ARISTOTLE

NOTES ON DE ANIMA (ON THE SOUL)

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INTRODUCTION

BOOK I:

I.1 The Study of the Soul is Most Exact and has a Higher Dignity and Greater Wonderfulness, and so Ranks at the Top; to Attain Knowledge of the Soul is the Most Difficult Thing in the World; 10 Questions About the Essence of the Soul (its Substance, Whether it has Parts, etc.); All Affections (e.g., Passion, Gentleness, Fear, Pity, Courage, Joy, Loving, and Hating) Involve a Body; the Dialectician Gives a Teleological Explanation for Affections, but Physicists (Nature-Studiers) Define the Bodily Characteristics Thereof; the Genuine Physicist Gives a Material and Teleological Account of Affections (402a-403b).


Introduction

The following are detailed notes of Aristotle’s De Anima (On the Soul), which were part of a Summer Project Grant, approved by the Maricopa County Community College District in 2014. I would like to thank them for allowing me to spend time and effort on this research.

Please be aware that in what follows, these are actual sentences of Aristotle’s text in some cases, but this is not the whole text. More importantly, I have deleted, paraphrased, and/or reworded many unnecessary words, phrases, sentences, and/or examples (when 2 or 3 would suffice), and added chapter headings (that should be very helpful), numbers, underlining, italicizing, and so on, to make the text easier to understand. I have also added any notes or objections I may have thought about along the way, which are underlined and highlighted in blue. I have also moved his examples nearer to when he describes a principle (sometimes he says, e.g., “X is Y and not-Y” and then gives an example of not-Y for several sentences, until finally getting to an example of Y; I moved the example to make it more easily accessible).

In addition, these notes are in no way to be thought of as being a substitute for reading all of De Anima (On the Soul) for oneself; these notes are merely what I thought was most important, and put into a form that I could more easily understand. I use the following capitalized abbreviations: ARG = argument, OBJ = objection, REP = reply (to an objection), and EX(s) = example(s). Definitions are from the MAC Dictionary (v. 2.2.1) unless otherwise indicated, and are designated as follows: “Word to be defined [=definition – DY (⇒ to designate that it’s my note and not Aristotle’s definition)].”

The largest disclaimer comes as a result of the content of Aristotle’s argument(s) that slavery is expedient and morally correct (in Book I, Chapters 3-7)! I would hope that it is obvious that this author vehemently disagrees with any points Aristotle makes he re about slavery being natural or in any way good. I am embarrassed that I had to give headings to those Chapters; however, this document is a testament of Aristotle’s, and not my, thought, so please direct any anger, discomfort, and incredulity to the spirit of Aristotle, and write out your own rebuttals to his view. I have only given several major OBJs against his views on slavery and leave others to the exercise of the reader.

Lastly, despite all these disclaimers, I do sincerely hope that these notes are of some value to the reader.
I.1 The Study of the Soul is Most Exact and has a Higher Dignity and Greater Wonderfulness, and so Ranks at the Top; to Attain Knowledge of the Soul is the Most Difficult Thing in the World; 10 Questions About the Essence of the Soul (its Substance, Whether it has Parts, etc.); All Affections (e.g., Passion, Gentleness, Fear, Pity, Courage, Joy, Loving, and Hating) Involve a Body; the Dialectician Gives a Teleological Explanation for Affections, but Physicists (Nature-Studiers) Define the Bodily Characteristics Thereof; the Genuine Physicist Gives a Material and Teleological Account of Affections (402a-403b).

While knowledge of any kind is a thing to be honored and prized, one kind of it may, due to its greater exactness or higher dignity and greater wonderfulness in its objects, be more honorable and precious than another. Since both of these are true of the soul, we should naturally place the study of the soul in the front rank. The knowledge of the soul admittedly contributes greatly to the advance of truth in general, and, above all, to our understanding of Nature, for the soul is in some sense the principle of animal life. Our aim is to grasp and understand (1) its essential nature and (2) its properties (some properties are thought to be affections proper to the soul itself, while others are considered to attach to the animal owing to the presence of soul).

