, and it is clear that it is the general concept of life that he hopes to clarify by producing his account of psyche. Thus, one of the rewards this work offers its students is the illustration of what perhaps familiar terrain can look like from a quite new perspective.

Aristotle looks on life as a biologist, while Descartes looks on his experience as its subject. A convenient way of expressing this difference is to say that Aristotle's position is *third-personal*, in that his own enunciation of his theories is irrelevant to their content, while Descartes' position is *first-personal*, in that he is concerned to explain experiences that seem to be privately available to him alone. Those philosophers who have tried to repudiate Descartes' starting-point in the philosophy of mind have often sought to use linguistic considerations to discredit the priority that he must claim for the first-personal over the third-personal perspective. For them the third-personal perspective is the correct starting-point for investigation of mental phenomena. In this opinion they agree with Aristotle, but we must be very clear about the difference, which is fundamental, between such modern anti-Cartesians as Ryle and Wittgenstein and their followers and Aristotle. For the modern thinkers the right to look on mental items from the third-personal perspective had to be fought for by subtle and difficult arguments, whose success is indeed still controversial, whereas Aristotle, who gives no evidence of feeling any need to defend his own third-personal stance, gives nothing remotely comparable to such arguments either in this work or anywhere else. If we had to answer the question whether Aristotle would, had he lived in our time, have favoured Wittgenstein or Descartes, it seems that the answer must be the Austrian, but the weight of his support is greatly diminished by his complete indifference to the problem of consciousness in connection with which that support would be most conspicuously required.

Aristotle cannot be pressed into service in the modern debate about the mind, because he does not directly consider

the problem that is the centre of that debate – the problem of consciousness – but his theory does offer a model of how we might arrange our theory of the general features of living things, if we can conclude that the ghost of Descartes has been finally laid. What is this model?

One of the most striking features of Aristotle's philosophy is that, while Plato seems for most of his life to have been persuaded that that which changes is ultimately unreal, the founder of the Lyceum conceived the explanation of change as being the prime task of the science of nature. It was primarily to perform this task that Aristotle introduced his celebrated dichotomy of Form and Matter. Unfortunately, Aristotle's presentation of this dichotomy is never wholly explicit, and this has rendered it susceptible of a wide variety of interpretations, some at least much cruder than Aristotle seems chiefly to have had in mind. It can usefully be said in general, perhaps, that to grasp the Aristotelian conception of Form, one must realize that it presupposes a close correspondence between the arrangement and the functioning of any item. Thus, if we were to ask in the case of a motor car what its form was, it would be in a way right to answer with its shape and in a way right to answer with its characteristic activity, travelling on roads or perhaps the disposition to do so. The crucial point is that Aristotle feels that if either of these two answers were investigated sufficiently it would turn out to be the same as the other. In Aristotle's general metaphysics the notions of Form and of function are closely connected.

Now, Aristotle's Form–Matter dichotomy is a part of his general conceptual scheme for the explanation of nature. What relevance can it have to the question with which we began, the question what model Aristotle is offering us of a theory of life? The answer, unsurprisingly, is that Aristotle's theory of animation amounts to the claim that particular living things, like all particular items, can, to put it an un-Aristotelian way, be analysed into their Form and their Matter, but that in the exceptional case of living things their Form can be identified with the traditional concept of their soul. To put this more concisely, we might use his own words,

that the soul is the form of a living body. This formulation is certainly a simplification, but the first thing to be grasped is the boldness of Aristotle's approach. As he makes clear in Book I of this work, the soul had mostly been identified by his predecessors as some kind of material substance. Aristotle has answered the traditional question as to the soul's nature with a different type of answer. In this a great deal of the originality of his treatment resides. One of the most important questions to determine in connection with the *De Anima*, as this work is conventionally known in Latin, is just how different it is to say that the soul is Form and to say, for instance, with Heraclitus, that it is fire. However, on any account it represents a great step forward in sophistication.

The doctrine that the soul is the Form of a living body is the core of Aristotle's mature psychological view, presented in this work. As we have seen, the concepts of Form and function are closely connected for Aristotle. As it is in virtue of a thing's Form that it can perform its functions, so to know its functions is to know its Form. Furthermore, any functional entity can be at any time either in the exercise of any given function or not, if only logically, but, as it will not change its nature between periods of exercise of any or all of its functions, the Form denotes that feature in virtue of which it is able to retain the capacity to function without actually doing so. Aristotle captures this by refining his notion that the soul is the Form of the living body to the view that it is the first Actuality of the living body, the second Actuality being that in virtue of which the body actually is in the exercise of its functions. Since the word that I here, and in the text, translate as Actuality is *entelecheia*, and since, as we have seen, this view is the core of the whole theory, that theory has reasonably, if by no means universally, been dubbed Entelechism. The label seems as satisfactory as any other in bringing out the special features of this theory.

I have tried to suggest in very sketchy outline the central insight of the theory developed in this work. It would in itself be enough to make the work startlingly original. However, it might well be objected that it is not clear how the mere act of legislation that the Forms of living things be called 'souls'

suffices to explain what is peculiar to those things. The fact is, of course, that it does not. The great merit of this approach to the soul is not that it reveals in itself what is unique about living things, but that it provides a conceptual framework within which the peculiarity can be brought out. For from the central conception of soul as Form, as from the trunk of a tree, there grow the branches representing the different explications of the central concept to account for the different manifestations of life that are to be explained by a general biological theory. It is this fact that gives the work its architectural neatness and impact. However, Aristotle approaches the task of explaining each area of animal functioning flexibly enough to permit his account to adjust as far as necessary away from the central framework and this is what gives the work its fecundity in the examination of such areas as sense-perception and imagination.

Thus Aristotle's approach to psychology is in essence very simple and is exactly mirrored in the structure of this work. After the first Book has exposed the shortcomings of previous theories, the central conception of the soul is immediately presented and developed and then shown to apply in the areas traditionally to be explained by a theory of the soul. However, while the strategy is clear, the tactics often involve the crossing of extremely treacherous terrain and the work constantly provokes further questions than it answers. For this reason, I have tried in this Introduction to set the work in its complicated context and at the same time to suggest how some of the points that Aristotle is making might be most clearly connected with modern discussions. I have tried as little as possible to presuppose either philosophical expertise or Classical knowledge, and those with either or both may well find my remarks only of cursory interest. For those readers, however, who, relatively fresh to this subject, are my principal audience, I offer a selective introductory survey of the work and of its contemporary relevance, preceded by a brief account of its author's life.