

Chapter 1

The Soul in Greek Thought

In this chapter our focus is on the two best known figures of ancient Greek philosophy: Plato (428/7–348/7 BCE) and Aristotle (384–322 BCE). There are other major philosophers in Greek thought, both before Plato and after Aristotle, and some of them hold a place of honor in the development of great future ideas, such as the hypothesis that the material world is made up of atoms, or the thesis that life evolved; but Plato and Aristotle are the most important ones in shaping the history of the soul.

Plato

Before diving into Plato's view of the soul, three important points need to be observed. First, because the central figure in Plato's dialogues is the philosopher Socrates, the question about which views are Socrates' and which are Plato's is not easy to answer, if it is answerable at all. For the sake of brevity and clarity of presentation, we will not enter the debate about this matter and we will not distinguish between Socrates' and Plato's thought. We will simply assume that Socrates' philosophical views about the soul are Plato's.

Second, we stress that Plato's treatment of the soul is *philosophical* in nature. It is necessary to emphasize this point because it is not uncommon in certain circles (e.g. theological; see Chapter 2) to find

assertions to the effect that Plato invented the idea of the soul and, therefore, that the concept of the soul is a Greek idea. Nothing could be further removed from the truth. Belief in the existence of the soul is, as we pointed out in the Introduction, commonsensical in its nature, in the sense that it is espoused by the ordinary person. What Plato did was to philosophize about the nature of the soul in which ordinary people believe.

Third, the Greek term used in ancient philosophical texts and commonly translated as *soul* is *psyche*, a noun derived from the verb *psychein*, which meant *to breathe*. For philosophers, *psyche* came to stand, not for breath, but for the life of a being or for that which generates and constitutes the essential life of a being. The great philosopher and classicist A. E. Taylor offers this overview, in which he points out that *psyche* can involve (though this meaning is secondary) consciousness—a term that was probably coined in the seventeenth century by Ralph Cudworth, to stand for “awareness”:

Consciousness is a relatively late and highly developed manifestation of the principle which the Greeks call “soul.” That principle shows itself not merely in consciousness but in the whole process of nutrition and growth and the adaptation of motor response to an external stimulation. Thus consciousness is a more secondary feature of the “soul” in Greek philosophy than in most modern thought, which has never ceased to be affected by Descartes’ selection of “thought” as the special characteristic of psychical life. In common language the word *psyche* is constantly used where we should say “life” rather than “soul,” and in Greek philosophy a work “on the *Psyche*” means what we should call one on “the principle of life.” (Taylor 1955, 75)

As we shall see in different chapters, the definition of the soul is dynamic, though Plato’s view on the soul or *psyche* has great historical significance, coming as it does as from the first major contributor to the philosophy of the soul. As an aside, we note that the term “soul” in English today is derived from *sawel/sawol* in Old English, as found in the Vespasian Psalter and in *Beowulf*. What, then, did Plato have to say about the soul? His thoughts are many and wide-ranging in

scope, and they seem to develop over time in ways that sometimes present problems of consistency. We will focus on those thoughts that comprise the core of his view and, when appropriate, we will point out the tensions among them.

We begin with the end of Socrates' life. While Socrates is in prison and not long before he drinks the hemlock that will bring about his death, his friend Crito asks him about how he would like to be buried. "Any way you like, replied Socrates, that is, if you can catch me and I don't slip through your fingers. [. . .] I shall remain with you [Crito and other friends] no longer, but depart to a state of heavenly happiness [. . .] You [the other friends] must give an assurance to Crito for me [. . .] that when I am dead I shall not stay, but depart and be gone" (Plato 1961: *Phaedo*, 115C–D). From this response of Socrates to Crito's question it seems reasonable to infer that Plato believes the "person" Socrates is his soul (as opposed to his soul plus his body, or just his body).

Like most philosophers after him up until Descartes in the seventeenth century, Plato claims that the soul is that which imparts life to its body (*Phaedo*, 105C–D). Moreover, because the soul is that which gives life to its body and cannot acquire a property that is contrary to its essentially life-giving nature, the soul itself can never perish (*Phaedo*, 105D–E). Plato's rationale behind this view of properties is tenuous; but, for a start, we simply note that he thought of the soul as essentially and fundamentally alive, whereas he did not think this was the case with the body. The soul is indestructible or imperishable, and thereby the soul is unlike its body and other material things, which by nature are always changing and never keep to the self-same condition (*Phaedo*, 79C). When a person dies, the body may perish but the soul endures. Plato argues that, because change is always from contraries (e.g., that which becomes bigger does so from that which is smaller, and that which is darker comes from that which is lighter), the soul must have come from the realm of the dead and return there after completing its life in this world, only to return once again to the realm of the living (*Phaedo*, 70C–72E). While belief in reincarnation

may strike western secular readers as preposterous, it is interesting to take note not only of the presence of a belief in reincarnation in the ancient west (one of the best known Presocratic philosophers, Pythagoras, taught reincarnation, and reincarnation is in evidence in one of the greatest Roman epic poems, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book VI), but also of its widespread adherents today, among Hindus and Buddhists. In any case, given the way Plato describes reincarnation, the soul has to be thought of as something that is distinct from the body.

