
Aristotelian Soul and Bodies II

A Middle Way?

Two Approaches to Soul and Body

- ❖ Presocratic Materialism: the soul is identical with the elements which constitute the body; the soul *is* the body.
- ❖ Platonic Dualism: the soul is an immaterial substance, distinct from the body and imprisoned within it.

Against Materialism

- ❖ The elements and their properties cannot explain the observed facts regarding living substances.
 - ❖ So, materialism is explanatorily inadequate.
 - ❖ Further, it is possible to have just the elements of the body, without their being alive.
 - ❖ So, again, materialism is explanatorily inadequate.

Against Platonic Dualism

- ❖ The falsity of materialism is insufficient to establish Platonic dualism.
- ❖ So, while Plato was right to reject Presocratic materialism, he was wrong to infer on the basis of its falsity that souls are immortal and capable of an independent existence.
- ❖ In a sense, Plato overemphasizes the formal cause.

A Positive Proposal: Hylomorphism

- ❖ ‘Therefore, the soul must be a substance as the form of a natural body which possesses life in potentiality.’ (*De Anima* ii 1, 412a19-22)

Aristotle's General View

Soul : Body :: Form : Matter

or again

Soul : Body :: Shape : Bronze

Two Consequences

- ❖ It is not necessary to ask whether the soul and body are one.
- ❖ There is no reason to suppose that the soul can exist without the body.

Not Need to Inquire

- ❖ 'If then one must make a general statement about the soul, it will be the first actualization of a natural organic body. That is also why there is no need to inquire whether the soul and body are one, just as there is not need to ask whether the wax and its shape are one, nor more generally whether the matter of each thing and that to which the matter belongs are one. For while one and being are spoken of in several ways, what is spoken of in the primary way is the actualization.' (*De Anima*, ii 1, 412b5-10)

Separate Existence

- ❖ ‘Therefore, it is not unclear that the soul is not separable from the body, and also that certain of its parts are not, if it is naturally divisible into parts; for the actualization of some of them belong to the parts themselves.’ (*De Anima* ii 1, 413a4-8)

A Middle Way?

- ❖ Presocratic materialism is indefensible.
 - ❖ Plato was right about that.
- ❖ But the falsity of Presocratic materialism does not establish the truth of Platonic dualism.
 - ❖ Plato was wrong about that.
- ❖ Hylomorphism acknowledges the indefensibility of materialism without embracing the extravagance of dualism.

Three Problems

- ❖ Soul and Body
 - ❖ The Priority of the Soul
- ❖ Perception
 - ❖ A Problem of Representation
- ❖ Reason
 - ❖ A Problem of Plasticity

The Basic Argument for Hylomorphism

- (1) There is change.
- (2) A necessary condition of there being change is the existence of matter and form.
- (3) So, there are matter and form.

Matter and Form: First Characterisation

- ❖ x is matter $=_{df}$ x underlies change in the acquisition or loss of a form.
- ❖ x is form $=_{df}$ x is a positive attribute gained or lost by matter in the process of change.

Hylomorphism: *A Workable Middle Way?*

- Material substances are compounds of matter and form
- x is matter =_{df} x is potentially ϕ
- x is form =_{df} x is such as to make what is potentially ϕ actually ϕ

A Problem about Priority

- ❖ If x is the actuality of y , then x is prior to y .
 - ❖ So, the soul is prior to the body.
- ❖ If ϕ is predicated of x , then ϕ is posterior to x .
 - ❖ So, the soul is posterior to the body.
- ❖ So, the soul is both prior and posterior to the body.

An Unhappy Argument

1. If m is the matter of a compound c , and f its form, then m is contingently enformed by f (GH).
2. A living being is a compound of form and matter: the body is the matter and the soul is the form (*DA* ii 1 412a19-21).
3. Hence, in a living being, the body is contingently enformed by the soul (1, 2).
4. A living body which has lost its soul is not a body, except homonymously (*DA* ii 1, 412b10-27).
5. If (4), then the living body is not contingently enformed by the soul.
6. Hence, in a living being, the body is not contingently enformed by the soul (4, 5).
7. Hence, in a living being, the body both is and is not contingently enformed by the soul (3, 6).
8. (7) is impossible.
9. Hence, soul-body hylomorphism is a non-starter.

