

ARISTOTLE

ON THE  
SOUL

Still from *The Love Life of the Octopus*, film by Jean Painlevé (1967)

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ON THE

SOUL

περι  
ψυχης

Greek:

*PERI*  
*PSUCHĒS*

*psyche*  
*psychiatry*  
*psychology*

Latin:

DE  
ANIMA

*animal*  
*animation*

# ON THE SOUL I.1

402a10- 402b7

SOUL = psuchē (ψυχή)

**KNOWLEDGE OF THE SOUL** contributes greatly to truth in general, and above all to the study of **NATURE**, for the **SOUL** is in some sense the FIRST PRINCIPLE of ~~animal~~ **LIFE**.

LIFE (= zōē / ζωή)

We seek to inquire into and ascertain both its **NATURE** and its **ESSENCE**, and after that all the **ATTRIBUTES** that belong to it.

Of these, some are thought to be **PROPERTIES** of the soul, while others are thought to belong to ~~animals~~ "living things".

...

First, surely, we must determine in which of the **GENERA** the soul is, and **WHAT** it is; I mean, whether it is a particular thing and **SUBSTANCE**, or quality or quantity or some other of the categories [*i.e.*, modifications of substance] which have been distinguished.

And secondly we must determine if 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.

And we must inquire also whether it is **DIVISIBLE** or **INDIVISIBLE**, and whether every soul is of like kind or not – and if not of like kind, whether differing in species or genus.

...

We must take care not to overlook the question of whether there is one definition\* of the soul, as of animal, or whether there is a different one for each, as of horse, dog, man, and god – [in the latter case,] the universal, animal, being either nothing, or secondary...

(genera = plural of 'genus.' [Latin])

ESSENCE (= OUSIA / οὐσία)

(Both terms are used for the same Greek word)

SUBSTANCE

POTENTIALITY (= DYNAMIS / δυναμῖς)

ACTUALITY (= ENTELECHEIA / ἐντελεχεία)

DEFINITION (= LOGOS / λόγος)

\*LOGOS' here would be better translated here as "ACCOUNT"

# ON THE SOUL I.1

403a3 – b19

**THERE IS** also the problem of whether the **PROPERTIES** of the **SOUL** are all common also to that which has it [that is, the **BODY**,] or whether they are peculiar to the soul itself...

*Pathē is the term used by Aristotle here, too.*

It appears that in most cases the **SOUL** is not **AFFECTED**, and nor does it **ACT**, apart from the **BODY**, e.g. in being angry, being confident, **WANTING**, and **PERCEIVING** in general – although **THINKING** looks most like being peculiar to the soul.

But if this too is a form of **IMAGINATION**, or does not exist apart from imagination, it would not be possible even for this to exist apart from the body.

...

It seems that all the **AFFECTIONS**\* of the soul involve the body – passion, gentleness, fear, pity, confidence, and, further, joy, and both loving and hating; for at the same time as these the body is affected in a certain way.

...

The affections of the soul are inseparable from the natural matter of the animals [or: living things] in which they occur, and **(not)** in the same way as a line or surface.

\*affection (= ΠΑΤΗΕ παθη)

The Greek word, ΠΑΤΗΕ, means 'affection' in the most general sense, i.e., 'manner of being affected'. The word was also used more specifically with reference to emotional states, and to conditions of suffering (i.e., being subjected to the impact of an outside force or agent). It is the source of our words 'pathos,' 'pathetic,' and 'patient.'

# ON THE SOUL II.1

412a2-22

matter → POTENTIALITY

form → ACTUALITY

ACTUALITY-

• tier 1: like knowledge

• tier 2: like contemplation  
(i.e., active reflection)

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** [or: **ACCOUNT**].

[1.] Now we speak of one particular kind of existent things as **SUBSTANCE**, and under this heading we so speak of one thing *qua* **MATTER**, which in itself is not a particular [thing], and another *qua* **SHAPE** and **FORM**, in virtue of which it is then spoken of as a particular [thing], and third, *qua* the product of these two.