The soul's recurring journey from death to life and back again entails that it is embodied more than once. This view also seems to involve a concept of the soul as a substantial individual being, as opposed to a mode of the body. In the *Phaedo* the idea that the soul may be just a mode of the body is considered as an objection to the Socratic–Platonic position. An interlocutor in the dialogue raises this point. Could it be that what Socrates and Plato refer to as the soul is not a substantial individual entity, but more like a harmony? One may play a stringed instrument (a lyre, for example) and produce what appears to be more than the instrument (melodious sound); yet this is not a separate substance, but a mode of the lyre. Melodious sound is *the way a lyre sounds when played*, and if (so the interlocutor argues) the lyre is broken, the melodious sound will end:

The body is held together at a certain tension between the extremes of hot and cold, and wet and dry, and so on, and our soul is a temperament or adjustment of these same extremes, when they are combined in just the right proportion. Well, if the soul is really an adjustment, obviously as soon as the tension of our body is lowered or increased beyond the proper point, the soul must be destroyed, divine though it is—just like any other adjustment, either in music or in any product of the arts and crafts, although in each case the physical remains last considerably longer until they are burned up or rot away. (*Phaedo*, 86C; Tredennick's translation)

In the dialogue, Socrates argues that the soul cannot be like the lyre and the music it makes, because the soul actually pre-exists the

body; and, if the soul pre-exists the body, it is not identical with it. Socrates thereby seeks to break the analogy proposed, because *the way a lyre sounds* cannot exist before the lyre exists. The case for a pre-natal existence of the soul, developed in detail by Plato elsewhere in the same dialogue (and in others, too), deserves a brief comment here. For example, in the *Meno* he argues that knowledge is recollection of what the soul was aware of before birth:

[A man] would not seek what he knows, for since he knows it there is no need of the inquiry, nor what he does not know, for in that case he does not even know what he is looking for. [. . .] Thus the soul, since it is immortal and has been born many times, and has seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything that is. So we need not be surprised if it can recall the knowledge of virtue or anything else which [. . .] it once possessed [. . .] for seeking and learning are in fact nothing but recollection. (*Meno*, 80E, 81D)

The most famous illustration of the “anything else” that is recalled by the soul involves the interrogation of a slave boy who, when prodded with the right questions, “rediscovers” a proof of the Pythagorean theorem (*Meno*, 85E–86A).

The Platonic case for pre-natal existence would be hard to defend today, but if it is even conceivable that the soul can pre-exist its body, then there is at least an appearance that the soul is not the body, and thus not a mere mode of the body. Another way to make Plato’s case against the soul being a mere mode is to appeal to our understanding of ourselves as substantial beings existing over time. Arguably, when you love a person, you love a concrete individual. But if the person, or soul, is a mode of something else (say, a living animal body), then it appears that your beloved is a phase or a shape of his/her body. Is it plausible to believe that the object of your love is a certain aspect of that body? Isn’t it more reasonable to believe that you love a substantial being and that, when your beloved dies, she is no more (at least not in this life), while her body remains? Socrates took

something akin to this position and, in the *Crito*, he comforted his disciples, who were weeping over his immanent death, by claiming that they might bury his body, but he, Socrates, would be elsewhere. (We will return to this question when considering the work of Aristotle.)

Reincarnation means re-embodiment; and in Plato's account of the soul the material body is not only something that is ever changing, but also it is that which effectively serves as a prison for the soul, and as such is evil (*Phaedrus*, 250C). As we examine further Plato's view of the soul-body relationship, it is important to recognize that early philosophers were interested in the soul for more than purely theoretical reasons. They also sought to evaluate the moral and spiritual condition of the soul. According to Plato, the embodied soul is attracted by the pleasures of the body, such as those of food and drink and love-making (*Phaedo*, 64D). These pleasures distract the soul from its true purpose of being (what we might think of as the soul's meaning of life), which is to reason about and know (or recollect) what is true. However, Socrates says:

I suppose the soul reasons most beautifully [without the need for recollection] when none of these things gives her pain—neither hearing nor sight, nor grief nor any pleasure—when instead, bidding farewell to the body, she comes to be herself all by herself as much as possible and when, doing everything she can to avoid communing with or even being in touch with the body, she strives for what *is*. (*Phaedo*, 65C; Brann's translation)

What *is* are the immaterial Platonic Forms or Ideas, which are abstract objects like the concepts of justice, circularity, rationality, humanness, and so on. The soul possesses knowledge when it is focusing on these Forms and philosophizing about them and their relationships with each other. The soul is happy when it beholds the Forms directly, because what it ultimately desires more than anything else is the truth (*Phaedo*, 66b).

