

PART TWO: INTRODUCTION TO ARISTOTLE'S *DE ANIMA*

by Paul J. Medeiros
Department of Philosophy

10:00 AM, Monday, March 16, 2009

SUMMARY OF *DE ANIMA*

Aristotle proposes to explore the nature and essence of the soul. Aristotle presents the view that all living beings have soul, and that each kind of living being is distinguished by its own kind of soul.

The human, we learn, is distinguished by intellect, and Aristotle indicates that intellect is likely to be the immortal portion of the human person. The treatment of the soul in *De Anima*, however, is surprisingly brief.

Book I, Aristotle first proposes the subject of the soul, Aristotle discusses the right method in order to reveal the nature and essence of the soul, and Aristotle discusses immortality.

Book II, Aristotle explains the soul in terms of a unique terminology, Aristotle distinguish the soul of the various kinds of living beings, and Aristotle begins an elaborate discussion of perception.

Book III, Aristotle continues the discussion of perception, and Aristotle defines the human intellect.

LEARN ARISTOTLE'S TERMINOLOGY

In order to learn Aristotle, you must define and memorize his philosophical vocabulary. Here are a list of some of the difficult terms from the *De Anima* that are unique to Aristotle and that require study.

nature, essence, genera, attributes, student of nature, dialectician, substance, composite, actuality, first actuality, principle, incidental object, common object, special object, practical intellect, contemplative intellect

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Prepare a list of Aristotelian terms in your notebook and as you read the *De Anima*, construct the best definition of the terms, as used by Aristotle. In some cases, the term is deliberately defined.

Please submit questions about terminology for which you have difficulty!

ARISTOTLE ON IMMORTALITY

What is Aristotle's view on immortality of the human soul? Aristotle clearly indicates in *De Anima* that the human intellect is likely to be independently existing. Aristotle notes that thought is not effected by age, and Aristotle notes that the intellect has unique attributes that are not found in physical body nor in other creatures. And yet, Aristotle observes that human perception and emotion are quite dependent on the physical body.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Prepare a summary of the argument provided by Aristotle in the *De Anima* for the immortality of the human soul.

Submit Questions for Part Three by 11:00 AM

PART THREE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWER ABOUT ARISTOTLE

By Paul J. Medeiros
Department of Philosophy

12:00 NOON, Monday, March 16, 2009

HOW MAY WE RELATE *DE ANIMA* TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN PERSON?

In *De Anima*, Aristotle provides his ideas about the nature of the soul, especially the human soul. The human soul is a feature of any possible human person. Thus, to study Aristotle's *De Anima*, is to learn something about his idea of what constitutes and defines the human person.

De Anima by no means provides us with a complete idea of Aristotle's concept of the human person.

We would have read other texts of Aristotle to be approach that ideal. These texts include *Nicomachean Ethics*, a set of lectures about ethics, *On Generation and Corruption*, and Aristotle's famous *Politics*.

HOW MAY WE UNDERSTAND ARISTOTLE'S FAMOUS DISTINCTION BETWEEN MATTER AND FORM?

In *De Anima*, Aristotle's distinction between matter and form makes an important appearance. Aristotle explains the distinction between body and soul in terms of the distinction between matter and form.

MATTER is pure material stuff. Matter without form is matter without character or meaning. Water and earth are matter, but water and earth have character because such matter has already been taken up by living beings.

FORM is variously described by Aristotle as the "internal principle", "shape", and "limit" of a being. We distinguish kinds of beings, claims Aristotle, in terms of their particular form. Humans give "form" to matter in the act of creation. Natural beings have "form" within them as an "internal principle".

Some today may argue that DNA structure approximates what Aristotle meant by "form": form organizes matter into a specific kind of being with a particular purpose.

For Aristotle, the body is to the soul, as matter is to form.

HOW MAY WE UNDERSTAND ARISTOTLE IN BOOK 3? ARISTOTLE SAYS: INTELLECT IS "ACTUALLY NOTHING". (196)

Aristotle's idea must be that the intellect is thoroughly receptive. The intellect is able to think about the great variety of existing things, including divine being. For Aristotle's way of thinking, the intellect must be capable of becoming *like* the object of thought in order to have the idea.

Aristotle applies this same notion of "becoming like" the object when Aristotle discusses perception.

Aristotle, moreover, insists that the intellect is unperturbed by perceptions, and Aristotle suggests that it is this portion of the human soul which is immortal. He calls this the CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT.

