

A Quidditative Definition of Soul

In libros Aristotelis De Anima I.4

A Puzzling Remark in Aristotle *De Anima* i

- We count cognition among the fine and honourable things, and suppose that one kind of cognition is finer and more honourable than another owing to its precision or because of its having better and more marvellous objects; and for both these reasons we may reasonably place an inquiry into the soul into the premier class of study. It also seems that research into the soul contributes greatly to truth in general, and most especially to truth about nature. For the soul is a sort of first principle of animals. We aim to consider and ascertain its nature and essence, and then its properties, of which some seem to be affections peculiar to the soul itself, while others belong to animals as well because of the soul. (*DA* 402a1-10)
- Τῶν καλῶν καὶ τιμίῳν τὴν εἶδησιν ὑπολαμβάνοντες, μᾶλλον δ' ἑτέραν ἑτέρας ἢ κατ' ἀκρίβειαν ἢ τῷ βελτιόνων τε καὶ θαυμασιωτέρων εἶναι, δι' ἀμφοτέρω ταῦτα τὴν περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς ἱστορίαν εὐλόγως ἂν ἐν πρώτοις τιθείημεν. δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ἄπασαν ἢ γνῶσις αὐτῆς μεγάλη συμβάλλεσθαι, μάλιστα δὲ πρὸς τὴν φύσιν· ἔστι γὰρ οἷον ἀρχὴ τῶν ζώων. ἐπιζητοῦμεν δὲ θεωρῆσαι καὶ γνῶναι τὴν τε φύσιν αὐτῆς καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν, εἴθ' ὅσα συμβέβηκε περὶ αὐτὴν ὧν τὰ μὲν ἴδια πάθη τῆς ψυχῆς εἶναι δοκεῖ, τὰ δὲ δι' ἐκείνην καὶ τοῖς ζώοις ὑπάρχειν.

A Curious Aim

- Aristotle wishes to ascertain the soul's essence (or substance; οὐσία) and nature (φύσις).
- We learn later, however, that the soul *is* a substance as the nature of the living being (*DA* ii 1, cf. *Phys.* 192b13-15; *Met.* 1051a13-15, 1070a6-9).
- Moreover, when he moves to offer a definition (?) of the soul, Aristotle offers nothing which approximates a canonical definition given in terms of species and genus.
 - Nor even does he offer an account which restricts itself to the soul's intrinsic features, as one might expect if he is aiming to provide an account displaying the soul's essence and nature.

The Two Definitions+

- It is necessary, then, that the soul is a substance as the form of a natural body which has life in potentiality. But substance is actuality; hence, the soul will be an actuality of a body of such a sort. (*DA ii 1 412a17-22*)
 - ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος. ἢ δ' οὐσία ἐντελέχεια· τοιούτου ἄρα σώματος ἐντελέχεια.
- Hence, the soul is the first actuality of a natural body which has life in potentiality. This sort of body would be one which is organic (*DA ii 1 412a27-b1*)
 - διὸ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἐντελέχεια ἢ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζωὴν ἔχοντος. τοιοῦτον δὲ ὁ ἂν ἦ ὀργανικόν.
- Consequently, the soul is in the primary way that by which we live and perceive and think, so that it will be a sort of structure (*logos*) and a form, but not matter and a substrate. (*DA ii 2 414a12-14*)
 - ἡ ψυχὴ δὲ τοῦτο ᾧ ζῶμεν καὶ αἰσθανόμεθα καὶ διανοούμεθα πρῶτως—ὥστε λόγος τις ἂν εἴη καὶ εἶδος, ἀλλ' οὐχ ὕλη καὶ τὸ ὑποκείμενον.

Background to Suárez's *De Anima* I

- Its aims are a little hard to fathom: Suárez's *DA* seems neither a commentary nor not a commentary.
 - It is plainly unlike the *Metaphysical Disputations* in that it does not seek to offer a free-standing exposition in *propria persona*.
 - At the same time, it does not at all devolve into a line-by-line analysis of Aristotle's text.
 - Then again, it does take up its issues roughly following the order of Aristotle's *DA*; and it very frequently does more than merely appeal to Aristotle as an authority.
 - On the contrary, it often appears dedicated to resolving this or that straightforward exegetical controversy.
 - So, e.g. *DA* I q. 4. 7: Aristotle intends to offer a univocal account of soul, which account is quidditative.

Background to Suárez's *De Anima* II

- A tension wrapped in a tension:
 - An internal tension: in its rejection of Platonism, Aristotelian hylomorphism plainly treats the soul as inseparable from the body—but then again maybe not.
 - Therefore, that the soul is not separable from the body, or some parts of it if it naturally has parts, is not unclear. For the actuality of some parts belongs to the parts themselves.
 - Even so, nothing hinders some parts from being separable, because of their not being the actualities of a body.
 - It is still unclear, however, whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the way that a sailor is of a ship. (*DA* ii 1 413a2-9)
 - An external tension: the Thomistic appropriation and deployment of hylomorphism in a Catholic theistic framework treats the rational soul as a subsistent substantial form (*ST* 1 q. 76 ad 4; *QDA* 1):
 - As *subsisting*, it can exist without the body.
 - As a *substantial form*, it is intrinsically ordered to rendering some suitable matter actual.

