

“Aristotle on Defining Souls”

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A

- (1) The soul is a substance in the sense of form of a natural body that has life in capacity (412a19-21)
- (2) The soul is the first fulfillment of a natural body that has life in capacity (412a27-28).
- (3) The soul is the first fulfillment of a natural body that is instrumental (412b5-6).

B

Since what is clear and more knowable in account emerges from what in itself is unclear but more observable by us, we must reconsider our results from this point of view. For it is not enough for a definitional account to express, as most now do, the mere fact; it must include and exhibit the cause also. (413a11-16)

C

At present the definitions are just like the conclusions of an argument. For example, what is squaring? An equilateral rectangle being equal to a given oblong rectangle. Such a definition is a statement of a conclusion. One that tells us that squaring is the discovery of the mean proportional states the cause of the thing. (413a16-20)

D

- (1) Square that is equal to X holds of discovering the mean for oblong rectangle X
 - (2) Discovering the mean for oblong rectangle X holds of oblong rectangle X
- Therefore, (3) square that is equal to X holds of oblong rectangle X

Here is what this means:

- (1) Discovering the mean for oblong rectangle X enables identification of a square that is equal to X
 - (2) Oblong rectangle X enables identification of the mean for oblong rectangle X
- Therefore, (3) oblong rectangle X enables identification of a square that is equal to X

E

Posterior Analytics 2.10 (94a5-9; cf. 93b8-12):

- (1) Noise holds of extinction of fire
 - (2) Extinction of fire holds of the clouds
- Therefore, (3) noise holds of the clouds

F

- (1) First actuality holds of X
 - (2) X holds of natural body that is instrumental
- Therefore, (3) first actuality holds of natural body that is instrumental

G

We resume our inquiry from a fresh starting-point by calling attention to the fact that what has soul in it differs from what has not in that the former displays life. Now having life is spoken of in more ways than one, and provided any one alone of the following is found in a thing we say that a thing has life – thinking or perception or locomotion and rest or change in respect of nutrition, decay and growth. (413a20-25)

H

At present we should confine ourselves to saying that the soul is the origin of these things and is delimited by them: by the powers of nutrition, perception, thought, and movement. (413b11-13)

I

- (1) First fulfillment holds of what provides life
 - (2) What provides life holds of a natural instrumental body
- Therefore, (3) first fulfillment holds of a natural instrumental body

J

It is now evident that a single account can be given of the soul only in the same sense as one can be given of figure. For, as in that case there is no figure apart from triangle and those that follow in order, so here there is no soul apart from the forms of soul just enumerated. It is true that a common account can be given for figure which will fit all figures without being specific to

any figure. So here in the case of the soul and its specific forms. Hence it is absurd in this and similar cases to look for a common account which will fail to be a specific account of anything that has being and which will also fail to accord with the appropriate undivided kinds, while at the same time omitting to look for an account that will. (414b20-28)

K

[...] having life is spoken of in more ways than one, and provided any one alone of the following is found in a thing we say that a thing has life – thinking or perception or locomotion and rest or change in respect of nutrition, decay and growth. (413a22-25)

L

Topics 6.10: Furthermore, if he [i.e. one's interlocutor] has rendered a single common account (ἓνα λόγον...κοινόν) of a totality of things that are spoken of homonymously.¹ For things whose account corresponding to the name is one are synonymous. If then the account applies in like manner to the whole range of the homonyms, it does not define any of the objects described by the term.² This is what happens to Dionysius' definition of life when stated as a movement of a creature sustained by nutriment, congenitally present with it. For this is found in plants as much as in animals, whereas life seems to be not one kind of thing only, but one thing in animals and another in plants. It is possible to hold the view that life is synonymous and of one kind only, and therefore to render the definition in this way on purpose. Or it may quite well happen that someone may see the homonymy and wish to render the definition of the one sense only, and yet fail to see that he has rendered an account common to both instead of proper to one. Either way, he has gone wrong. (148a23-37, Pickard-Cambridge, with changes)

M

Euclid's definition of figure (def. 14): A figure is that which is contained by any boundary or boundaries.

N

The cases of figure and soul are parallel, for both in the case of figure and in the case of ensouled creatures, in that which is next in order that which is before is always present in

¹ Ἐπι εἰ τῶν καθ' ὁμωνυμίαν λεγομένων ἓνα λόγον ἀπάντων κοινὸν ἀποδέδωκεν.

² ὥστ' οὐδενὸς τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦνομα ὁ ἀποδοθεὶς ὄρος, εἰ δὴ ὁμοίως ἐπὶ πᾶν τὸ ὁμώνυμον ἐφαρμόττει.

capacity, e.g. in a quadrangle, a triangle; and in a perceiver, a self-nourisher. In consequence, we should ask in the case of each of these, what is the soul of each, e.g. what is a plant soul, what is a human soul, and what is a beast soul? [...]³ It is clear, then, that the account concerning each of these is also the most appropriate account concerning soul. (414b28-415a13)

O

A. Plant soul

- (1) First fulfillment holds of what provides nutrition
 - (2) What provides nutrition holds of natural instrumental body
- Therefore, (3) first fulfillment holds of natural instrumental body.

B. Beast soul

- (1) First fulfillment holds of what provides perception
 - (2) What provides perception holds of natural instrumental body
- Therefore, (3) first fulfillment holds of natural instrumental body.

C. Human soul

- (1) First fulfillment holds of what provides thought
 - (2) What provides thought holds of natural instrumental body
- Therefore, (3) first fulfillment holds of natural instrumental body.

Plant soul: first fulfillment that provides nutrition in a natural instrumental body

Beast soul: first fulfillment that provides sense-perception in a natural instrumental body

Human soul: first fulfillment that provides thought in a natural instrumental body

³ I take this whole passage to express one continuous train of thought that is somewhat interrupted by a brief discussion (at 414b33-12) of how the kinds of soul form an ordered sequence.