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Soul and Substance in Aristotle’s Philosophy

Ph.D. Dissertation Summary

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Summary

The traditional interpretations of Aristotle have considered the theory of soul as subordinated to metaphysics. The systematical approach requires that the theory of substance and its conceptual frame to be settled before dealing with the problem of living being, seen as substance in a particular sense. The interpretations of the last century were also deeply influenced by the theory of evolution of the Aristotelian philosophy, which offered chronological arguments for the systematic view and the priority of metaphysics was applied to the order of the writings also. According to the theory of evolution of the Aristotelian philosophy at the moment of the composition of *De anima*, the metaphysical conception was already available to Aristotle. The conclusion of this systematic view is at hand: the theory of souls is nothing but the applying of the metaphysics to the living. In the second half of the last century, together with the increased interest in the Aristotelian biological theory, the subordination of empirical (or what was called empirical) research to metaphysics was questioned. Furthermore, in the last three decades of the century, scholars interested mainly in the interpretations of the biological writings, formulated alternative hypotheses, which also concerned the chronological arrangement of the texts. Not all the Aristotelian biological treatises were written in his last years, his interest in the studying of nature may be dated before the composition of some parts of the *Metaphysics*, including the central books on substance (ZHΘ). The reciprocal influence between the theory of substance and the biological discussion cannot be excluded. Our aim is to study the mutual dependence of the theory of soul and the theory of substance in Aristotle, based on the hypothesis of their mutual influence.

The first chapter, *The place of the theory of soul in Aristotle's philosophy* attempts to determine the place of the discussion of soul in the Aristotelian philosophy. Questions regarding the soul may be traced in various treatises, according to a manifold of questions. The ethical considerations are based on the theory of the parts of soul, along the Greek philosophical tradition, such as we may find also in Plato's thought. In some of his biological writings Aristotle speaks about the relation of body and soul as being a community of action. But all these views are replaced in the treatise *De anima* by a new theory, according to which body and soul form a substantial unity, reflecting a conception diametrically opposing the presupposed one in the lost dialog *Eudemos*. But the novelty of *De anima* is represented mainly by the new view, which discusses the problem of soul in the context of philosophy of nature, and this is the reason that has led to

disagreement among scholars regarding the place of the theory of soul and the place of the treatise itself.

We adhere to the view that the theory of soul developed in the *De anima* should be considered significant for Aristotle, without neglecting the limits of this theory. Since the problem of the intellect cannot be discussed on biological grounds, Aristotle himself has to leave behind the philosophy of nature in dealing with it. We believe though, that the intention of uniting the two discussions, the philosophy of nature and the intellect, is not alien to Aristotle.

In order to study the problem of soul on the ground of philosophy of nature, that is the Aristotelian physics, we must observe that, even though it finds its starting point in experience, it is in fact aimed at *phainomena*, and this means not only empirical observations, *empeiria*, but Aristotle considers the accepted opinions, the *endoxa*, to be also part of experience. The two components of experience combine, and we cannot sharply separate the empirical research and the dialectical enquiry in the Aristotelian method. To deal with the problem of soul according to the physical enquiry does not mean a discussion based on empirical observations, it means that the question to be asked about the nature of soul is the question about the substance of the natural substance. Furthermore, in the introduction to his treatise on soul, *De anima*, Aristotle defined the aim of the research as being the enquiry about the nature and substance of soul itself. As a result, a chain is formed, in which 'substance' is present three times: the enquiry aims at the substance of soul, which at his turn is nothing but the substance of the living, which, as a final point, is again substance in the primary sense (of the *Categories*). The term 'substance', obviously, has different meanings in the sequence. Our goal is to discuss the correlation of the theory of soul and the theory of substance in the framework defined by this threefold sequence.

The investigation of the place of the theory of soul in the Aristotelian philosophy has led us to the conclusion that the physical (in its Aristotelian usage) point of view present in the treatise *De anima* is the significant approach for the discussion on soul. It may be paralleled with the central books on substance of the *Metaphysics* (ZHΘ), which investigate the composite substance. As a result, we may conclude that the physical approach is appropriate for the comparison of the two theories. In the same time we must note that, as a result of our introductory investigation, it is clear to us that the physical approach does not cover the entire matter, the problem of the intellect cannot be discussed within the physical framework. But, again, if we regard the enquiry about intellect as being residual in the treatise *De anima*, then we question in fact the unity of the theory of soul as such. A possible overcome of the issue, as we can only point out at the moment, requires an

approach including a theological perspective (as suggested by Heinrich Cassirer or Georg Picht), which is beyond the limits of the present study.