To attain any knowledge about the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world. As the form of question “What is it?” recurs in other fields, it might be supposed that there was some single method of inquiry applicable to all objects whose essential nature we are endeavoring to ascertain; in that case what we should have to seek for would be this unique method. But if there is no such single and general method for solving the question of essence, our task becomes still more difficult; for each different subject we shall have to determine the appropriate process of investigation. If to this there is a clear answer (e.g. that the process is demonstration or division, or some other known method), many difficulties and hesitations still beset us: EX: With what facts shall we begin the inquiry? The facts that form the starting points in different subjects must be different, as e.g. in the case of numbers and surfaces. We have many questions about the soul:

First, it is necessary to determine in which of the greatest kinds (genera) soul lies, what it is: is it (1) a “this,” a substance; (2) a quality, (3) a quantity, or (4) some other of the seven remaining kinds of predicates that we have distinguished? Second, does soul belong to the class of potentiality or actuality?

Third, is the soul divisible or without parts, and is it everywhere homogeneous? And (fourth) if not homogeneous, are its various forms different specifically or generically? Up till now, those who have discussed and investigated soul seem to have confined themselves to the human soul. [DY: time, place, relation, state, position, active action, or passive action? Second, does soul belong to the class of potentiality or actuality?]

Fifth, can soul be defined in a single account, as is the case with animal, or must we give a separate account for each sort of it, as we do for horse, dog, man, god (in the latter case the universal, animal – and so too every other common predicate – is either nothing or posterior)? Sixth, if what exists is not a plurality of souls, but a plurality of parts of one soul, which ought we to investigate first: the whole soul or its parts? Seventh, we must decide which of these parts are in nature distinct from one another. Eighth, which ought we to investigate first, these parts or their functions, mind or thinking, the faculty or the act of sensation, and so on? Ninth, if the investigation of the functions precedes that of the parts, the further question suggests itself: ought we not before either to consider the correlative objects, e.g. of sense or thought? It seems not only useful for the discovery of the causes of the incidental properties of substances to be acquainted with the essential nature of those substances (as in mathematics it is useful for the understanding of the property of the equality of the interior angles of a triangle to two right angles to know the essential nature of the straight and the curved or of the line and the plane) but also conversely, for the knowledge of the essential nature of a substance is largely promoted by an acquaintance with its properties: When we are able to give an account conformable to experience of all or most of the properties of a substance, we shall be in the most favorable position to say something worth saying about the essential nature of that subject; in all demonstration a definition of the essence is required as a starting point, so that definitions that do not enable us to discover the incidental properties, or which fail to facilitate even a conjecture about them, must obviously, one and all, be dialectical and futile.

Tenth, are all affections of the complex of body and soul, or is there any one among them peculiar to the soul by itself? To determine this is indispensable but difficult. If we consider the majority of affections, in every case the soul cannot act or be acted upon without involving the body; e.g. anger, courage, appetite, and
sensation generally. Thinking seems the most probable exception; but if this too proves to be a form of imagination or to be impossible without imagination, it too requires a body as a condition of its existence. If there is any way of acting or being acted upon proper to soul, soul will be capable of separate existence; if there is none, its separate existence is impossible. In the latter case, it will be like what is straight, which has many properties arising from the straightness in it, e.g. that of touching a bronze sphere at a point, though straightness divorced from the other constituents of the straight thing cannot touch it in this way; it cannot be so divorced at all, since it is always found in a body. All the affections of soul involve a body – passion, gentleness, fear, pity, courage, joy, loving, and hating; in all these there is a concurrent affection of the body. Proof: While sometimes during violent and striking occurrences there is no excitement or fear felt, at other times faint and feeble stimulations produce these emotions (e.g., when the body is already in a state of tension resembling its condition when we are angry). Here is a still clearer case: in the absence of any external cause of terror we find ourselves experiencing the feelings of a man in terror. Thus, the affections of soul are *logoi* (accounts) in matter.