Plato seems to regard reason/intellect as that which alone constitutes the essence of soul, and tells his readers that the soul is nourished by reason and knowledge (*Phaedrus*, 247D). The less a soul is nourished by these, the greater its forgetfulness and resulting wrongdoing and the lower its level of re-embodiment. Thus Plato claims that

the soul that hath seen the most of being shall enter into the human babe that shall grow into a seeker after wisdom or beauty, a follower of the Muses and a lover; the next, having seen less, shall dwell in a king [. . .] or a warrior and ruler; the third in a statesman, a man of business, or a trader; the fourth in an athlete, or physical trainer, or physician. (*Phaedrus* 1961, 248D–E)

Elsewhere Plato states: “Of the men who came into the world, those who were cowards or led unrighteous lives may with reason be supposed to have changed into the nature of women in the second generation” (*Timaeus*, 90E–91A). (While such a view would be labeled sexist today, we should note that Plato held a higher view of women than his contemporaries when he affirmed in the *Republic* that women can make ideal rulers). Furthermore, “those who’ve made gorging and abusing and boozings their care [. . .] slip into the classes of donkeys and other such beasts” (*Phaedo*, 81E). In the *Timaeus* again, Plato expresses the view that the “race of wild pedestrian animals [. . .] came from those who had no philosophy in any of their thoughts [. . .] In consequence of these habits of theirs they had their front legs and their heads resting upon the earth to which they were drawn by natural affinity” (*Timaeus* 1961, 91E).

Plato’s position on pleasure and the body may seem to us today as too derisive, and we will not defend it; but it is worth appreciating that Plato’s teacher Socrates, and probably Plato himself, were veterans of a massive war, the Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) in which their side (Athens and her allies) was decisively defeated. Perhaps Plato’s warnings about bodily pleasure and being prey to other sensory desires stemmed from his (and other Athenians) belief that Athens’

entry into war was largely the result of a desire for worldly goods. His account on the soul definitely situates the soul as oriented toward more enduring goods than imperial wealth.

Let us consider further Plato's understanding of the soul-body relationship. We have already touched upon his view of how bodily pleasures seduce the soul away from its proper activity of contemplating the Forms. When the soul is seduced in this way, events in the body causally affect it. For example, the eating of foods, the drinking of liquids, and sexual intercourse cause the soul to experience pleasure. Plato was also aware that the soul moves its physical body when it pursues, among other things, bodily pleasures, some of which it should forego. How does the soul move the body? When discussing the concept of motion, Plato claims that that which can move itself is the most powerful and superlative kind of mover (*Laws*, 894D). At one point, Plato suggests defining the word "soul" as "the motion which can set itself moving" (*Laws*, 896A), and he thinks of the soul as "the universal cause of all change and motion" (896B) because motion in a series that has a beginning must begin with the motion of a self-mover (894E; 895B). Motion that is produced in a thing by that thing itself is most like or akin to the motion of thought (*Timaeus*, 89A) and, as a result, when the soul moves the body that is its vehicle (*Timaeus*, 69C), it is the soul that governs and the body that is governed (*Laws*, 896C). In short, it is our souls that move us wherever we go (*Laws*, 898E) and Plato seems to believe that the soul moves the body by first setting itself in motion.

The soul, then, is a self-mover that moves the body. Is there anything more that might be said about the soul's movement of the body? Plato believes that there is. In a passage in the *Phaedo*, at 97B–99D, Socrates informs his interlocutor that he once heard someone reading from a book by an earlier philosopher, Anaxagoras, in which the author claimed that mind is responsible for all things, and it orders the world and the objects in it in the best possible way. Socrates recalls how he thought he had discovered, to his great pleasure, a teacher after his own mind. However, upon reading Anaxagoras further, he

discovered a man who did not acknowledge any kind of explanatory role for the mind. Socrates' words deserve quotation in full:

And to me his [Anaxagoras'] condition seemed most similar to that of somebody who—after saying that Socrates does everything he does by mind and then venturing to assign the causes of each of the things I do—should first say that I'm now sitting here [in prison] because my body's composed of bones and sinews, and because bones are solid and have joints keeping them separate from one another, while sinews are such as to tense and relax and also wrap the bones all around along with the flesh and skin that holds them together. Then since the bones swing in their sockets, the sinews, by relaxing and tensing, make me able, I suppose, to bend my limbs right now—and it's through this cause that I'm sitting here with my legs bent. And again, as regards my conversing with you, he might assign other causes of this sort, holding voices and air and sounds and a thousand other such things responsible, and not taking care to assign the true causes—that since Athenians judged it better to condemn me, so I for my part have judged it better to sit here and more just to stay put and endure whatever penalty they order. Since—by the Dog—these sinews and bones of mine would, I think, long ago have been in Megara or Boeotia, swept off by an opinion about what's best, if I didn't think it more just and more beautiful, rather than fleeing and playing the runaway, to endure whatever penalty the city [Athens] should order. But to call such things causes is too absurd. (*Phaedo*, 98C–99A; Brann's translation)

