

Aristotle on The Soul

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According to some commentators Aristotle's psychological development falls into three main stages.¹

1. Platonic stage evident in *Eudemus*: as in Plato's *Phaedo* the soul = an unwilling prisoner on the body
2. Instrumentalism. The soul was still spiritual substance (like Plato), not inherently connected to the body to which it was attached, and the body was the soul's instrument rather than it's prison.

3. Entelechism - *De Anima*:

Entelechy

1. In the philosophy of Aristotle, the condition of a thing whose essence is fully realized; actuality.
2. In some philosophical systems, a vital force that directs an organism toward self-fulfillment.

[Late Latin entelecha, from Greek entelekheia : entels, complete (en-, in; see en-2 + telos, completion; see kwel-1 in Indo-European roots) + ekhein, to have; see segh- in Indo-European roots.]

From *De Anima (On the Soul)*

II.I (412a) (see also II.II 414a) One class of things is described as substance

This is divided into three:

- i. matter (not individual) = potential (see also II.V417b)
- ii. shape or form (provides individuality) = realisation or actuality. (Form is a translation of *eidos* - idea)
- iii. compound of the two.

'Soul is substance in the sense of being the form of a natural body, which potentially has life. And substance in this sense is actuality. The soul, then, is the actuality of the kind of body we have described'.²

II.I (412a-b) Actuality is then divided into two analagous to the possession of knowledge and to

- a) sleep
- b) waking

II.II (413a-b) The soul is the origin of the characteristics of life: the faculties of (i) nutrition, (ii) sensation, (iii) thought and (iv) movement.

¹ Lawson-Tancred, Hugh, 'Introduction' in Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, pp. 54-5.

² Aristotle, *On the Soul*, trans. W.S.Hett, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1936, II.1 (412a).

II.II.(413b) Although the parts of the soul cannot be separated, the 'mind and the thinking faculty' may be a distinct kind of soul, which can be separated from the perishable (i.e., body) and may be immortal.

II.II 414a. The soul is the actuality of a body. (i.e. the soul provides individuality). The body can not be the actuality of a soul.

The soul is not a body but it (a) cannot exist without a body (b) is associated with a body and (c) resides in a body.

While the other parts of the soul may not be separated, they are 'theoretically different'. Sensation, opinion and feeling are clearly different

II.III 414a-b The faculties (or senses - II.IV.415b) of the soul are

- a) Nutritive (possessed by plants, animals and people) (see also II.IV.416a-b)
- b) Sensation (includes touch, which allows perception of flavour, includes pleasure (stimulates desire), pain), appetite (includes desire (includes hunger, thirst), inclination, wish) (animals), power of movement in space (possessed by animals, people) (see also II.V.416b-417a). (Sensation is of particulars II.V.417b)
- c) Thinking, intelligence (possessed by people). (Knowledge is of universals II.V.417b)

II.III 415b Asserts that there must be a common definition of soul but rejects the idea.

II.III 414b-415a The faculties of the soul are arranged in a series, a allows b and b allows c, like geometrical figures (cf Plato)

II.IV 415a. Yet thinking and perceiving must precede the other faculties

II.IV.415b. 'The soul is the cause and first principle of the living body'

The soul is the cause of the three senses/faculties in the sense of

- a) the cause of that from which motion is derived.
- b) the cause of the purpose of final cause (i.e., that to which they are heading towards in the fulfilment of their potential: both mind and nature has purpose)
- c) the cause of the substance of all bodies that have souls

III.III Imagination

III.V.430a

Divides the intellect into two (NB this is one of his most important teachings for medieval astrology):

1. Passive. 'Becomes all things', i.e. is undifferentiated potential.
2. Active (This does not appear to be Aristotle's term, but that of later commentators. See for example Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 204. Aristotle calls it an 'activity'): separable, impassive, unmixed (i.e. exists by itself without mixing with other faculties) and

immortal, everlasting (see also I.IV.408b: 'the mind is something more divine and is unaffected',

III.IX, 432a-b. Discusses whether soul can be divided into parts. Decides it can not because the different faculties exist at different levels.

The Soul: Aristotle and other philosophers

Book I

I.II Rejects Pythagorean idea that the soul is a 'harmony', adjusting the other parts of the world.

I.V 411a. Rejects Platonic view that the soul pervades the universe.

The Soul: Lawson-Tancred's commentary:

'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"'.³

Can we read Aristotle as suggesting that soul is Form⁴ (i.e., the Form of a human being?).

Or is this too Platonic, and is it better to say that the soul is receptive to Form, without itself being Form?⁵

If we see Aristotle as suggesting a 'necessary structural Parallelism between soul and body', and if Form and Matter are closely connected, Tancred-Lawson asks, 'is he not directly anticipating the Physicalist theories so dominant in contemporary philosophy of psychology?'⁶

³ Lawson-Tancred, Hugh, 'Introduction' in Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 12.

⁴ Lawson-Tancred, Hugh, 'Introduction' in Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 15.

⁵ Lawson-Tancred, Hugh, 'Introduction' in Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 53.

⁶ Lawson-Tancred, Hugh, 'Introduction' in Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin, 1986, p. 37.