

PHIL 321
Lecture 21: Aristotle's *De Anima*, 2.1-6, 11-12

11/7/2013

Discuss evolution of notion of “psyche”

Aristotle's potentiality / actuality distinction

Central to A's metaphysics is a distinction between potential beings and actual beings

For example: being potentially a house and a being actually a house; being potentially a dog and being actually a dog; being potentially seeing and being actually seeing

A does not think that facts about potential beings can be completely reduced to facts about potential beings

In the example above: he does not think that the fact that a collection of bricks constitute a potential house can be reduced to facts about bricks

Rather, a being (or collection of beings) *X* is (are) a potential *F* if and only if there is a single process such that, as a result of undergoing that process, *X* is actually *F*

So, for example, it is because there is a single process, namely an exercise of the art of housebuilding, that a collection of bricks can come to be a house that a collection of bricks constitute a potential house

So, for example, trees standing in the forest are not potential furniture; they are potential timber (i.e. as a result of undergoing an exercise of the art of lumberjacking they will be timber; and timber, in turn, is potentially furniture

The general account of soul

Soul is a particular kind of nature

Relation of soul to body is an instance of the more general form-matter relationship

A's general account of soul employs a tiered notion of the potentiality / actuality distinction

The example A gives is the difference between someone who can acquire knowledge (because, say, they are a normally developed human being at the appropriate age) / a person who has actually acquired knowledge (say of French) / and a person who is employing that knowledge (say by speaking French)

The first person is in a state of “first potentiality” / the second in a state of “second potentiality” and “first actuality” / the third in a state of “second actuality”

The soul is a second potentiality/ first actuality of a certain kind of body

It is that, in virtue of which, a certain kind of body is capable of engaging in certain activities

The kind of body at question is “organic” (composed of organs), i.e. one's whose parts are capable of func-

tioning in integrated ways

For example, the leaves, roots, stem etc., of plants are capable of functioning in various integrated ways

Thus, A's general account of soul: the first actuality of a natural body that is potentially alive

A thinks this renders the question "are the soul and body one" easily answerable; he seems to be thinking; since the soul makes the body the kind of body it is, you can't have that kind of body separately from the soul

414a20-25: against transmigration of the soul since souls are potentialities to perform certain activities, they can only exist in bodies that are suited to engage in those activities;

Homonymy

if eye were an animal, sight (i.e. the power of sight) would be its soul

get into homonymy

Integrated capacities

nutrition can be had without perception and thought; but the latter, at least for earthly organisms can't be had without the former

perception marks the animal with touch as the primary sense-perceptive faculty

just like with figures, there can be a general account of soul as such; but that general account is not that informative; need to know the account of each kind of figure, like soul

use figure analogy

perception leads to appearance and desire; because if it has perception it has pain and pleasure, and part of what it is for something to be pain is to generate an aversion, part of what it is to be pleasure is to generate a desire

The soul as *aitia*

Soul is the *aitia* in three ways of the living body whose soul it is: as source of motion, what it is for, and substance (i.e. form)

form: what it is to be an organism of a certain type is to be able to perform the activities distinctive of that organism; and it is in virtue of its soul that an organism is able to do whatever it is able to do

end: natural bodies are organs of the soul, for the sake of the soul

Particular kinds of soul

Order of explanation from object–activity–potentiality