“I AM HAVING TROUBLE DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN THE PRACTICAL INTELLECT AND THE CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT...” “CAN WE DISCUSS THE TWO TYPES OF INTELLECT?”

The CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT is the intellect proper. The contemplative intellect is the part of the human being that is truly independent and immortal. Aristotle says that the contemplative intellect is not influenced by change in the physical body nor by external events. Aristotle says that the contemplative intellect “contemplates nothing practicable”. (202)

In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle claims that the proper object of the contemplative intellect is divine being and that the best possible life is life spent in contemplation of divine being.

The PRACTICAL INTELLECT is that portion of the human soul concerned with action and with the pursuit of everyday goals. The practical intellect is closely allied to appetites (desires), perception, and the physical body; so it must be, for Aristotle, that the practical intellect does not survive death.

Possibly Aristotle holds that the practical intellect is also found in animals since animals also pursue their appetites in a way that requires memory and calculation.

“WOULD ARISTOTLE AGREE THAT THE SOUL IS A SEPARATE ENTITY FROM THE PHYSICAL HUMAN BODY?”

Aristotle introduces a complex terminology to distinguish parts of the soul, and Aristotle is tentative when Aristotle does this. Aristotle claims that there is soul living in every kind of natural beings, and this soul he calls the first actuality. It is the common way in which life on earth is organized and directed. every

Plants have soul, in this sense. But artifacts do not have soul because they lack this “internal principle”.

The human soul is distinguished in that it has a portion which does not in any way depend on the physical body. So, it is the intellect that exists independently of the physical body.

Nonetheless, unlike Plato, Aristotle believes that all knowledge happens through perception. So, for the intellect to actively contemplate requires perception through the physical body.

“IS THE TERM *INTELLECT* INTERCHANGE-ABLE WITH SOUL IN THE SENSE OF IMMORALITY WHEN DEALING WITH ARISTOTLE?”

Yes, it is true that Aristotle asserts the immortality of the intellect. Moreover, the intellect is possessed only by humans. The rest of the soul is so closely allied to the body that those parts of the soul do not survive.

“HOW ABOUT THE SECOND PAPER ASSIGNMENT?”

I will provide the description of the second paper possibly by email on Wednesday. The second paper will focus on the basic ideas of Aristotle. If you do not have to have a personal computer by which to print the attachments, then you may visit the computer lab to view and print documents.

Part Four: Aristotle's Concept of the Human Person around 2:00 PM

PART FOUR: ARISTOTLE'S CONCEPT OF THE HUMAN PERSON in *DE ANIMA*

by Paul J. Medeiros
Department of Philosophy

2:00 PM, Monday, March 16, 2009

Aristotle's *De Anima* is a complex and often fascinating introduction to Aristotle's way of thinking. Fluency in Aristotle takes time. Aristotle's treatment of the soul appears at times to skirt the complex question of immortality. And, to some readers, the similarity of Aristotle's ideas with Plato's ideas appears very obvious: so, we are naturally inclined to ask *does Aristotle dogmatically asserting what Plato had already thought?*

Let us propose two *possible* definitions of the human person for Aristotle, and let us distinguish Aristotle's philosophy from that of his famous teacher Plato.

THE COMPOSITE

Perhaps the "composite" is, for Aristotle, the human person. Aristotle uses the term "composite" as early as Book I. The philosopher there states that the physical body is MATTER and the soul is FORM. The composite of the two beings is the individual man. In saying this, Aristotle refers to his *Categories*.

Moreover, Aristotle claims that the "composite" is that to which we attribute emotions such as anger, joy, and love. The body does not love; and the soul does not love. It is the "composite", says Aristotle, which loves. Aristotle's composite, insofar as it is partly physical, does not survive death.

THE CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT

Perhaps the "contemplative intellect" is, for Aristotle, the human person. The contemplative intellect, for Aristotle, is that activity of the human soul that distinguishes humans. The contemplative intellect, moreover, is distinct from the physical body. Aristotle writes that "intellect is distinct, unaffected, and unmixed..." (197).

Aristotle does not explain precisely how the distinct being of the intellect is possible. But Aristotle does note evidence for the assertion: the intellect does not weaken even as the sense weaken, the intellect must be able relate to all possible things, animals carry have emotions and desires without intellect...

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Prepare argument for what appears to be the best candidate for Aristotle's definition for the human person: the composite or the contemplative intellect.

HOW IS ARISTOTLE UNIQUE?

