

Overview

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- what makes a thing the (kind of) thing it is, is its substantial form
- what a living being is, is essentially *alive*
- what makes a thing living is a soul
- Therefore, the soul is the substantial form of living things
- for humans in particular, it's the tri-partite soul:
 - ① vegetative (nutritive) soul: nutrition, sexual activity, metabolism, etc.
 - ② sensitive soul: sense perception, imagination
 - ③ rational soul: thinking, desiring

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- Perception and thought: kinds of **change** → they should be able to be explained by the general hylomorphic framework (change = form-reception).
- what makes these changes special?

De An. II.12, 424a17–24

“In general, with regard to all sense-perception, we must take it that the sense is that which can receive perceptible forms without their matter; as wax receives the imprint of the ring without the iron or gold. . . . Similarly too in each case the sense is affected by that which has colour or flavour or sound, but by these not in so far as they are what each of them is said to be something, but in so far as they are things of a certain kind and in accordance with their proportion.”

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Thus, in perception:

- the subject receives the form;
- does so in a manner corresponding to its account or proportion (*logos*).
E.g., each color is a ratio of black and white; se need to receive the same ratio without the matter.
- The perceiving subject becomes *isomorphic* with the sensible quality (cf. blueprint or model).

Thus, perception vs. other kinds of motion:

- the perceiver has a capacity for receiving sensible forms (– what does this mean, exactly?)
- the object does not literally transfer a form, but
- isomorphism = sameness in structure

Perception: Open Questions

- does Aristotle really mean isomorphism, or is it more like a literal form-transfer? What does 'isomorphism' mean, exactly?
- role of the medium in perception: does all perception require a medium? Or only some of the senses do? (Aristotle seems inconsistent, at least in the case of touch)
- Is there a most fundamental sense? (Sometimes Aristotle suggests it is touch; other times that it is vision)
- Is there a common sense (probably: yes; *De An.* III.2–3), and if so, how does it differ from the individual senses?

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The Main Idea

Thinking is analogous to perception:

De An. III.4, 429a13–18

“Now if thinking is akin to perceiving, it must be either being affected in some way by the object of thought or something else of this kind. It must then be unaffected, but capable of receiving the form, and potentially such as it, although not identical with it; and as that which is capable of perceiving is to the objects of perception, so must be the intellect similarly to its objects.”

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So, just like in perception:

- there is some intelligible object;
- there is a thinker, who is capable of receiving the object's form;
- the object acts on the thinker by informing it, as a result of which the thinker becomes isomorphic with the object's intelligible form.

- ① It is not a change from contrary to contrary
 - normally, change is effected when one contrary is destroyed and supplanted by another (white paper → black paper)
 - ignorance → knowledge
 - But what if I start thinking suddenly about something? It seems to be a change, but how can we explain it in the usual way? (A.: it's a kind of change involving fulfillment)
- ② **Plasticity**: there is no object of thought that is incapable of being thought, and the mind doesn't exist in actuality before it thinks.

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The Active and Passive Mind

De An. III.4, 429a18–27

“It must, then, since it thinks all things, be unmixed, as Anaxagoras says, in order that it may rule, that is in order that it may know; for the intrusion of anything foreign to it hinders and obstructs it; hence too, it must have no other nature than this, that it is potential. That part of the soul, then, called intellect. . . is actually none of existing things before it thinks. Hence, too, it is reasonable that it should not be mixed with the body; for in that case it would come to be of a certain kind, either cold or hot, or it would even have an organ like the faculty of perception; but as things are it has none.”

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The Active and Passive Mind

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Aristotle's argument for the passive intellect:

- ① The mind can think all things.
- ② Hence, the mind is unmixed. = it lacks an organ
- ③ Hence, the nature of mind is nothing other than to be something potential. (= potential intellect)
- ④ Hence, the mind is none of the things existing in actuality before it thinks.

Lots of open questions! How should we understand (1)? How should we understand (4)?

The Active and Passive Mind

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- *De An.* III.4–5: *nous* can become all things, sense cannot – but what *activates* nous?
- passive vs. active nous (*pathetikos* vs. *poetikos*): thinking requires both an active and a passive component
 - active: starts the process, and may also be responsible for seeing the form in things and handing these forms over to the passive side (a “trigger”)
 - passive: receives (and perhaps stores) the form

Implications (1): The Active Nous

The perhaps most puzzling chapter of the whole work (III.5); very hotly disputed (cf. the SEP entry for some useful discussion).

De An. III.5

Since in the whole of nature there is something which is matter to each kind of thing. . . , while on the other hand there is something else which is their cause and is productive. . . so there must also be these differences in the soul. And there is an intellect which is of this kind by becoming all things, and there is another which is so by producing all things. . . . And this intellect is distinct, unaffected, and unmixed, being in essence activity. For that which acts is always superior to that which is affected, and the first principle to matter. . . . In separation it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal.

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- 'the active mind' is 'deathless and eternal', separate.
- But how can this be, if – as A insists – the soul cannot be separated?

Two main interpretations:

- 1 **Divine Interpretation:** Aristotle here is not speaking of humans but of the god of *Metaphysics* XII (unmoved mover, pure actuality); the human mind is not detachable from the soul or from the human being.
 - but: the *De An.* is about the human soul; how can A. start talking about something completely different, without telling us?
- 2 **Human Interpretation:** Aristotle is talking about the human soul; the immortality derives from the plasticity thesis.
 - is this consistent with all that Aristotle says elsewhere?

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Active Nous: Open Questions

- is the active nous individual to each human being?
- what is its ontological status after the death of the person? If it persists, does it *become* a person?
- what *is* it, in its separated state?
- how can it function without the passive intellect, or if it can't, what does it do?
- especially how can it function, if, as Aristotle claims later, there is no thinking without an image (*De An.* III.7)?

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Implications (2): Limits of Hylomorphism?

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- perception and thinking are similar in that they both involve form-reception, but the intellect is very different in that it does not involve a body. So how much does the analogy help?
- if the intellect is unmixed, how can it be described hylomorphically?
- Aristotle says the intellect is nothing before it thinks – but what does that mean?