

2 Soul and Body, Form and Matter: Aristotle, *De Anima*\*

As our previous account makes clear, Plato takes the soul to be some kind of separate entity, capable of surviving apart from the body. Aristotle, in his treatise *De Anima* ('Concerning the Soul')<sup>1</sup> challenges this framework. Though he himself had been a pupil of Plato, he presents a crucially different account of the nature of the soul. For Aristotle, all living things are 'ensouled' (*empsychos*), but this does not have to imply that they are made up of two distinct and separable types of entity, soul and body. Rather, the matter of which they are composed has a certain form or organizational principle, and the 'soul' is simply the *form* of a natural (biological) body. To simplify somewhat, the form or recipe is what enables a given set of materials to perform their functions (for example the way the iron is shaped and placed on its handle enables a tool to function as an axe); but we should not suppose the form could exist 'on its own', apart from matter (any more than shape can exist in isolation from a shaped object). Soul, for Aristotle, stands to body in the same way as form stands to matter.

In Aristotle's jargon, to say of a creature that it is ensouled is to say that the potentialities of the body are *actualized*: to use an analogy, if we consider the eye as a set of material structures (muscle, jelly and so on), then the form is that in virtue of which the potentialities for vision are actualized, so that the organ actually has the power to see. 'If the eye were an animal', as Aristotle puts in his typically compressed fashion, 'sight would be its soul.' Aristotle's 'materio-formal' account of the body-soul relation has come to be



Knowledge we regard as a fine and worthwhile thing, and one kind as more so than another, either in virtue of its accuracy or in virtue of its being concerned with superior and more remarkable things. On both these grounds we should with reason place the study of the soul in the first rank. It would seem also that an

\* Aristotle, *De Anima* [c.325 BCE], extracts from Book I, ch. 1, ch. 4; Book II, chs 1-3. Translation (with modifications) from Aristotle's *De Anima*, ed. and trans. D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), pp. 1-16.

<sup>1</sup> In Greek, *Peri psyches*. Since the Middle Ages, when Aristotle's works were widely studied in the universities in Latin translations, it has become customary to refer to many of Aristotle's works by their Latin titles.

acquaintance with it makes a great contribution to truth as a whole, and especially to the study of nature; for the soul is as it were the *first principle of animal life*. We seek to inquire into and ascertain both its nature and its essence, and after that all the attributes belonging to it; of these, some are thought to be properties peculiar to the soul, while others are thought to belong because of it to animals also.

... First surely we must determine how to classify the soul, and what it is; I mean whether it is a particular thing and substance or quality or quantity or some other of the categories which have been distinguished. And second we must determine whether it is one of those things which are in *potentiality*, or whether it is rather a kind of *actuality*; for this makes no small difference ...

For as things are, people who speak and inquire about the soul seem to study the human soul only. But we must take care not to overlook the question whether there is one definition of the soul, as of animal, or whether there is a different one for each animal, as of horse, dog, man and god ...

There is also the problem whether the properties of the soul are all common to that which has it, or whether they are peculiar to the soul itself. We need to deal with this, though it is not easy. It appears that in most cases 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. Thinking, however, looks most special to the soul; but if this too is a form of imagination, or does not exist apart from imagination, it would not be possible for it to exist apart from the body ...

It seems that all the affections<sup>1</sup> of the soul involve the body – passion, gentleness, fear, pity, confidence, and also joy and both loving and hating. For at the same time as these occur, the body is affected in a certain way. This is shown by the fact that sometimes when severe and manifest sufferings befall us we are not provoked to exasperation or fear, while at other times we are moved by small and imperceptible sufferings when the body is aroused, and is in a similar state to when it is angry. This is confirmed by the fact that people may come to have the affection of fear, even though nothing frightening is taking place.

If this is so, it is clear that the affections of the soul are *principles involving matter*. Hence their definitions are such as 'Being angry is a particular movement of a body of such and such a kind (or a part or potentiality of it), as a result of so and so, and for the sake of such and such.' Hence an inquiry concerning the soul (either every soul or this kind of soul) is the province of the natural scientist.

But the natural scientist and the conceptual inquirer would define each of these differently (e.g. what anger is). For the latter would define it as a desire for retaliation, or something of that sort, while the former would define it as the boiling of the blood and hot material round the heart. Of these, the one gives the *matter*, the other the *form and principle*. But the principle of the thing must be in matter of such and such a kind if it is to exist. Thus, the principle of a house is, say, that it is a covering to prevent destruction by winds, rain and heat; but someone else will say that a house is stones, bricks and timber, and another again that it is the form in them for the sake of these other things ...

Let us return to the point from which our account began. We were saying that the affections of the soul are (at any rate in so far as they are such as passion

<sup>1</sup> 'Affections': the states of a thing, or the ways in which it is affected.

and fear) inseparable from the natural matter of the animals in which they occur . . .

. . . There will be greater reason for raising the question of whether the soul is moved, on consideration of the following. We say that the soul is grieved, rejoices, is confident and afraid, and again is angry, perceives and thinks. And all these seem to be movements. One might conclude from this that the soul itself is moved; but this is not necessary.