The Problems

- These tensions intersect in an unavoidable way in Aristotle's definitions of soul:
 - First, they comprise extrinsic as well as intrinsic factors, mentioning the body and its activities (*DA* I 4.1)
 - For instance, the first contains *superfluous* material: it specifies the the extrinsic factor by introducing the body as *organic*.
 - It then also characterizes the relevant body as *physical*—though this plainly pleonastic, since every organic body is a physical body
 - Same again when it treats the relevant body as 'having life in potentiality'—which equally follows from its being organic.
 - Further, the second is in one way too narrow (it does not apply to non-human animals or plants) and in another too broad (it applies to God, who is not a soul) (*DA* I 4.2)
 - Moreover, the definitions are at war with each other: one thing can have but one essence; here we have two essence-specifying definitions of the same thing, foisting on the soul two essences. (*DA* I 4.2)
 - Finally, if either or both of the definitions are quidditative, then neither can be demonstrated. Yet each appears as the conclusion of some manner of demonstration. (*DA* I 4.2)

Suárez's Conclusions

- The first definition is both optimal and quidditative (*DA I 4.4*).
- The first definition is perfectly univocal, applying to every soul (*DA I 4.7*)
- The second definition is optimal but not formally quidditative (*DA I 4.9*)
- The first is rightly demonstrated (*recte demonstratur*) by the second (*DA I 4.14*)

Optimal and Quidditative

- ‘The first part [scil. optimality] is obvious from what has been said in the preceding three questions since the soul is essentially a form and a first actuality, and in this respect is similar to other kinds of first actuality. *First actuality* thus rightly holds the place of genus since the soul is the actuality not of an artificial body but a natural one.’ (*DA* I 4.4)
- ‘There are after all artificial bodies that are seen to have their own organ-like parts, and thus it is necessary to exclude them. Organic is added to distinguish it from inanimate bodies’ (*DA* I 4.4)
- So:
 - x is a soul =_{df} (i) x is a first actuality as form [=genus] and (ii) x is a form of an organic body, i.e. a body having life in potentiality [=differentia]

Two Notions of Organic Body

- x is an organic body *iff* x is a body disposed to life, that is, the kind of body functionally suited to be a living substance.
 - This is the organic body construed as functional matter (OB_f).
- x is an organic body *iff* x is the body of a living composite suited to discharge life activities.
 - This is the organic body as enformed (OB_e).
- *Contra* Cardinal Cajetanus, who thought the definition quidditative only of the differentia were the (OB_f), the definition is quidditative whether the organic body is understood as (OB_f) or (OB_e).

Proper and Univocal

- The first definition is perfectly univocal, applying to every soul (*DA* I 4.7)
- Return to the opening remarks of *De Anima*; compare them with *DA* 412b4-12 and cf. 413a17-20 *apud* 414b20ff, where 'he [*scil.* Aristotle] says that as in all geometrical figures there is one common essence and one definition of the figure in common, so also in the case of the soul' (*DA* I 4.7).

Optimal and Non-quidditative I

- The second definition is optimal but not formally quidditative (*DA I 4.9*)
 - A hypothesis: in speaking this way, Suárez means, in effect, that the first definition is essence-specifying and the second merely modally adequate. That is the difference between saying:
 - x is a soul =_{df} x . . .
 - Nec. (x is a soul *iff* x . . .)
 - If this is so, Suárez means that the second definition is extensionally optimal, but not yet essence-specifying.

Optimal and Non-quidditative II

- Our second definition:
 - Consequently, the soul is in the primary way that by which we live and perceive and think, so that it will be a sort of structure (*logos*) and a form, but not matter and a substrate. (*DA* ii 2 414a12-14)
- ‘In order to prove [this], it should be noted in the first place that each thing acts by virtue of that through which it is in actuality, since everything that acts, acts insofar as it is in actuality, and therefore to act and to be spring from the same principle.’ (*DA* I 4.10)
 - So, the so-called *suppositum* is the subject of any given action, but only to the degree that does so from its operating actively.
 - The contrast here is with its being the principle of operating by the agency of something to which it is merely connected, however intimately, in which case it would not be the principle ‘which which *we* live’.
 - Thus, it is an intrinsic principle, and ‘such a principle must necessarily be a true form because, just as form is the principle of being, so it is also the principle of acting.’ (*DM* I 4.10)

But you will say. . . .

- ‘But you will say that the definition also applies to the body, for since too is a principle of being, it will also be a principle of operating.
- It is responded that [the body] is not the first principle by which we live because it is not that by which we actively draw forth vital activities.
- Hence, it is not a first principle, but rather serves as an instrument of the body.’ (*DM* I 4.11)