The exposition has three main parts.

The first part investigates substance as the object of philosophy of nature. It is closely connected to the problem of definition. The two Aristotelian writings which treat the problem of substance, along two different questions, the *Categories* and *Metaphysics ZHΘ*, are the starting point of our investigations. The book Z contains the enquiry that leads to the questions about definition, formulated based on the view that points out the distinction between matter and form. The physical definition, since it must also include the reference to matter, is investigated first as a problem of abstraction, being contrasted with the mathematical definitions (the comparison between the ‘snub’ and the ‘curved line’). But this opposition is neither the only one, nor the most significant, since the geometrical objects, according to Aristotle, also have matter, and they must not be abstracted, because the result will already belong to another science, arithmetic (the number two). To demonstrate the possibility of definitions based on distinct starting points we present and discuss the two definitions of soul in the first two chapters of the second book of *De anima*. According to the first of the two (apparently added later to the treatise) soul is defined in its opposition to body, as being, most generally speaking, the form of the body. In the second definition (according to the same hypothesis, the original definition, which is in agreement with the discussion of the treatise in rejecting the possibility of a general definition) the soul is the principle of the capacities of soul.

In the biological treatises Aristotle discusses question which are important to the theory of soul and of substance. In the second chapter of our exposition, *Substance in the biological treatises*, we try to offer a synthesis of the contemporary literature on Aristotelian biology. Although a consensus regarding the interpretation on central issues of the biological treatises has not yet been reached, the inclusion of the study of the zoological writings has proved to be important in our understanding of the Aristotelian theory of science and the theory of substance. During his biological investigations Aristotle developed a more detailed analysis of the structure of body, and in the same time of material components, than he did in his *Physics* and *Metaphysics ZH*. He tells us that the investigation of nature must not neglect the study of the parts and the material component, but the formal aspect is the first in rank, without which the explanation of the living is not possible. The body is analyzed by Aristotle as a hierarchical structure, which may be explained as a blending of material parts at the basic level, but, starting already at the level of simple homogenous parts of the living, the explanation must also include the teleological, functional and

formal component. We must also note the distinctions of the terminology at use in the biological writings regarding the form, the essence and the species. The species is used only to what is common in the individuals of the species (the individuals do not reproduce the species), the essence designates the elements for which a teleological explanation may be given, and the form makes reference also to accidents.

In the Aristotelian tradition the definition of soul is the one found in the first chapter of the second book of the treatise *De anima*, according to which the soul is the form or the actuality of the body. In the fourth chapter of the same book (in a paragraph inserted also later into the treatise) Aristotle develops the idea of the causality of soul. He tells us that the soul is the formal cause, the end, and the source or origin of movement. The theory of the movement of soul is at the center of various discussions: the theory of movement in Aristotle's philosophy, the presocratic ideas about soul, or the platonic theory of soul as the self-moved mover. We believe that the Aristotelian analysis and critique regarding the hypothesis of the movement of soul can tell us a great deal about his views about the nature of soul and indirectly about substance. Aristotle refutes the presocratic theories, which regard (or Aristotle considers that they do) the motion of soul as a bodily movement. The platonic theory is refuted sometimes on the same ground, but the main question concerns the very nature of motion. For Plato movement is one of the highest genera, but Aristotle rejects the view that motion should be placed above the categories. He translates the movement of soul to the movement of the living, saying that the movement is not in the soul, „rather it is the man who does this with his soul”. But again, despite of his critique and his remarks, Aristotle speaks about the movement of soul in several places: „thought [*nous*] is moved by the object of thought”, „the faculty of thinking” when „it is engaged upon the images it is moved”, „appetite in the sense of actual appetite *is* a kind of movement”, the sensitive faculty is „a different kind from [of] movement [...] that of what has been perfected”. But in these examples Aristotle has in mind a different kind of movement, which is activity or actuality. If we take into account the parallel between soul as first actuality and the distinction between the “possession of knowledge and the actual exercise of knowledge”, and the remark of Aristotle regarding the transition from the possession of knowledge to the exercise of knowledge, we may see that it is an alteration in a quite different sense, or it is not alteration at all, “being in reality a development into its true self or actuality [*entelecheia*]”. We note finally that a parallel between the platonic theory of soul as self-moved mover and the Aristotelian solution of the movement of soul as movement toward the self may be possible, and further should be extended to the concept of *energeia* as perfect movement.

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