Suppose it is indeed the case that being grieved, rejoicing and thinking are movements, that each of them consists in being moved, and that the movement is due to the soul (e.g. that being angry and being afraid consists in the heart's being moved in a particular way and that thinking is a movement either of this perhaps or of some other part, and that some of these happen because of spatial movements in place and others because of movement constituting alteration). Even granting this, to say that the *soul* is angry would be like saying the soul weaves or builds. It is surely better not to say that the soul pities, learns or thinks, but that the human being does this by means of soul. This is not because the movement takes place in it, but because sometimes it reaches as far as it, or at other times it comes from it (e.g. perception starts from particular things, while recollection starts from the soul itself and extends to the movements or persistent states in the sense organs).

The intellect seems to be born in us as a kind of substance, and it seems not to be destroyed. For it would be destroyed if at all by the feebleness of old age, while in fact what happens is similar to what happens in the case of the sense-organs. For if an old man acquired an eye of a certain kind he could see as well as even a young man. Hence 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*, as in the case of drunkenness and disease.

Thus thought and contemplation decay because something else within is destroyed, while thought is in itself unaffected. But thinking or loving or hating are not affections of that, but of the individual thing that has it, in so far as it does. Hence when this too is destroyed, we neither remember, nor love, for these did not belong to that, but to the composite thing which has perished. But the intellect is surely something more divine and is unaffected . . .

Let us start again as it were from the beginning and try to determine what the soul is and what would be its most comprehensive definition.

We speak of one of the kinds of things that there are as *substance*, and under this heading we speak of one aspect as *matter* (which in itself is not a particular), and an other as *shape and form* (in virtue of which it is then spoken of as a particular), and a third as the product of the two. And matter is potentiality, while form is actuality – and the latter in two senses, first in the way knowledge is and second in the way contemplation is.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A lump of bronze has the potentiality to be a ball; when it takes on a spherical form, the potential is actualized. By talking of 'actuality', however, one might mean to refer to a *disposition* (such as knowledge, which need not be functioning all the time) or to an *actual activity* (such as contemplating). Aristotle is about to define 'soul' in terms of actuality in the first sense.

It is bodies especially which are thought to be substances, and of these especially natural bodies; for these are sources of the rest. Of natural bodies, some have life and some do not; and it is self-nourishment and growth and decay that we speak of as life. Hence, every natural body which partakes of life will be a substance, and substance of a composite kind.

Since substance is indeed a body of such a kind (for it is one having life), the soul will not be body. For the body is not something predicated of a subject, but exists rather as subject and matter. The soul must then be substance as *form* of a natural body which has life potentially. Substance is actuality. The soul therefore will be the actuality of a body of this kind.

But actuality is spoken of in two ways, first as knowledge is and second as contemplation is. It is clear that the soul is actuality as knowledge is, for both sleep and waking depend on the existence of soul, and waking is analogous to contemplation, and sleep to the possession but not the exercise of knowledge. (In the same individual knowledge is in origin prior.) Hence the soul is the *first actuality* of a natural body which has life potentially.

Whatever has organs will be a body of this kind. Even the parts of the plants are organs, although extremely simple ones – for example the leaf is a cover for the pod, and the pod for the fruit, while roots are analogous to the mouth, for both take in food.

If we are to speak of something common to every soul, it will be the *first actuality* of a natural body which has organs. Hence we should not ask whether the soul and the body are one, any more than whether the wax and the impression are one, or in general whether the matter of each thing, and that of which it is the matter are one . . .

It has been stated in general what the soul is: it is substance corresponding to the principle of a thing. And this is 'what it is to be' for a body of the relevant kind. Compare the following: if an instrument, for example an axe, were a natural body, then its substance would be what it is to be an axe, and this would be a soul (if this were removed, it would no longer be an axe in the strict sense). But as it is, it is an axe. The soul is 'what it is to be', or the principle – though not of a body like an axe, but of a certain kind of natural body having within itself a source of movement and rest.

We must consider this in relation to the parts of the body also. If the eye were an animal, sight would be its soul. For this is an eye's substance, that corresponding to its principle. The eye is matter for sight, and if this fails it is no longer an eye in the strict sense, but more like an eye in stone, or a painted eye. We must now apply to the whole living body that which applies to the part . . .

It is not that which has lost its soul which is potentially such as to live, but that which possesses it. Seeds and fruit are bodies of this kind only in potentiality. As cutting or seeing is actuality, so is being awake; the soul is like sight and the potentiality of an instrument; the body is like the thing merely in potentiality. But just as the pupil and sight make up an eye, so the soul and body make up a living animal.

So it is clear that the soul, or certain parts of it, if it is divisible, cannot be separated from the body; for in some cases it is the actuality of the parts themselves. Not that anything prevents at any rate some parts from being

separable, because these are actualities of nothing bodily. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the way the sailor is of the ship. Let this suffice as a rough definition and sketch about the soul. . . .

What has soul is distinguished from what has not by *life*. But life is spoken of in many ways, for we say that a thing lives if one of the following is present: intellect, perception, movement and rest with respect to place, and also the movement involved in nutrition and both decay and growth.