[2.] And **MATTER** is **POTENTIALITY**, while **FORM** is **ACTUALITY** – and that in two ways: first, as **KNOWLEDGE** is, and second, as **CONTEMPLATION** is.

[‘Contemplation’ = **ACTIVE** reflection on what is known]

CONTEMPLATION  
(= THEŌRETIKĒ  
/ θεωρητική)

[3.] It is **BODIES**, especially, which are thought to be **SUBSTANCES**, and of these, especially **NATURAL BODIES**, for these are the sources of the rest.

[4.] Of natural bodies, some have **LIFE** and some do not; and it is **SELF-NOURISHMENT**, **GROWTH**, and **DECAY**, that we speak of as **LIFE**.

[5.] Hence, every **NATURAL BODY** which partakes of **LIFE** will be a **SUBSTANCE**, and substance of a composite kind.

[6.] Since it [*i.e.*, a natural body] is indeed a body of that kind (one having life), the **SOUL** will not be a body; for the body is not something predicated of a subject, but exists rather as subject and matter.

[7.] The **SOUL** must, then, be **SUBSTANCE** *qua* **FORM** of a **NATURAL BODY** which has **LIFE** potentially.

[8.] **SUBSTANCE** is **ACTUALITY**.

[9.] The **SOUL** then, will be the **ACTUALITY** of a body of this kind... [Continued]

# ON THE SOUL II.1

412a22-28

[Continued]

[10.] ...But **ACTUALITY** is spoken of in two ways, first as **KNOWLEDGE** is, and then as **CONTEMPLATION** is.

[11.] It is clear that the **SOUL** is **ACTUALITY** as knowledge is, for both sleep and waking depend on the existence of the 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.

[12.] Hence the **SOUL** is the **FIRST ACTUALITY** of a **NATURAL BODY** which has the potentiality for **LIFE** .



**ACTUALITY-**

- tier 1: like knowledge
- tier 2: like contemplation  
(i.e., active reflection)

# ON THE SOUL II.1

412b4-b18

*Against Plato!*

Hence too we should not ask whether the soul and 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. For while unity and being are so spoken of in many ways, that which is most properly so spoken is that of **ACTUALITY**.

Compare the following: If an instrument, e.g., an axe, were a natural body, then its substance would be what it is to be an axe, and this would be its soul; if this were removed it would no longer be an axe, except in name. But, as it is, it is an axe, for it is not of *this* kind of body that the soul is 'what it is for it to be what it is,' and [therefore] the principle, but, [instead] of a certain kind of NATURAL BODY having WITHIN ITSELF a SOURCE of MOVEMENT and REST.

*(that is to say,  
a LIVING body)*

# ON THE SOUL

## II.2 413b24

Concerning the INTELLECT, and the POTENTIALITY for CONTEMPLATION, the situation is not so clear, but it seems to be a different kind of soul, and this alone can exist separately, as the everlasting can from the perishable.

?

INTELLECT (= NOUS / νοϋς)  
CONTEMPLATION (= THEŌRETIKĒ / θεωρητική)

POTENTIALITY } = *dynamis* (δυναμις)  
FACULTY }

THOUGHT = *dianoētikē* (διανοητική)

## II.3 414a31

...The POTENTIALITIES [of the soul]... are those for NUTRITION, SENSE-PERCEPTION, DESIRE, MOVEMENT in respect of place, and THOUGHT.

1. NUTRITION

2. { SENSE-PERCEPTION  
DESIRE

(3.) MOVEMENT (*location*)

(4.) THOUGHT

Plants have the NUTRITIVE FACULTY only, other living things have both this and the FACULTY OF SENSE-PERCEPTION.

And if that of sense-perception, then that of DESIRE also; for desire comprises wanting, passion, and wishing: all animals have at least one of the senses, touch, and for that which has sense-perception there is both PLEASURE and PAIN, and both the pleasant and the painful: and where there are these, there is also wanting: for this is a desire for that which is pleasant.