Aristotle's definition of INTELLECT recalls for us Plato's *Phaedo*. Socrates asserts that the philosopher purifies the soul by focusing on contemplation. Is Aristotle providing a re-statement of Plato's philosophy? Apparently not. The difference is expressed in Aristotle's account of *thinking* and the *intellect* in Book III.

On p. 195, Aristotle explicitly revises what can only be Plato's saying, that the soul is "a place of forms". Whereas Plato held that the Forms (pure beauty) are actually in the human intellect, Aristotle holds that the intellect is nothing but pure receptivity for forms. Aristotle says that the intellect is "the form of forms". So, Aristotle, rejecting Plato's *theory of recollection*, holds that knowledge is acquired through experience.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Create an analogy that makes clear the distinction between Plato's concept of the intellect and Aristotle's concept of the intellect.

Part Five: Second Set of Questions and Conclusion around 4:00PM

FIFTH PART: SECOND SET OF QUESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

by Paul J. Medeiros
Department of Philosophy

4:00 PM, March 16, 2009

In conclusion, I provide an argument in favor of the idea that, for Aristotle, the “composite” is truly the human person. Ten (10) students today mailed questions or comments. I will also answer remaining questions. We will conduct the exact same exercise on Wednesday with Book VII of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. On that morning, I will again request confirmations. I will also prepare for you, the second paper assignment description.

ARGUMENT FOR THE COMPOSITE

What we ordinarily mean by “human person” is best expressed by Aristotle’s term “composite”.

The “composite”, for Aristotle, is the combination of physical body and soul. Aristotle often observes that most activities essential to life generally, and to human life particularly, take place in terms of the composite.

Perception, imagination, growth, reproduction, movement, and desire all require the physical body. We do not say that the body rejoices, and we do not say that the soul rejoices, but we do say that the person rejoices.

The contemplative intellect, by Aristotle’s description, represents something mysterious and unperceptible. We know it not. The contemplative intellect, for Aristotle, provides the unique activity that distinguishes humans—but the contemplative intellect could not be that which distinguishes each one of us, as *individual humans*.

What distinguishes each of us as individual humans, or “human persons”, is our experiences (contemplative or practical), our personality, our character, and our work. Thus, the “composite” has better claim to Aristotle’s human person. If we agree to this, then we have to consider Aristotle’s view that the “composite” perishes.

QUESTIONS-AND-ANSWERS

HOW MAY WE UNDERSTAND THE IDEAS OF POTENTIALITY AND ACTUALITY?

For Aristotle, everything may be distinguished in terms of *potentiality* and *actuality*. Living things, in particular, are discussed by Aristotle in these terms. Aristotle, a biologist, observed that natural things already have within themselves the principle by which they grow and mature. This observation provides the basis for Aristotle’s distinction between *potentiality* and *actuality*.

Matter, for Aristotle, is pure potentiality. Matter could become anything. Curiously, Aristotle also describes the intellect proper as pure potentiality. The intellect is “nothing” in order that it may be like anything.

Form, for Aristotle, is actuality. Form *limits and organizes* matter so as to create an individual being with distinct features and functions.

As pure wax is to candle, so matter is to form. As plastic is to a chair, so matter is to form.

For Aristotle, any being’s purpose is to achieve complete and immortal actuality. Most beings achieve this by replication of their kind, and, for Aristotle, some beings, humans, achieve this goal by the immortal intellect.

DOES ARISTOTLE BELIEVE THAT HUMAN PERSONALITY CANNOT SURVIVE DEATH?

Insofar as human personality consists in gestures, vocal quality, dexterity, appearance, and other physical qualities, then Aristotle is committed to the view that human personality does not survive death.

Insofar as the contemplative intellect provides the basis of human personality, Aristotle would argue that human personality survives death.

It is probable that the characteristics that we normally attribute to *persons* are characteristics that are based in the composite being—the individual human. And, for Aristotle, these characteristics cannot matter.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: On scrap paper, distinguish these concepts: person, personality, and character. Are personality and character distinct ideas? Can one be a person without having personality?

IS IT POSSIBLE, FOR ARISTOTLE, TO CONFORM ONE'S PERSONALITY, WITH ITS IDENTITY AND EMOTIONS, TO THE "CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT"?

Aristotle does at times, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, write in this way. The best place to study the distinction between "composite" and the CONTEMPLATIVE INTELLECT is in the concluding book—Book X.