For this reason, all plants too are regarded as alive. For they evidently have in them such a potentiality and first principle, through which they come to grow and decay in opposite directions. For they do not grow upwards without growing downwards, but they grow in both directions alike and in every direction – this being so of every plant that is constantly nourished and continues to live, as long as it is able to receive nourishment. This form of life – nutrition – can exist apart from the others, but the others cannot exist apart from it in mortal creatures. This is obvious in the case of plants, for they have no other potentiality of soul.

It is because of this first principle that living things have life. But it is primarily because of sense perception in that they will be *animal* (for even things which do not move or change their place, but which do have sense-perception are spoken of as animals, not merely as living) . . .

For the present, let it suffice to say that the soul is the source of the things mentioned above, and is defined by them – by the faculties of nutrition, perception, thought, and by movement. Whether each of these is a soul, or a part of a soul (and if a part, whether such as to occupy a distinct place, or merely distinct in definition) are questions which it is not hard to answer in some cases, though others present difficulty. . . . Concerning the intellect and the potentiality for contemplation, the situation is not so far clear, but it seems to be a different kind of soul, and this alone can exist separately, as the everlasting can from the perishable. But the remaining parts of the soul are not separable . . .

### 3 The Human Soul: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*\*

Aristotle was greatly revered in the early Middle Ages, when after the period of chaos known as the 'dark ages', his ideas were gradually reintroduced to Western Europe, initially via the writings of the great Islamic philosophers and scholars of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The general thrust of Aristotle's 'hylomorphism' (see previous extract) is away from the notion of a soul as a separate entity distinct from the body; this left some problems for the Christian philo-

sopher-theologians of the Middle Ages, notably Thomas Aquinas, who set themselves the task of reconciling the principles of Aristotle's philosophy with the doctrines of the Church. In the following extract from Aquinas's monumental *Summa Theologiae*, we see many Aristotelian elements – for example the description of the soul as 'the act of a body'. But Aristotle had hesitated over whether the intellect, at least, might be a distinct from the body, and Aquinas,

arguably taking his cue from this, argues that the intellectual soul of human beings is something 'subsistent' – capable of existing in its own right – and also incorruptible. The result is a somewhat uneasy compromise between a broadly Aristotelian account of our human faculties as 'principles involving matter' (see extract 2), and a more 'separatist' or Platonic conception (see extract 1) – perhaps better suited to the Christian doctrine of a future state in which the soul will continue after the body's death, awaiting final reunion with the body at the resurrection. Notice that Aquinas does not treat all the aspects of the soul in the same way. What he calls the 'sensitive' and 'nutritive' parts of the soul (those responsible for sensation and nutrition, and shared with animals) belong to the human being as 'composite' of soul and body;

but the higher faculties of intellect and will (which set us apart from other animals) 'belong to the soul alone', and hence 'such powers must remain in the soul after the destruction of the body'. The special treatment of intellect and will paves the way for the radical mind/body dualism of Descartes developed many centuries later (see below, extract 4). The austere and unadorned style adopted by Aquinas in the excerpts that follow is influenced by Aristotle, but is more formalized. Each article opens with a 'question', and then lists a series of 'objections', to the answer which Aquinas himself wishes eventually to propose. Various authorities are then cited, after which, in his 'replies' to the objections, Aquinas makes his own philosophical position clear.

Concerning Man, who is composed of a spiritual and a corporeal substance. First, what belongs to the essence of the soul.

Is the soul a body?

*Objection 1.* It seems that the soul is a body. For the soul is the moving principle of the body. Nor does it move unless moved: firstly, because it seems that nothing can move unless it is itself moved, since nothing gives what it has not, as, for instance, what is not hot does not give heat; secondly, if there be anything that moves and is not moved, it must be the cause of eternal, unchanging movement, as we find proved (Aristotle, *Physics*, Book viii); and this does not appear to be the case in the movement of an animal, which is caused by the soul. Therefore the soul is a mover moved. But every mover moved is a body; therefore the soul is a body . . .

*On the contrary*, are the words of Augustine (*De Trinitate*, vi), who says that the soul is 'more simple than the body, inasmuch as it does not occupy space by its bulk'.

*Answer as follows:* To seek the nature of the soul, we must premise that the soul is defined as the first principle of life in those things which live; for we call living things animate (souled), and those things which have no life, inanimate (souless). Now life is shown principally by two actions, knowledge and movement. The philosophers of old, not being able to rise above their imagination, supposed that the principle of these actions was something corporeal; for they asserted that only bodies were real things; and that what is not corporeal is nothing: hence they maintained that the soul is something corporeal. This opinion can be proved to be false in many ways; but we shall only make use of one proof, based on universal and certain principles, which shows clearly that the soul is not a body.

It is manifest that not every principle of vital action is a soul, for then the eye would be a soul, as it is a principle of vision; and the same might be applied to the



\* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* [1266–73], Part I, question 75, articles 1–6, Dominican translation (London: Washbourne, 1912), pp. 2–16, with minor omissions and changes.