More generally, Socrates is suggesting something like the following. When we go to explain our bodily actions, it is misguided to think that we can ultimately explain them in terms of physical causes alone, without any reference to purposes (ends or goals). In other words, there are at least two kinds of explanations, one that is causal and the other that is teleological (*telos* is the Greek word for purpose, end, or goal). While it is no doubt true that, if Socrates (contrary to fact) had fled to Megara, his bones and sinews would have been caused to move in certain ways, it is also true in such a case that the movements

of his bones, sinews, and body to Megara would ultimately have been explained by the purpose for which Socrates was fleeing his cell in Athens. From the first-person perspective of Socrates (the perspective of self-awareness or introspection), this purpose would have been something like “so that I save my life.” Moreover, as Socrates goes on to point out (*Phaedo*, 99B), there is a distinction between those things (in this case, bones, sinews, and the like) without which this purpose could not become active so as to do any explanatory work (what philosophers call “necessary conditions”) and the purpose itself. To maintain that the necessary conditions are the explanation itself is, Socrates claims, a most serious mistake.

So far, we have primarily surveyed Plato’s thoughts about the soul’s *extrinsic* nature, as it relates to the body and to reincarnation. Plato has equally interesting and important views about the soul’s *intrinsic* nature (its nature independently of its relationship to a physical body). What is not clear, however, is whether his views about the soul’s intrinsic nature are consistent.

For example, on the one hand, as we have already seen, Plato maintains that the soul is indestructible and imperishable. He explains this fact about the soul in terms of its indissolubility (*Phaedo*, 80A–B). Unlike bodies, which are composite and whose components are constantly changing (*Timaeus*, 43A), a soul keeps to the self-same condition (*Phaedo*, 80B) and is thereby likely to be non-composite, or without parts (*Phaedo*, 78C). Plato also stresses that the soul is akin to the invisible Forms, which are grasped by thought and not by the senses (*Phaedo*, 79A–D).

On the other hand, Plato claims that the soul has “parts,” whose existence is clearly manifested in everyday life. More specifically, the soul has three parts. On the one hand, there is the appetitive and lowest part of the soul, which does not comprehend reason (it is non-rational) but experiences pleasure and pain and has low desires (*Timaeus*, 71A, 77B). At the other extreme, there is the rational part of the soul (*Republic*, 440E), which is the part that beholds the Forms and ought to rule over the other two parts. In between these

two parts of the soul is a third one, which is spirited in nature. This part's function is that of rising to the occasion, in support of the rational part, when that one is at odds with the appetitive part. As Plato views the life of the soul, excessive pains and pleasures are its greatest enemies insofar as they tempt the soul to engage in inappropriate behavior. Pleasure is the greatest incitement to evil action, while pain is a deterrent to action that is good (*Timaeus*, 69D). Excessive pleasures provoke abuse of food, drink, and sex, while excessive pains elicit cowardly behavior. Reason must govern the unreasonable eagerness to attain the former and avoid the latter, and in order to do so it harnesses the emotion (e.g. anger) of the high-spirited part of the soul to support reason in its battle with the appetites. Plato goes so far as to locate the three different parts of the soul in different areas of the body. The rational part is located in the head; the appetitive in the midriff; and the high-spirited in between the other two, midway between the midriff and the neck, "in order that being obedient to the rule of reason it might join with it in controlling and restraining the desires when they are no longer willing of their own accord to obey the word of command issuing from the citadel" (*Timaeus*, 70A).

Plato's assertion that the soul has parts is puzzling in light of his other claim, that the soul keeps to the self-same condition because it is likely without parts. Perhaps these three parts are not so much separable things that make up a soul (the way three people might make up a singing trio), but they are three capacities or powers possessed by a single soul. On this view, the appetitive part is the soul's capacity to be subject to appetitive urges, the rational part is the soul's power to reason, and so on. But, no matter how Plato's two positions may be reconciled (if they can be reconciled at all), they serve to highlight an important issue, which will be with us throughout the remainder of this book. This issue is the question of whether the soul has or lacks parts, whether it is complex or simple in nature. Plato raised this matter but did not clearly resolve it. The contemporary philosopher David Armstrong has used Plato in an effort to support the view that the self does have parts (Armstrong 1999, 23). He points

out that in the *Republic* Plato argues for the existence of parts of soul from the fact that we are the subjects of, and can consider acting for the purpose of, fulfilling either one, but not both, of two competing desires:

But, I [Socrates] said, I once heard a story which I believe, that Leontius the son of Aglaion, on his way up from the Piraeus under the outer side of the northern wall, becoming aware of dead bodies that lay at the place of public execution at the same time felt a desire to see them and a repugnance and aversion [. . .] (*Republic*, 439E)

Contrary to what Armstrong (and, perhaps, Plato) would have us believe, if these desires are parts of the self, they are not substantive parts in the sense of being substantial entities in their own right, whose loss would entail a corresponding substantial diminishment in the size of the self. To see that this is the case, we can suppose that Socrates loses one or both of the desires—to see the dead bodies and not to see them (the loss of a desire is not an uncommon experience that each of us has). Does Socrates experience a substantial loss of himself? Not in the least. *All* of him will remain after the loss of either or both of these desires. Socrates will have changed, but not in the sense that there will be less of him in a substantive sense. He will survive this kind of psychological change in his entirety. Therefore, we will need an argument other than the one brought forth by Armstrong from Plato to support the idea that the self has substantive parts.