There Aristotle provides a lucid distinction between the life devoted to being composite and the life devoted to being a contemplative human. Aristotle argues that the contemplative life is most superior.

Aristotle, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, asserts that the one who lives the contemplative life does so by focussing all their time on the activity of contemplating God. As such, the contemplative person does without the external goods, friends and social roles, that make composite life meaningful. The contemplative human, focussed on the goal of knowing God, must lose whatever unnecessary characteristics that normally constitute personality.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: What qualities of personality do we customarily attribute to those who devote themselves to monastic life? These will be the qualities that are evident in the person who excels at the activity of contemplating God wisely.

WHAT DOES ARISTOTLE THINK ABOUT NATURE?

For Aristotle, nature consists of composites of matter and form, most of which are living and some of which are rational living creatures. Aristotle's father was a biologist, and Aristotle acquired a scientist's tendency to describe and classify things in terms of their kinds and attributes.

For Aristotle, the natural world consists of many kinds of beings. Natural beings, have within themselves, the internal principle, or form, by which they are directed in life. Only natural beings have this principle authentically, whereas artifacts have their ordering principle imposed from without by human creators.

For Aristotle, everything living has an ideal goal to which it is directed by the internal principle. Aristotle's discussion of this key Aristotelian topic is found in Aristotle's *Physics* and in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Aristotle believes that all natural things have an ideal goal, which is their fulfillment. Plants, insects, and humans each have purposes. Is this true? What about mountains? What about rivers? Sketch down your thoughts in your journal or notebook.

HOW ARE THE SENSES PERTINENT TO ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF THE HUMAN SOUL?

The uniquely human soul, for Aristotle, is the contemplative intellect. But the whole human soul consists of functions and activities that are dependent on perception. So perception contributes, for Aristotle, substantially to the human experience. The senses, however, do not distinguish the human experience as a *human* experience.

Aristotle's discussion of the senses, I may add, is especially materialistic. In other words, for Aristotle, as for the student of nature, the senses may be explained in terms of physical events and relations. Aristotle's insistence that *touch* is the common dominator for all perceptive beings is unique to Aristotle.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: Sketch in your own words, using perhaps analogy, Aristotle's distinction between special objects of perception, common objects of perception, and incidental objects of perception.

WHEN ARISTOTLE SAYS "QUA" MATTER OR "QUA" SHAPE, WHAT DOES "QUA" MEAN?

The term "qua" is Latin. The term "qua" may be translated with the equivalent English term "as". So, the person *qua* student attended the College ceremony. And city mayor *qua* citizen cast his vote in the general election.

The bird *qua* insectivore devoured the pesky bug.

WHEN WE SAY THE INTELLECT IS PURE RECEPTIVITY OF THE FORMS, WHAT DO WE MEAN? DO WE MEAN THAT THE INTELLECT HAS PRECONCEIVED NOTION OF THE FORMS?

Aristotle's intellect is a complex idea. The intellect must be able to be like everything, and the intellect is pure activity. Aristotle holds that the intellect is able to recognize and identify beings in terms of their kind. In this sense, the intellect is the "form of forms". Aristotle's idea of the intellect must be similar to the idea of photographic paper: it is able to record the impression of any visible object. So too the intellect is able to apprehend the form of any being, and, presumably, the intellect thinks entirely in terms of the forms of things.

Aristotle sounds here just like Plato, except that Aristotle emphasizes that the forms are not already known in the intellect. The intellect, for Aristotle, is a uniquely infinite being. The intellect is able to apprehend the forms of things that we experience, presumably through the venue of our physical bodies and the five senses. But intellect, for Aristotle, is aloof of worldly experience, much like a tennis referee is aloof of the tennis game.

OPTIONAL EXERCISE: scour through Book III of the *De Anima* and collect all distinct propositions that together define Aristotle's concept of the intellect and the contemplative intellect.

WHEN IS THE PAPER DUE...?

The second paper, which I provide a description for Wednesday's meeting, will be due for submission on the Monday, March 23, 2009.

WHEN ARE NEXT OFFICE HOURS? I WANT TO SUBMIT AN LETTER OF GRADE APPEAL.

Office hours are suspended. I will answer questions by email for this week, March 16 to March 20. You may certainly submit a letter of grade appeal by campus mail. Address the campus mail envelop to: Paul J. Medeiros, Department of Philosophy.

The mid-term grades, exam grades, and first paper grades are not available to me. I request your forbearance. In the meantime,

Yours philosophically,
PAUL J. MEDEIROS