Thus, their definitions ought to correspond: EX: Anger should be defined as a certain mode of movement of such and such a body (or part or faculty of a body) by this or that cause and for this or that end. That is precisely why the study of the soul (either every soul or souls of this sort) must fall within the science of nature. Hence a physicist (DY: literally in Greek, “physicist” means the studier of nature (physis), and not what we would call “physics”); here, he’s really describing what we’d call a biologist (or a botanist if he’s discussing plants) would define an affection of soul differently from a dialectician; the dialectician would define e.g. anger as the appetite for returning pain for pain, or something like that, while the physicist would define it as a boiling of the blood or warm substance surrounding the heart. The physicist assigns the material conditions, the dialectician the form or account (what he states is the account of the fact, though for its actual existence there must be embodiment of it in a material such as is described by the other). Thus, one may give an account of the essence of a house as “a shelter against destruction by wind, rain, and heat”; the physicist as “stones, bricks, and timbers”; the third possible description is that form in that material with that purpose or end. Which is the account of the genuine physicist? The one who combines both. If this is so, how are we to characterize the other two? There is no type of thinker who concerns himself with those qualities or material attributes that are in fact inseparable from the material, and without attempting even in thought to separate them. The physicist is he who concerns himself with all the properties active and passive of bodies or materials thus or thus defined; attributes not considered as being of this character he leaves to others, in certain cases it may be to a specialist (e.g. a carpenter or a physician), in others (a) where they are inseparable in fact, but are separable from any particular kind of body by an effort of abstraction, to the mathematician, (b) where they are separate, to the First Philosopher. Repeat: the affections of soul (passion and fear) are inseparable from the natural matter of animals in this way and not in the same way as a line or surface.


For our study of soul it is necessary to review our predecessors’ views on this subject, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their suggestions and avoid their errors.

The starting point of our inquiry is an exposition of those characteristics that have chiefly been held to belong to soul in its very nature. Two characteristic marks have above all others distinguishes what has soul in it from what does not have soul: Movement and sensation. These two are what our predecessors have fixed upon as characteristic of soul.

Some say that what originates movement is both pre-eminently and primarily soul; believing that what is not itself moved cannot originate movement in another, they arrived at the view that soul belongs to the class of things in movement. Thus, Democritus says that soul is a sort of fire or hot substance; his “forms” or atoms are infinite in number; fire and soul are spherical, and he compares them to the motes in the air which we see in shafts of light coming through windows; the mixture of seeds of all sorts he calls the elements of the whole of nature (Leucippus gives a similar account); the spherical atoms are identified with soul because atoms of that shape are most adapted to permeate everywhere, and to set all the others moving by being themselves in movement. This implies that soul is identical with what produces movement in animals. That is also why they
regard respiration as the characteristic mark of life; as the environment compresses the bodies of animals, and tends to extrude those atoms which impart movement to them, because they themselves are never at rest, there must be a reinforcement of these by similar atoms coming in from outside through respiration; they prevent the extrusion of those which are already within by counteracting the compressing and consolidating force of the environment; and animals continue to live only so long as they are able to maintain this resistance.

The Pythagoreans' doctrine rests upon the same ideas; some of them declared the motes in air, others what moved them, to be soul. They referred to motes because motes are seen always in movement, even in a complete calm.

The same tendency is shown by those who define soul as that which moves itself; all these hold the view that movement is what is closest to the nature of soul, and that while all else is moved by soul, it alone moves itself. This belief arises from their never seeing anything originating movement that is not first itself moved.

Similarly, Anaxagoras (and whoever agrees that thought set the whole in movement) declares the moving cause of things to be soul. His position differs from Democritus'. Democritus roundly identifies soul and mind, for he identifies what appears with what is true – he does not employ mind as a special faculty dealing with truth, but identifies soul and thought. What Anaxagoras says about them is less clear; in many places he tells us that the cause of beauty and order is thought, elsewhere that it is soul; it is found, he says, in all animals, great and small, high and low, but thought (in the sense of intelligence) appears not to belong alike to all animals, and indeed not even to all human beings.

So all those who had special regard to the fact that what has soul in it is moved, adopted the view that soul is to be identified with what is essentially originative of movement. All, on the other hand, who looked to the fact that what has soul in it knows or perceives what is, identify soul with the principle(s) of Nature, according as they admit several such principles or one only. Thus Empedocles declares that soul is formed out of all his elements, each of them also being soul. In the same way Plato in the Timaeus fashions the soul out of his elements; for like, he holds, is known by like, and things are formed out of the principles or elements. Similarly in the lectures, “On Philosophy” Plato states that the Animal-itself is compounded of the Idea itself of the One together with the primary length, breadth, and depth, everything else being similarly constituted. Again he puts his view in yet other terms: Mind is the monad, knowledge the dyad (because it goes undeviatingly from one point to another), opinion the number of the plane, sensation the number of the solid; the numbers are by him expressly identified with the Forms themselves or principles, and are formed out of the elements; now things are apprehended either by mind, knowledge, opinion, or sensation, and these same numbers are the Forms of things. [DY: In his Metaphysics, Aristotle states that Plato does not think that Forms are numbers].