Regardless of whether Plato ever espoused a clear position on the matter of the soul's substantive simplicity, he was aware of the soul's nature as a unit in perception and cognition and of the problem that this poses for the idea that the soul has parts. In a discussion about knowledge and perception in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates asks: "Is it more correct to say that we see and hear *with* our eyes and ears or *through* them?" Theaetetus responds, "I should say we always perceive through them, rather than with them," and Socrates retorts as follows:

Yes, it would surely be strange that there should be a number of senses ensconced inside us, like the warriors in the Trojan horse, and all these things should not converge and meet in some single nature—a mind, or whatever it is to be called—with which we perceive all the objects of perception *through* the senses as instruments. (*Theaetetus*, 184C–D)

In other words, Plato recognizes that it will not do to liken an individual mind to a group of individuals who are parts of a whole, where one person sees the lightning, another hears the thunder, yet another smells the rain, and yet one more feels the rain's impact on his skin, but there is no single individual that is aware of all of these things at once. No; one and the same individual simultaneously sees the lightning, hears the thunder, and smells the rain whose impact he feels on his skin. Hence Plato reasons that the senses through which we are aware of the thunderstorm must be instruments of the soul that somehow converge at the single point that is the soul itself, which is the subject of awareness. Were this convergence not to obtain, there would be no single soul or mind that is aware of all that is going on, but only a multiplicity of perceivers. A fact that deserves noting is that this *unity of consciousness* of which Plato was aware is still something that puzzles contemporary brain scientists. Thus, in commenting about contemporary speculations about consciousness, John Searle says:

I need to say something about what neurobiologists call “the binding problem.” We know that the visual system has cells and indeed regions that are specially responsive to particular features of objects such as color, shape, movement, lines, angles, etc. But when we see an object we have a unified experience of a single object. How does the brain bind all of these different stimuli into a single, unified experience of an object? The problem extends across the different modes of perception. All of my experiences at present are part of one big unified conscious experience [. . .]. (Searle 1997, 33)

We will have more to say about the unity of consciousness in our discussions of subsequent philosophers' views of the soul.

Aristotle

Without question, the other major Greek philosopher of the soul was Aristotle. Though he was a student of Plato at the Academy in Athens, he was not one who blindly accepted his teacher's views. Some passed his scrutiny, others did not.

Like Plato, Aristotle believes that the soul gives life to its body. Because the soul is the first principle of living things (Aristotle 1986: *De anima*, 402^a), Aristotle maintains "that the ensouled is distinguished from the unsouled by its being alive" (*De anima*, 413^a). In short, *everything* that is alive has a soul, including organisms like plants and trees. One should not conclude, however, that Aristotle believes that plants and trees see, hear, and think. To avoid saying anything like this, he distinguishes between kinds of soul, which are hierarchically arranged. The lowest kind of soul, which is the kind that plants and trees have, is what Aristotle terms a "nutritive" soul. Whatever has it is alive (*De anima*, 415^a). It is best to think of a nutritive soul as the principle that is responsible for the nourishment, growth, and decay of an organism. "Now of natural bodies some have life and some do not, life being what we call self-nourishment, growth and decay" (*De anima*, 412^a).

According to Aristotle, one step up from the nutritive soul is the sensitive soul, which is the soul that accounts for perception in the form of touch, sight, smell, taste, and hearing. It is the existence of the sensitive soul that distinguishes animals from plants and trees. Nothing that is alive is an animal, unless it is able to perceive (*De anima*, 413^b). Because animals both live and perceive, the question arises as to whether they have two souls, a nutritive one and a sensitive one. Aristotle makes it clear (at 414^b) that they have only one

soul, because the lower member of the hierarchical series (in this case, the nutritive) is present in the form of its powers (nourishment, growth, and decay) in the higher soul. In other words, the higher soul incorporates the powers of the lower into itself and thereby eliminates the need for the lower-level soul itself.

Human beings are animals, but different ones from beasts (non-human animals), so the question arises as to what distinguishes humans from the beasts. According to Aristotle, a human being possesses a kind of soul that is one step further up the ladder from the kind that is possessed by beasts. The kind of soul in question is one that enables a human being to think, suppose, and know (*De anima*, 413^b, 429^a). Its possession renders a human being a rational animal. In keeping with the point made in the previous paragraph, a human being does not have three souls but only one, where the rational soul incorporates the nutritive and perceptive powers that define the lower-level souls.

