

Aristotle's definition of *Psuchê* in *DA* II.1

Background

- Individual biological specimens ('this man, this horse') are the fundamental realities within the common-sense ontology of the *Categories*. Aristotle calls them '**primary substances**'. According to the common-sense ontology, nothing else would exist without them. (*Cat.* 2b5)
- A complete account of an object will give each of its **four causes**: its material cause (what it's made of); its formal cause (what it is to be that kind of thing); its efficient cause (what brought it into existence); and its final cause (what it's for). (*Phys.* II.3)
- Primary substances, then, are best understood as **hylomorphic compounds** ('*hulê*' means 'matter', '*morphê*' means 'shape' or 'form'). Thus, Socrates is a certain human animal composed of 180 pounds of flesh that is structured in a very complicated way. (*Phys.* II.1, *Met.* VII.3)
- Of the two components of a hylomorphic compound, **form** is properly regarded as primary – it is the 'substance of a substance'. For matter all by itself is no thing (it's just stuff), whereas the form is just what it is to be something (it's what makes matter into a 'this something' (*tode ti*)). (*Met.* VII.3)
- The relation between matter and form is best understood in terms of the **potentiality/actuality distinction**. Unformed matter is potentially something, while form makes it into an actual substance. Just as potency and act are separable only in account (i.e., conceptually), so too are matter and form – they are, in fact, 'one and the same' in number, but not the same in being, just as the President of the U.S. and the husband of Melania are one in number (each is Donald Trump), but different in being (being the President is different from being the spouse of a particular person). (*Met.* VII.11, VIII.6)

On to Soul ...

- A **soul is the form** of a living thing. It's what makes it the very thing that it is (most generally, a living thing; more specifically, an animal; a quadruped; a mammalian quadruped; a hooved, mammalian quadruped; a horse; an appaloosa; this appaloosa.)
- Since soul is a type of form (the substance of a living thing), and form is a kind of actuality, soul is a kind of actuality. Thus, Aristotle offers his first definition of soul at 412a20-2: soul is **the substance as the form (i.e., the actuality) of a natural body that is potentially alive**.
- Aristotle thinks it important to draw a distinction between what he calls 'first actualities' and 'second actualities'. Soul is an actuality of the first type, and in *DA* II.1 he draws out an extended analogy to illustrate this idea:

<u>First Actuality</u>	<u>Second Actuality</u>
<i>being knowledgeable</i>	<i>actively knowing</i>
<i>being asleep</i>	<i>being awake</i>
<i>being an axe (capacity to chop)</i>	<i>actively chopping</i>
<i>being an eye (capacity to see)</i>	<i>actively seeing</i>
<i>soul (being a specimen of kind K)</i>	<i>actively living <u>as</u> a K</i>

First actualities are states of an object, and the states are such that they endow their possessor with certain powers, functions, or capacities.

- With this distinction in hand, Aristotle offers his second definition: soul is the **first actuality of a natural body that is potentially alive** (412a27-8). It is a state or condition of the body; the corresponding second actuality is the activity proper to that state.
- Since the soul is supposed to explain why something is alive, it would be objectionably circular to include 'living' or 'life' in the proper definition of 'soul', so Aristotle jettisons the notion of *being potentially alive* in his third and "official" definition: **soul is the first actuality of a natural organic body** (412b5-6).
- **Natural bodies** are those bodies that have an **internal source of motion and stability**. Fire rises just by virtue of its own nature; a balsa-wood glider rises as a consequence of its construction and applied force, both of which are imposed from the outside. (*Phys.* II.1)
- **Organic bodies** are those that possess organs ('*organon*' means 'instrument' or 'tool'). Some natural bodies are inorganic in this sense – e.g., fire is natural, but it doesn't have any organs. Some non-natural bodies are organic – e.g., an axe has parts designed to serve specific functions. To be an organ is just to have a specific function (*ergon*).
- All living things have souls, on Aristotle's view. He identifies three types of soul:
 1. Nutritive
 2. Perceptive/locomotive/appetitive
 3. Rational

Plants have only nutritive soul, which enables them to take in nourishment, to grow, and to reproduce. All animals have nutritive and perceptive soul, the latter of which enables them to detect features of their environment and to move about within it in response (sometimes) to attractive or repulsive relations with objects. (He says that these three are always found together – 413b22-5.) Humans possess both of the "lower" types of soul and also possess rational soul. Other animals might, as well, but Aristotle will focus on humans in subsequent treatises.

Summary Remarks

From the *Categories* through the *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle is pursuing the question *what is fundamentally real?* His answer: **living organisms**. This is his considered view, and it is consistent with the common-sense ontology of the *Categories* but more sophisticated and better justified. Soul is what's distinctive of living organisms, and since soul is a first actuality, (an organism's formal cause), we're compelled to investigate the corresponding second actuality (namely, the corresponding final cause). That's what Aristotle does in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.