The Second Problem

- ❖ 'Perception comes about with an organ's being changed and affected ... for it seems to be a kind of alteration' (*DA* ii 5, 416b33-34)
- ❖ 'The perceptive faculty is in potentiality such as the object of perception already is in actuality' (*DA* ii 12, 418a3-4).
- ❖ 'It is necessary to grasp concerning the whole of perception generally that perception is the reception of perceptible forms without the matter, as wax receives the seal of a signet ring without the iron or gold. It acquires the golden or the metallic seal, but not insofar as it is gold or metal. In a similar way, perception is also in each case affected by what has the colour or taste or sound, but not insofar as each of these is said to be something, but rather insofar as each is of a certain quality, and corresponding to its proportion' (*DA* ii 12, 424a17)

The Basic Framework for Perception

- ❖ A perceiving subject S perceives some sensible object o if and only if:
 - ❖ (i) S has the capacity C requisite for receiving o 's sensible form F ;
 - ❖ (ii) o acts upon C by enforming it; and
 - ❖ (iii) C becomes isomorphic with o 's sensible form in being itself F .

Queries

- ❖ What is *enforming* in this application?
- ❖ How is *isomorphism* to be understood?

The Third Problem

- ❖ To be sure, if thinking is akin to perceiving, it would consist in being somehow affected by the object of thought or in something else of this sort (*DA* iii 4, 429a13-15).

The Basic Framework for Mind

- ❖ A subject S thinks some intelligible object o if and only if:
 - ❖ (i) S has the capacity C requisite for receiving o 's intelligible form F ;
 - ❖ (ii) o acts upon C by enforming it; and
 - ❖ (iii) C becomes isomorphic with o 's intelligible form in being itself F .

Queries

- ❖ Same two again:
 - ❖ What is *enforming* in this application?
 - ❖ How is *isomorphism* to be understood?
- ❖ Plus, a problem of receptivity in respect of (i).

Nothing in Actuality

- ❖ Reason, the mind, is nothing in actuality before it reasons (*DA* iii 4, 429b29-430a2).
- ❖ How then is the mind in potentiality, and such as to receive the form of an object of thought?

Promises and Problems I

- ❖ Promises:

- ❖ Aristotle's hylomorphism seems an attractive middle way between the (as he sees them) deficiencies of reductive materialism and excesses of Platonic dualism.
- ❖ Hylomorphism is *systematic*:
 - ❖ It understands the soul as explicable in terms of a broader, independently motivated explanatory framework.
- ❖ Hylomorphism self-consciously attends to the contribution of the body in psychological explanation: the form is the form *of* some matter and the matter is the matter *of* some form.
 - ❖ No explanation would be complete without attending to both factors.
 - ❖ This also seems to treat humans as what they are—whatever else they may be—as animals subject to the empirically ascertainable laws we use to explain all other biological creatures.
 - ❖ When saying that a human being is a rational animal, he is saying two things: (i) humans are essentially rational, and (evidently) (ii) humans are essentially animals.
- ❖ Hylomorphism has a claim to be immune to the problems which best dualism without sacrificing the insights dualism brings to the table: souls are active principles and final causes, and thus a locus of agency and value

Promises and Problems II

- ❖ Outstanding Problems:

- ❖ In committing to the importance—indeed the ineliminability—of two factors, namely body and soul as matter and form, hylomorphism has some difficulty determining which factor, if either, is prior in explanation.
 - ❖ In the end, it seems the soul is prior to the body, even though it seems that the soul depends upon the body as well, with the result that it becomes unclear whether the hylomorphism offers up a stable middle way.
- ❖ The actual accounts of how perception and thinking are meant to go remains, at best, unfinished. (That is perhaps, though, more a research program than a problem.)
 - ❖ This becomes especially acute in the case of thinking, where Aristotle's hylomorphism seems to take a surprisingly Platonic turn.
- ❖ What is seen as a virtue by some is seen as a vice by others: the soul, as a final cause, is a locus of value; but the soul, as a final cause, appeals to an outmoded and (some will say) justly derided teleology.