While Aristotle agrees with Plato about the existence of the soul and its life-giving power, he takes issue with several of his teacher's beliefs about the soul. For example, consider the issue of how the soul is related to the body. According to Plato, the soul's relationship to a body is *contingent*. The body you have now is not your body in virtue of some essential necessity; you could have had a different body. (And, if Plato is right about reincarnation, you will come to have a different body.) Formally, Plato's position can be put this way: while a rational soul A gives life to, and has, a human body B, A could have given life to, and could have had, human body D. Moreover, rational soul C, which gives life to, and has, D could have enlivened and had B. Indeed, on Plato's view, rational soul A could have had the body of a dog. Aristotle believes that this kind of radical contingency between a soul and its body is wrong:

But there is one absurdity that this [Platonic view] has in common with most theories about the soul. The soul is connected with the body, and inserted into it, but no further account is given of the reason for

this nor of the condition that the body is in. Yet this would seem to be required. For it is by their partnership that the body acts and the soul is affected, that the body comes to be moved and the soul produces motion. And none of these is possible for things whose mutual connection is contingent. [. . .] The point is, however, that each body has its own form and shape. (*De anima*, 407^b; Lawson-Tancred's translation)

Aristotle believes that an adequate account of the soul must be able to explain why it is that a *particular* soul has a *particular* body. Moreover, he claims somewhat cryptically that each body has its own form and shape, which might mean that, while all human bodies are just that—human—each nevertheless has its distinctive height and weight, skeletal structure and skin features, and so on, in virtue of its soul; and the Platonic kind of soul cannot account for these particularities of its body.

Before we explain Aristotle's account of the soul–body relationship, we believe it is important to point out that Aristotle concedes in the passage just cited that “most theories about the soul” acknowledge the contingency between a soul and its body that is included in the Platonic account. What explains this acknowledgment? It is not in the least implausible to think that part of the explanation is this: every one of us can easily conceive or imagine him- or herself having a different body than the one that he or she has. A male can easily conceive of himself having either a different male's body or the body of a female, and a female can easily imagine herself having either a different female body or that of a male. In a recent article in the *New York Times* entitled “Standing in Someone's Else's Shoes, Almost for Real,” the author, Benedict Carey, reports that neuroscientists can create “body swapping” experiences, in which a subject can be “tricked” into adopting

any other human form, no matter how different, as [his or her] own. “You can see the possibilities, putting a male in a female body, young in old, white in black and vice versa,” said Dr. Henrik Ehrsson of the

Karolinska Institute in Stockholm. [. . .] [T]he Karolinska researchers have found that men and women say they not only feel they have taken on the new body, but also unconsciously cringe when it is poked or threatened. (Carey 2008)

We cite Carey's article in the present context not because we believe that neuroscientists have discovered some new datum about something that people would be able to conceive for the first time in history, but because their work confirms the reality of something that human beings have always been able to do: to imagine themselves in bodies other than their own. In this instance, neuroscience teaches us nothing new. While Plato failed to provide the *complete* account of embodiment for which Aristotle was looking (as we pointed out in our discussion of Plato's view of the soul, he did have something to say about why one soul has the body of a human being and another has that of a beast), had Plato been able to respond to Aristotle, he might have countercharged that Aristotle failed to provide any plausible explanation for why or how it is that each of us can so easily imagine standing in the body of someone else and calling it his or her own.

What, then, is Aristotle's account of the soul-body relationship? At its core is the idea that the soul is the *form* or "first actuality of a body which potentially has life" (*De anima*, 412^a). To say that the soul is the form of the body means something like the following: the soul is an active or vital principle, which *informs* its body and gives to it its life and configuration (most generally, Aristotle is a "hylomorphist," which is to say that he believes an entity's matter or stuff is distinct from its form, where the latter, when combined with the former, makes that entity the kind of thing it is; the soul is a kind of form). By saying that the soul is a vital principle or a "first actuality" that informs its body, Aristotle intends to make clear that the soul is not, as Plato claimed, a primary substance that either does exist or could have existed on its own before it entered a body, or does or could survive the dissolution of the body and (once again) exist independently. The soul

does not and could not do either of these things because it is not a *thing* or an *entity* that exists on its own and is distinct from its body:

Now that it is impossible for [any of the three souls—nutritive, sensitive, rational] to preexist is clear from this consideration. Plainly those principles whose activity is bodily cannot exist without a body, e.g. walking cannot exist without feet. For the same reason also they cannot enter from outside. For neither is it possible for them to enter by themselves, being inseparable from a body, nor yet in a body, for the semen is only a residue of the nutriment in process of change. (Aristotle 1984b: *Generation of Animals*, 736^b)

If the soul is not a primary substance, then what is it in the case of a human being? Aristotle maintains that that which exists on its own is the individual soul–body composite—for example the individual man, Socrates. Thus, it is ultimately not the soul, as opposed to the body, that thinks, experiences pain and pleasure, desires, deliberates, and so on, but the individual man, Socrates, who is active with respect to some and passive with respect to others of these things. “Perhaps indeed it would be better not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks but that the man does in virtue of the soul” (*De anima*, 408^b).

