

Aristotle's *On the Soul*

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Course Description

Aristotle's *De Anima* (*On the Soul*) contains his general account of soul, understood as the principle and cause of life. This text has been foundational to much of the philosophical and scientific reflections on life and the mind that have followed. Philosophers from Aquinas to Hegel have praised its richness and insight; contemporary psychologists, cognitive scientists, and biologists have found in it a predecessor to contemporary conceptions of mind, perception, and life. In reading *De Anima*, then, we can come face to face with the origins of our own conceptions of life. Yet it has also struck some modern readers as quite alien. *De Anima's* scope doesn't fit neatly within contemporary philosophy of mind, psychology, or biology; it instead offers an idiosyncratic 'metaphysics of life', which to some has appeared hopelessly antiquated in our post-Cartesian age.

In this class, we will engage in a close reading of the whole of *De Anima*. We will give particular attention to Aristotle's greatest achievement in *De Anima*: his 'hylomorphic' conception of the living organism, according to which the soul is 'form' and 'actuality', and the body is 'matter' and 'potentiality'. We will use an understanding of this doctrine to address Aristotle's most infamous and enigmatic claims: that the soul and the body are one, that nutrition and reproduction are imitations of the divine, that perception is a reception of form, and that intellect is both nothing and everything. Our goal will be not only to understand Aristotle on his own terms, but also to see how modern philosophical problems about life and the mind (e.g., AI, consciousness) look from an Aristotelian perspective.

Course Objectives

1. To acquire a detailed understanding of Aristotle's views about the soul, mind, and life.
2. To get a broad survey of the central scholarly debates surrounding *De Anima*, including debates about the extent to which his views anticipate or differ from contemporary views.
3. To practice close reading of primary texts from the history of philosophy. This includes activities such as reconstructing arguments, engaging with secondary scholarship, and formulating and defending interpretations of texts.

Language

All readings will be in English, but we will make reference, when helpful, to ancient Greek terms. A glossary of central Greek terms will be provided.

Attendance Policy

Because discussion is central to this course, attendance at all sessions is mandatory. Absences will be excused only in exceptional circumstances. You are also required to meet with me during office hours at least once during the quarter to discuss paper topics and any feelings, questions, or concerns you have about the class.

Assignments

1. Term Paper
 1. Week 3: one to two paragraph topic proposal for term paper (for this reason, you should complete a cursory reading of all of *De Anima* by week 3)
 2. Week 5: 4-7 page draft of term paper
 3. Week 11: 8-12 page final draft of term paper

2. Each class will begin with two short student presentations, one on the primary text and another on the secondary text. In these presentations, you should summarize the arguments presented in the relevant assigned text, and describe whether you find these convincing and why.
3. Biweekly postings on Canvas, in which you highlight a part of the text and formulate a question about it. They are due by 9pm the night before each class, and will form an integral starting point for discussion.

Assessment

Presentations: 30%

Participation (in class and online reading responses): 20%

Term Paper (Draft and Final): 50%

All writing assignments are due at 11:59pm on the due date (unless individual arrangements have been made in advance), and a late penalty will be assessed.

An excellent paper should meet the following criteria:

- The writing and structure are clear
- It demonstrates an understanding of the Aristotle's text and the central scholarly debates surrounding it.
- The paper accomplishes one or more of the following: gives an interpretation of a text that advances our understanding of Aristotle's text or arguments; it presents an original criticism of a primary or secondary text; articulates a thought or argument that goes beyond Aristotle's original text and arguments.

Required Texts

Primary texts: We will use Christopher Shields' translation of Aristotle's *De Anima* (Clarendon Aristotle Series). Other translations can be consulted for clarification (See the bibliography on Canvas site for other recommended translations). I will provide PDFs of selections from other works of Aristotle when appropriate.

Secondary Texts: We will primarily be reading from Nussbaum and Rorty's influential collection of articles, *Essays on Aristotle's De anima* (available through the University of Chicago library website). I will provide PDFs of other secondary literature.

In addition, throughout the course we will refer to ancient, medieval, and contemporary commentaries. I will provide PDFs when appropriate (See Bibliography for a list of commentaries).

Midterm Course Evaluations

During week 5, I will ask you to complete an anonymous evaluation about the course. Please take a few minutes that week to think honestly about the course thus far—what you have found to be valuable and helpful, as well as deficient and unhelpful. The opportunity to get your feedback at this point is invaluable. You should also feel welcome throughout the quarter to let me know any concerns or problems you are having in the course, especially during my office hours.