Some thinkers (accepting that the soul causes movement and cognitive activities) have declared the soul to be a self-moving number.

Opinions differ as to the nature and number of the first principles. Some say the first principles are corporeal, others incorporeal, and yet others both. Some posit only one first principle, while others assert several. Thus, their accounts of soul differ: they assume, naturally enough, that what naturally causes self-movement must be a first principle. That has led some to regard it as fire (fire is the subtlest of the elements and nearest to incorporeality, and, in the primary sense, fire both is moved and originates movement in all the others).

Democritus is more ingenious than the rest; he ascribes two characters (soul and thought) to soul; soul and thought are one and the same thing, and this thing must be one of the primary and indivisible bodies, and its power of originating movement must be due to its fineness of grain and the shape of its atoms; of all the shapes, the spherical is the most mobile, and this is the shape of the particles of both fire and thought.

Anaxagoras, as said, seems to distinguish between soul and thought, but in practice he treats them as a single substance, except he specially posits thought as the principle of all things; thought alone of all that is is simple, unmixed, and pure. He assigns knowing and origination of movement to the same principle because he says that thought set the whole in movement.

1 Empedocles: “For ‘tis by Earth we see Earth, by Water Water, By Ether Ether divine, by Fire destructive Fire, By Love Love, and Hate by cruel Hate.”
Thales also seems to have held soul to be a motive force, since he said that the magnet has a soul in it because it moves the iron.

Diogenes of Apollonia (and others) held the soul to be air because he believed air to be finest in grain and a first principle; therein lay the grounds of the soul’s powers of knowing and originating movement. As the primordial principle from which all other things are derived, it is cognitive; as finest in grain, it has the power to originate movement.

Heraclitus also says that the first principle – the “warm exhalation” of which everything else is composed – is soul; this exhalation is most incorporeal and in ceaseless flux; what is in movement requires that what knows it should be in movement; and all that depends on movement (herein agreeing with the majority).

Alcmaeon says that the soul is immortal because it resembles the immortals, and that this immortality belongs to it in virtue of its ceaseless movement; all the divine things, moon, sun, the planets, and the whole heavens, are in perpetual movement.

Of more superficial writers, some (e.g. Hippo), have pronounced it to be water; they seem to have argued from the fact that the seed of all animals is fluid, for Hippo tries to refute those who say that the soul is blood, on the ground that the seed, which is the primordial soul, is not blood.

Another group (e.g. Critias) did hold it to be blood; they take perception to be the most characteristic attribute of soul, and hold that perceptiveness is due to the nature of blood.

Each of the elements has thus found its partisan, except earth, unless we count those who have declared soul to be, or to be compounded of, all the elements. Thus, everyone characterizes the soul by three marks: Movement, Sensation, Incorporeality, and each of these is traced back to the first principles. That is why (with one exception) all those who define the soul by its power of knowing make it either an element or constructed out of the elements. They use similar language: “like is known by like”; as the soul knows everything, they construct it out of all the principles. Hence all those who admit but one cause or element, make the soul also one (e.g. fire or air), while those who admit a multiplicity of principles make the soul also multiple. (The exception is Anaxagoras; he alone says that thought is impassible and has nothing in common with anything else. But, if this is so, how or in virtue of what cause can it know? That Anaxagoras has not explained, nor can any answer be inferred from his words.) All who acknowledge pairs of opposites among their principles, construct the soul also out of these contraries, while those who admit as principles only one contrary of each pair, e.g. either hot or cold, likewise make the soul some one of these. That is why they allow themselves to be guided by the names; those who identify soul with the hot argue that {\textit{zen}} (to live) is derived from {\textit{zein}} (to boil), while those who identify it with the cold say that soul ({\textit{psyche}}) is so called from the process of respiration and refrigeration ({\textit{katapsyxis}}).

Such are the traditional opinions concerning soul, together with the grounds on which they are maintained.