Though Aristotle denies, in opposition to Plato, that it is the soul as such that is the subject of what may be called psychological events, he is aware of the unity of consciousness that we discussed at the end of the previous section on Plato and of the problem it poses for a view that holds that distinct parts of the material body are subjects of distinct psychological capacities and of their actualizations:

Therefore discrimination between white and sweet cannot be effected by two agencies which remain separate; both the qualities discriminated must be present to something that is one and single. [. . .] What says that two things are different must be one; for sweet is different from white. Therefore what asserts this difference must be self-identical, and as what asserts, so also what thinks or perceives. That it is not possible by means of two agencies which remain separate to discriminate

two objects which are separate is therefore obvious. (*De anima*, 426^b; Smith's translation)

Aristotle's point seems to be that, if one subject apprehends whiteness and another apprehends sweetness, then it would not be obvious to either that what it apprehends is different from what the other apprehends. But it is obvious that whiteness is different from sweetness, which requires the existence of a single subject that is aware both of whiteness and sweetness and of their difference from each other.

In addition to highlighting the unity of consciousness, Aristotle also calls attention to the fact that, when we see and hear, we are aware that we are seeing and hearing (*De anima*, 425^b). He makes the same point about walking and thinking:

Moreover, when a person sees, he perceives that he sees; when he hears, he perceives that he hears; when he walks, he perceives that he walks; and similarly in all other activities there is something which perceives that we are active. This means that, in perception, we perceive that we perceive, and in thinking we perceive that we think. (Aristotle 1962: *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1170^a; Oswald's translation).

In other words, our perceiving is transparent to us. But can we be aware of our seeing or hearing (and tasting, smelling, and touching) by seeing or hearing, and so on? Because each mode of sensation has its appropriate object (e.g. color of seeing, sound of hearing) and the respective act of sensing does not itself exemplify that object (e.g., seeing color is not itself colored), one is tempted to answer this question negatively. Aristotle seems to take the position that one should resist this temptation and affirm that each act of perception is not a simple act of perception but *involves* both the respective act of perception (e.g. seeing) and the sensing of that act of perception in that act itself. The alternative, he says, would be an infinite regress of modes of sensation (e.g., the distinct mode of sensation by which one perceives that one is seeing must now itself be the object of a yet

further act of perceiving by a yet further distinct mode of sensation). But is an infinite regress of modes of sensation the only alternative? Might not one have an additional form of awareness (e.g., introspective awareness of oneself seeing when one sees, where not a faculty of oneself but one's self/soul is the subject endowed with that awareness), which is not itself the object of any further distinct act of awareness? In other words, one need not have an additional, distinct act of awareness whereby one is aware of oneself being aware of oneself seeing. We are not aware of any consideration that would reasonably disqualify this possibility.

Beyond noting that we are aware of our own selves sensing, Aristotle also alerts us to an important feature of our sense. In order to make his point, Aristotle distinguishes the special sensibles (color, sound, taste, smell, and touch), each of which is the object of only one sense (sight, and only sight, has color as its object; hearing, and only hearing, has sound as its object, and so on), from the common sensibles (movement, rest, number, shape, and size (*De anima*, 418^a), each of which can be the object of more than one sense (e.g., both touch and sight can have movement as an object). An interesting feature of a sense object that is special, says Aristotle, is that it is an object about which it is impossible in one way, but not in another, to be deceived: "Each sense then judges about the special objects [sight of color, hearing of sound] and is not deceived as to their being a colour or sound, but only as to what the coloured or sounded thing is or where it is" (*De anima*, 418^a). As we will see in subsequent chapters, both Augustine and Descartes will make a similar point in their refutations of skepticism. Each one maintains that, while the soul might be deceived about the color of an object or about where a sound is coming from, it cannot be deceived about the fact that it seems to it as if that color belongs to an object and that that sound is coming from a certain direction. Aristotle goes on to state that, with respect to the common sensibles, "there is the greatest possibility of perceptual illusion" (*De anima*, 428^b). It seems to us, however, that there is no greater possibility of error with regard to the common sensibles than

there is with respect to the special sensibles. If we stay with Aristotle's way of conceptualizing the issue, then it seems correct to hold that we are not deceived by our sight and touch about there being a moving object, but only as to what the moving thing is or where it is, or even if there is a moving thing. Similarly, if we take the perspective of Augustine and Descartes, it seems correct to say that, while a soul might be mistaken about the actual movement of an object, it cannot be deceived about the fact that it seems as if an object is so moving.

As we have already stated, Aristotle claims that rational souls make it possible for human beings not only to sense but also to think. Moreover, he believes that, because everything is a potential object of thought, it is not possible for the faculty of thought to be anything material. "That part of the soul then that is called intellect (by which I mean that whereby the soul thinks and supposes) is before it thinks in actuality none of the things that exist. This makes it unreasonable that it be mixed with the body" (*De anima*, 429^a; Lawson-Tancred's translation). The idea here seems to be that, if the power of thought were of a material nature, then we could not know things as they really are, but would distort them—much as a colored lens distorts the color of a perceived object.

