

ARISTOTLE "SOUL AND BODY, FORM AND MATTER" [DE ANIMA] (c. 325 BCE)

Aristotle. "Soul and Body, Form and Matter." Trans. D. W. Hamlyn. Western Philosophy: an Anthology. Ed. John Cottingham. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 134-138.

Aristotle's focus here is on the nature of the mind, its relationship to the body, and more generally, the nature of personal identity. He defines the soul (*psyche*) as the "first principle of animal life" (135). His goal here is to "inquire into and ascertain both its nature and its essence, and after that all the attributes belonging to it" (135), that is, "how to classify the soul, and what it is" (135), to be precise, to determine "whether it is a particular thing and substance or quality or quantity or some other of the categories which have been distinguished" (135). He is also keen to figure out whether the soul is "one of those things which are in *potentiality*, or whether it is, rather, a kind of *actuality*" (135). He seeks to discover as well whether all animals as sentient beings have a soul (and thus whether there is "one definition of the soul" [135]) or whether there is a different soul for each species of animal.

Aristotle addresses the question of *dualism* (the Platonic view that body and soul are two independent entities): he wants to grasp "whether the properties of the soul are all common to that which has it [the body], or whether they are peculiar to the soul itself" (135). This last question is a difficult one, he admits, in that the soul "is not affected nor does it act apart from the body – for example in being angry, being confident, wanting and perceiving in general" (135). Thinking, he points out, appears to be "most special to the soul" (135) but he surmises that "it would not possible for it to exist apart from the body" (135) if thinking too is a "form of imagination" (135).

Aristotle contends that "all the affections of the soul" (135), such as "passion, gentleness, fear, pity, confidence, and also joy and both loving and hating" (135), would seem to "involve the body" (135). The reason for this is that "at the same time as these occur, the body is affected in a certain way" (135). He concludes the "affections of the soul are *principles involving matter*" (135) and that "inquiry concerning the soul . . . is the province of the natural scientist" (135). Whereas the scientist would link emotions like anger to biological processes, the "conceptual inquirer" (135) (the philosopher) would equate it with a "desire for retaliation, or something of the sort" (135). The former deals, Aristotle argues, with the matter of anger, the latter with the "form and principle" (135). Anger is not very different from an object like a house which is made of rock, etc. (this is the province of the natural scientist who would analyse the matter out of which the house is built and the biology responsible for the emotion) but its end or purpose is to provide shelter (this is the province of the philosopher or 'conceptual inquirer').

Aristotle counters other of Plato's assumptions about human nature. He argues that the affections and thinking do not originate in the soul: it is "better not to say that the soul pities, learns, or thinks, but that the human being does this by means of soul" (136). Moreover, the "intellect seems to be born in us as a kind of substance, and it seems not to be destroyed" (136). However, he compares thinking to vision (which deteriorates with age) in order to argue that thought itself does not decay, only that which produces thought – the brain. Old age "is not due to the soul's being affected in a certain way, but to something's happening to that which the soul is in" (136). Thought and contemplation "decay because something else within is destroyed, while thought is in itself unaffected" (136).

Aristotle argues that each substance has both matter and form. Matter "is potentiality, while form is actuality" (136). Arguing that "every natural body which partakes of life" (137) is a substance, he contends that the soul is not a substance which

takes the form of an animate body. The soul is, rather, "substance as *form* of a natural body which has life potentially" (137). The soul is the body's potential actualised, or as Aristotle puts it, the "*actuality* of a *natural body* which *has life potentially*" (137). From this point of view, "we should not ask whether the soul and the body are one, any more than whether the wax and the impression are one" (137). Soul is the "substance corresponding to the principle of a thing. And this is 'what it is to be' for a body of the relevant kind" (137). As a result, if the eye were an animal, sight would be its soul, if an axe were an animal, chopping would be its soul or *raison d'être*. Just as the pupil and sight make up the eye, so too does the soul and the body make up a living animal. Consequently, the soul cannot be separated from the body for it is the "actuality of the parts themselves" (137).