
Souls and Bodies

An Aristotelian Approach I

Three Aristotelian Complaints

- ❖ Against those Ignoring the Requisites of Soul-Body Relations (Pythagoras and his followers)
- ❖ Against the Denial of the Human Essence (against both materialists and dualists)
- ❖ Against Separation (against, among others, Plato)

The Requisites of Soul-Body Relations

- ❖ But something absurd turns out for this account as for most others concerning the soul, since they conjoin the soul to the body and place it in the body without articulating in addition the cause of this or the condition of the body. This, however, would seem to be necessary; it is because of their commonality that one acts while the other is affected, and that the one initiates motion and the other is in motion. None of this belongs to things which just happen to be related to one another. These accounts merely endeavour to say what sort of thing the soul is without articulating anything further about the body which is to receive the soul, as if it were possible, as according to the Pythagorean myths, for just any soul to be outfitted in just any body. For each body seems to have its own peculiar form and shape, and what they say is almost the same as if someone were to say that carpentry could be outfitted in flutes; for it is necessary that the craft make use of its tools, and that the soul make use of its body (*DA* i 4, 407b13-26).

Three Contentions in this Passage

1. Many theorists simply ignore the requisites of soul-body relations, with the result that absurdities abound
2. Paying attention to this matter is necessary, because soul and body casually interact—and so must be able to do so
3. These theorists focus on the soul, to the exclusion of the body—a mistake leading to all manner of fanciful but false conceptions of what is possible for the soul

(1) The Requisites of the Body

- ❖ Non-technical: we should not think that just any body can perform the psychic activities of a given kind of soul.
 - ❖ Here it is noteworthy that Plato (in the *Phaedo*) was highly intellectualist about the soul, assigning desires and the like to the body.
- ❖ Technical: the soul is the final cause of the body
 - ❖ If the body has as its end the realization of various psychic activities, then it had better be able to perform those activities.
 - ❖ If a hammer is *for* pounding nails, then it had better be suitably shaped and it had better be made of a suitably solid, heavy material.
 - ❖ Aristotle's technical way of putting this: the final cause determines the formal and material causes.

(2) Interaction

- ❖ We have met the problem of the ‘ghost in the machine’: it is difficult to fathom how an immaterial being could causally interact with a material being.
- ❖ Yet souls and bodies *do* causally interact, in two directions:
 - ❖ body to soul: a pin prick causes pain, a light in our visual field cause us to see, an appetizing dish causes us to desire it, a strange sight causes us to wonder
 - ❖ soul to body: desires cause us to move, decisions cause us to act, fear causes us to flee, pain causes us to pursue avoidance behavior
- ❖ If a theory cannot account for this datum, something is wrong with that theory.

An Illustration



A 'Superior Image' taken from the shore near Falmouth, Cornwall
BBC meteorologist David Braine said the superior mirage occurred because of 'special atmospheric conditions that bend light'—one involving a thermal inversion.

(3) Focussing on the Soul: Understandable I

- ❖ Perhaps we focus on the intellectual and phenomenal features of the soul first and foremost for a good reason: they are immediately available to us, and seem to be somehow privileged.
 - ❖ Intellectual: Suppose I am an agnostic about the existence of God. I've thought about it a lot, and I'm just not sure. Some of my friends, and some people I respect, are theists; some of my friends, and some people I respect are atheists? Me? I'm just not sure.
 - ❖ If I am just not sure about God's existence, then I am aware, immediately, and non-inferentially, that I am just not sure.
 - ❖ That can change, of course, but when it does, I'll be privy to that information as well.
 - ❖ By contrast, you won't be privy to that information, unless I elect to tell you so.

(3) Focussing on the Soul: Understandable II

- ❖ Phenomenal: When I am in pain, I am aware that I am in pain. I do not need to look at a brain scan to determine whether I'm in pain; perhaps, indeed, I *cannot* learn that I am in pain that way.
 - ❖ If I am in pain, then I am aware, immediately and non-inferentially that I am in pain.
 - ❖ When my pain abates, then I'll be aware of that, too.
 - ❖ You might learn that about me that I'm in pain from a brain scan, if you're a skilled technician, able to interpret neural data adeptly. But that will perforce be a kind of inference that you make.
- ❖ In sum, perhaps it is understandable that we focus first on the intellectual and phenomenal features of the soul: (some) psychic states are self-intimating.

(3) Focussing on the Soul: Problematic

- ❖ However understandable, this becomes problematic when we neglect the body.
- ❖ Then we begin to believe, perversely, that just any old soul could inhabit any old body.
- ❖ My soul could be in this body. . .
 - ❖ . . . or in an animal body. . .
 - ❖ . . .or in the body of a 1964 Jaguar

Three Ways the President of ND Might Look



Revisiting Aristotle's Text

- ❖ But something absurd turns out for this account as for most others concerning the soul, since they conjoin the soul to the body and place it in the body without articulating in addition the cause of this or the condition of the body. This, however, would seem to be necessary; it is because of their commonality that one acts while the other is affected, and that the one initiates motion and the other is in motion. None of this belongs to things which just happen to be related to one another. These accounts merely endeavour to say what sort of thing the soul is without articulating anything further about the body which is to receive the soul, as if it were possible, as according to the Pythagorean myths, for just any soul to be outfitted in just any body. For each body seems to have its own peculiar form and shape, and what they say is almost the same as if someone were to say that carpentry could be outfitted in flutes; for it is necessary that the craft make use of its tools, and that the soul make use of its body (*DA* i 4, 407b13-26).

An Implicit Argument

- (1) If just any soul could animate just any body, then the craft of carpentry could be effected by using flutes and harps as tools.
- (2) The craft of carpentry cannot be effected by using flutes and harps and tools.
- (3) So, it's not the case that just any soul can animate just any body.
- (4) Any theory of soul which runs afoul of (3)—Plato's for instance—must be rejected.
- (5) So, Plato's theory, like all which run afoul of (3), must be rejected.

Some Observations

- ❖ The analogy offered in (1) presupposes that the soul is the final cause of the body.
 - ❖ Our souls must be described *teleologically*.
 - ❖ Given that psychic activities are, well, *activities*, souls can only be realized in functionally suitable matter.
 - ❖ If that sounds daunting, then think of it this way: just as a house has the purpose of providing shelter, the form of the house (and recall, the soul is the form of the body) must be realized in some matter capable of realizing that function.
 - ❖ This might be wood, brick, stone, snow, even sod. . .
 - ❖ . . . but *not* candy floss, wind, champagne froth.

Functionally Suitable Matter



Not Functionally Suitable Matter



Functionally Suitable Matter

Trees in Berlin

It is, one hears, *good for* trees to be dormant in winter

This, it seems, permits them to expend energy developing their root structures during periods of dormancy.

This development, in turn, serves their growth and general health.

One might say, then, that dormancy is for *the sake of* tree health.



For the sake of?

- ❖ Recall our account of the normative:
 - ❖ Normative claims make appeal, explicitly or implicitly, to some norm as a standard; they are generally evaluative or prescriptive.
 - ❖ For better or worse, teleological causes are irredeemably normative.
 - ❖ On Aristotle's picture, many things with a final cause have those causes even though their having them is not the result of any conscious design or intentional activity.

The Soul as Final Cause

- ❖ If the soul is a final cause, then the activities of the body are explained and evaluated by how and how well they serve its intrinsic good.
- ❖ Again, though, this good (on Aristotle's picture) is intrinsic to the soul, without the soul's having been designed for any further purpose.
- ❖ The soul is not a tool or a means to an end; it is rather a source and an end in itself.