Aristotle reinforces the belief that the soul as intellect is non-bodily in nature by arguing that, because the soul is, or has, an intellect, it cannot be a quantity. He points out that, while the thought in which a soul engages has a unity, this unity is different from the one possessed by a quantity. Thought is unified by its logical connections (e.g. by the connection between "If A then B; A; hence B"), but a quantity is unified by a juxtaposition or arrangement of parts, which is a spatial issue. Some, says Aristotle, liken the soul to a circle. Will the soul, then, he responds, always be thinking without beginning or end? This is absurd, because

all practical thought processes have termini—they are all for some purpose—and all contemplative thought processes are similarly limited by their arguments. Now every argument is either a definition or a

demonstration, and of these a demonstration is both from a starting-point and in a way has an end [. . .] and all definitions are obviously limited. (*De anima*, 407^a; Lawson-Tancred's translation)

Thus the fact that all reasoning has a beginning and an end should deter us from thinking that we can learn about the nature of the soul by considering the nature of a circle.

While Aristotle is not a soul–body dualist in the sense that he maintains that the soul is a substance in its own right, which is separable from its body, he believes that the distinctive nature of thought or intellect provides him with grounds for making some suggestive remarks about the possibility of separating the intellect from its material housing:

But nothing is yet clear on the subject of the intellect and the contemplative faculty. However, it seems to be another kind of soul, and this alone admits of being separated, as that which is eternal from that which is perishable, while it is clear from these remarks that the other parts of the soul [nutritive, sensitive] are not separable, as some assert them to be, though it is obvious that they are conceptually distinct. (*De anima*, 413^b; Lawson-Tancred's translation)

According to Aristotle, the intellect is both theoretical and practical in its operations. That is, it can have as its subject matter both philosophical concerns (e.g., does every event have a cause?) and concerns about daily life (e.g., how do I get to the market from here?). The concerns of the practical intellect require motions of our bodies, and Aristotle is much interested in how it is that the soul–body complex (the individual human being) moves. He devotes a significant space (*De anima*, Book I) to cataloging how earlier theorists of the soul tried to account for the movements of those things that are alive, most especially human beings. For example, he notes that many philosophers believed that what is ensouled differs from that which is not, in virtue of the fact that the soul is that which produces movement (*De anima*, 403^b). Moreover, because these philosophers thought

that what is not itself moved is not capable of moving anything else, they held that the soul, because it produces motion, is itself in motion. Aristotle notes that Democritus asserted that the soul is a kind of fire made up of spherical atoms—because, when they are in motion, they are especially able to penetrate everything and to move it. He also makes mention of some of the Pythagoreans who held that the soul is like motes in the air, because they seem to be in constant motion even when there is complete calm. (*De anima*, 404^a).

Aristotle's response to such views is that they are deeply mistaken: "All this has made it clear that the soul cannot be in motion, and if in general it is not in motion, obviously it is not moved by itself" (408^b). According to him, the plain fact is that the soul is not a kind of body, but rather belongs to a body and is present in it (414^a). Moreover, the soul need not be made up of things that are spatially in motion in order for it to be able to move its body, which is something it does. As far as Aristotle is concerned, Democritus, the Pythagoreans, and others who shared views like theirs were deeply mistaken about how the soul moves its body. In the case of human beings, Aristotle asserts that the soul produces motion "through some kind of choice and thought process" (*De anima*, 406^b), where that choice and the thought process cannot be understood in terms of microscopic bodies in motion. Later on, Aristotle elaborates on his insight about how the soul moves the body, and he claims that movement is started by the object of desire, which attracts because it either is good or seems good.

The object of desire is the point of departure for action. [. . .] In form, then, that which produces movement is a single thing, the faculty of desire as such. But first of all is the object of desire, which, by being thought or imagined, produces movement while not itself in motion. (*De anima*, 433^{a-b}; Lawson-Tancred's translation)

Elsewhere Aristotle says that "the origin of action—its efficient, not its final cause—is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning

with a view to an end” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139^a; Ross’ translation). Finally, there must be a causal connection between what is mental and what is bodily, “so that the organ whereby desire produces movement [. . .] is something bodily, whose investigation belongs with that of the common functions of body and soul” (*De anima*, 433^b; Lawson-Tancred’s translation).

Aristotle’s view of how the soul moves the body seems to be as follows. The soul has the *faculty* or *capacity* of desire (*De anima*, 433^b), whose *operations* (actualizations) are directed at what is good or believed to be good. This object of desire is an *end* or goal (what Aristotle calls a “final cause”), and the subject of the desire, the individual human being, reasons about how to achieve this goal; and this goal of the reasoning process is a *purpose* because “all practical thought processes have termini—they are all for some purpose” (*De anima*, 407^a). This desire and reasoning process produce, or bring about (in Aristotle’s language, they “efficiently cause”) the individual’s choice to act, where that choice in turn produces the relevant bodily motions, which serve as the means to the achievement of the purpose, if all goes according to plan.

We conclude our discussion of Aristotle’s account of the soul by noting that he affirms a causal connection between what is mental and what is bodily in nature. Though he denies that the subject of what is mental is a substantial soul that is ontologically distinct from its physical body, he nevertheless affirms the broadly Socratic teleological view that the ultimately purposeful actualization or activity of an individual’s mental faculty is directly causally productive of an initial effect in a bodily organ of that individual whereby motion is produced in that individual’s limbs. In short, Aristotle affirms a form of mental-to-physical causation that will later (with Descartes) become a major point of debate.