Schedule

| | Topic and Questions | Primary Reading | Secondary Reading | Optional Reading |
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| 1 | Overview and Stakes of Aristotle's Psychology; Course Structure | DA I.1, 402a1-22 | "Aristotle's Psychology", Shields | "Introduction" in <i>Essays on Aristotle's De anima</i> , Nussbaum |
| 2 | What are the aims of Aristotelian psychology? What are the central problems it wishes to confront? | I.1 | "Aristotle's psychology", Caston | |
| 3 | What does Aristotle find compelling in his predecessors' theories of soul? What does he reject? What are his arguments against materialism? | I.2-5 | "Ancient Theories of Soul", Lorenz | "Dialectic, Motion, and Perception: <i>De anima</i> Book I", Witt |
| 4 | What does Aristotle mean when he says that the soul is a form and an actuality? How does this serve as a definition of soul? | II.1-2 | "On Aristotle's Conception of Soul", Frede | "Animals and Other Beings in Aristotle", Kosman; "Aristotle's Definition of Soul and the Programme of the <i>De anima</i> ", Menn |
| 5 | What does Aristotle mean when he says that the body is matter, or 'an organic body having life potentially'? | II.1-2 | "Living bodies", Whiting | "Aristotle's definitions of <i>psuchē</i> ", Ackrill |
| 6 | How do the various capacities of the soul relate to each other? What does this special mean for Aristotle's science of soul? | II.3 | "Two Conceptions of Soul in Aristotle", Frey | "Souls and Figures: Defining the Soul in <i>De anima</i> ii.3" Ward; "Parts and Unity in the Definition of the Soul", Johansen |
| 7 | How is nutrition 'like by like'? Why is it an 'imitation of the divine'? | II.4 | "The Importance of Nutrition", Johansen | " <i>De Anima</i> 2. 2-4 and the Meaning of Life", Matthews |
| 8 | What sort of change is involved in perception? How does perception differ from ordinary alteration? | II.5-6 | "The spirit and the letter: Aristotle on perception", Caston (pg. 245-264) | "Intentionality and Physiological Processes: Aristotle's Theory of Sense Perception", Sorabji |
| 9 | Do Aristotle's theories of the special senses rely on antiquated physics? How is perception is a 'mean'? | II.7-11 | "Is an Aristotelian Philosophy of mind Still Credible? (A Draft)", Burnyeat | |
| 10 | How is perception a reception of form? Why can't plants perceive? | III.12 | "Changing Aristotle's mind", Nussbaum & Putnam | |
| 11 | How does perception perform complex perceptual acts? How are we perceptually self-conscious? | III.1-2 | "Perceiving That We Perceive: <i>On the Soul</i> III.2", Kosman | "Sensation and consciousness in Aristotle's philosophy", Kahn; "The order of Aristotle's psychological writings", Block |
| 12 | How does imagination differ from perception and thought? Why does Aristotle devote so much time to it? | III.3 | "Why Aristotle needs imagination", Caston | "The cognitive role of <i>phantasia</i> in Aristotle", Frede; "Aristotle on the imagination", Schofield |

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| 13 | In what sense is intellect 'unaffected'? How does thinking parallel perceiving? | III.4-5 | " <i>Nous poiētikos</i> : Survey of Earlier Interpretations", Brentano | |
| 14 | What is the distinction between active and passive intellect? Is active intellect truly human? | III.4-5 | "What Does the Maker Mind Make?", Kosman | "Aristotle's two intellects: A modest proposal", Caston |
| 15 | How does intellect relate to action and perception? Why does intellect need images? | III.6-8 | "Aristotle on Thinking", Kahn | "The <i>Nous</i> -body problem in Aristotle", Modrak; "Aristotle's rationalism", Frede |
| 16 | Why does Aristotle reject ethical divisions of the soul? What is the relationship between ethics and psychology? | DA III.9 | "Aristotle's Criticism of Soul-Division", Vander Waerdt | "Locomotive soul: The parts of soul in Aristotle's scientific works", Whiting |
| 17 | How does desire cause locomotion? How does the Good relate to action? | III. 9-11 | "Desire and the Good in <i>De Anima</i> ", Richardson | "Rational Animals and the Explanation of Action", Nussbaum |
| 18 | How does Aristotle apply a teleological analysis to the vital capacities? | III.11-12 | "Teleology in the Analysis of the Capacities of the Soul", Leunissen | |
| 19 | What is a functionalist theory of mind? What modern assumptions are made in adopting functionalism? | "Philosophy and our mental life", Putnam | "Functionalism", <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> | |
| 20 | What is the relationship between modern functionalism and Aristotelian psychology? Was Aristotle really a functionalist? | "The First Functionalist", Shields | "Explaining Various Forms of Living", Code & Moravcsik | |