

## CHAPTER 4

Concerning the part of the soul by which the soul both knows and understands, whether it is separable or is not separable in magnitude but only in account, it is necessary to consider what its differentia is and how reasoning ever comes about. **429a10**

To be sure, if reasoning is like perceiving, it would consist in being somehow affected by the object of reason or in something else of this sort. It is necessary, therefore, that it be unaffected, yet capable of receiving the form; that it be of this sort potentially but not be this; and that it be such that just as the perceptual faculty is to the objects of perception, so reason will be to the objects of thought. **15**

It is necessary, then, since it reasons all things, that it be unmixed, just as Anaxagoras says, so that it may rule, that is, so that it may know; for the interposing of anything alien hinders and obstructs it. Consequently, its nature must be nothing other than this: that it be potential. **20**

Hence, that part of the soul called reason (and by *reason* I mean that by which the soul reasons and conceives) is in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons; nor is it, accordingly, reasonable for it to be mixed with the body, since then it would come to be qualified in a certain way, either cold or hot, and there would be an organ for it, just as there is for the perceptual faculty. As things are, though, there is none. **25**

Therefore, they speak well, further, who say that the soul is a place of forms—except that it is neither the whole soul, but rather the rational soul, nor the forms in actuality, but rather in potentiality.

That the unaffectedness of the perceptual and rational faculties is not the same is evident in the case of the perceptual organs and perception. For perception cannot perceive when coming from an intense object of perception, for instance a sound when coming from loud sounds, nor when coming from strong colours or odours can it see or smell. By contrast, when it reasons some intense object of reason, reason reasons inferior things not to a lesser degree but rather to a greater. For the perceptual faculty is not without the body, whereas reason is separate. **30** **429b** **5**

Whenever it becomes each thing in the manner in which one who knows in actuality is said to do so (this occurs whenever one

is able to move to actuality through oneself), even then it is somehow in potentiality, not, however, in the same way as before learning or discovering. And then it is able to reason through itself.

- 10 Since a magnitude and being a magnitude differ, as also water and being water differ (and thus for many other cases, though not all, since in some cases they are the same), one discerns flesh and being flesh either by means of different things or by means of something in a different condition. For flesh is not without matter, but is rather just as the snub: a this in a this. One discerns by  
 15 means of the perceptual faculty the hot and the cold, those things of which flesh is a proportion.<sup>47</sup> But it is by means of something else, something either separate or something which is as a bent line is to itself when it has been straightened out, that one discerns being flesh.

- Further, in the case of things which are by abstraction, the straight is as the snub is, since it is with extension. The essence  
 20 though, if it is the case that being straight and the straight differ, is something else. For let it be two: then one discerns it either by different things or by something in a different condition. Generally, then, as things are with respect to things separate from matter, so too are they with respect to things concerning reason.

- Someone might raise a difficulty: if reason is simple and unaffected and has nothing in common with anything, just as  
 25 Anaxagoras says it is, how will it reason, if reasoning is to be being affected somehow (since it is insofar as something common belongs to both that one thing seems to act and the other to be affected)? And there is a further difficulty: is it itself an object of reason? For either reason will belong to other things, if it is an object of reason itself not in virtue of something else, and the object of reason is one in form, or it will be something mixed with it which makes it an object of reason just as other things are.

- Or else being affected in virtue of something common is as discussed earlier: that reason is in a certain way in potentiality  
 30 objects of reason, though it is nothing in actuality before it reasons—in potentiality just as in a writing tablet on which  
 430a nothing written in actuality is present, which is just what turns out in the case of reason.

And it is itself an object of reason just as other objects of reason are. For whereas in the case of those things without matter what reasons and what is being reasoned about are the same, since theoretical knowledge and what is known in this way are the same 5 (though one must inquire into the cause of its not always reasoning), in the case of those things which have matter it is each of the objects of reason in potentiality.

Consequently, reason will not belong to those things (since it is without their matter that reason is a potentiality of these sorts of things), though it will belong to reason to be an object of reason.

## CHAPTER 5

Since in all of nature there is something which is the matter for each kind of thing (and this is what is all those things in potentiality), while something else is their cause, i.e. the productive one, because of its producing them all as falls to a craft in relation to the matter, it is necessary that these differences be present in the soul.<sup>48</sup> And there is one sort of reason by coming to be all things, and another sort by producing them all, as a kind of positive state, 15 like light. For in a certain way, light makes colours which are in potentiality colours in actuality.

And this reason is separate and unaffected and unmixed, being in its essence actuality. For what acts is always superior to what is affected, as too the first principle is to the matter.

[Knowledge in actuality is the same as the thing, though in an individual knowledge in potentiality is prior in time, though generally it is not prior in time.]<sup>49</sup> 20

But it is not the case that sometimes it reasons and sometimes it does not. And having been separated, this alone is just what it is, and this alone is deathless and everlasting, though we do not remember, because this is unaffected, whereas passive reason is perishable. And without this, nothing reasons. 25

## CHAPTER 6

Reasoning of indivisible things is among the things concerning which there is no falsity, while among those where there is both 430a26

## CHAPTER 4

**Introduction to III 4**

Aristotle's treatment of reason (*nous*) represents his third and final major deployment of hylomorphic analysis in *De Anima*, the first having been to soul and body in general and the second to perception (*aisthêsis*). The translation of *nous* as 'reason' reflects a decision regarding Aristotle's approach to the psychic faculty he characterizes here but also a somewhat unstable judgement about the shifting semantic fields of the relevant English alternatives, namely 'reason', 'understanding', 'intellect', and 'mind'. Each translation has some advantages and some disadvantages, and none is uniquely superior to the others. One important consideration concerns the fact that *nous* is pressed into service in a variety of ways in the Greek of Aristotle's time, sometimes indicating a faculty and sometimes indicating a state of a faculty, sometimes referring to a kind of cosmic principle or entity. To do something 'with *nous*' (*sun nô(i)*) is to do it wisely or prudently or reasonably; to 'have *nous*' (*echein nous*) is to be sensible or to pay attention to something or someone. More broadly, Anaxagoras (fr. 12) and Plato (*Soph.* 41a, *Tim.* 249a, *Phlb.* 30c) speak readily of the *nous* of the cosmos. This is a view with a resonance in Aristotle as well (*Met.* 1070b20; some would point additionally to the whole of *DA* III 5; see the Introduction to the next chapter). Aristotle several times draws reservedly favourable attention to Anaximander's characterization of *nous* in *De Anima* (404b1, 405a13, b19–20, including in the present chapter at 429a19). In Aristotle, *nous* does at least double duty: to reach a state of *nous* is to achieve a kind of understanding or insight (cf. 433a26, *A Po.* 88a15–17); to have a faculty of *nous* involves being able to engage in the kinds of activities characteristic of human animals, including thinking, reasoning, and intellection (404a28). Back in *De Anima* I, Aristotle wanted to raise and leave open the question of whether *nous* might be a certain sort of substance: 'But reason (*nous*) would seem to come about in us as a certain substance and not to be destroyed' (408b18–19).

Plausibly, 'reasoning' splits the difference between 'thinking' and 'intellection,' and also, on balance, 'reason' seems best to capture Aristotle's range of meanings when talking about both the faculty and the state; but not too much should be invested in

any such determination. One disadvantage of this translation: it tends to lose the connection with some verbal forms, where 'thinking' is to be preferred, given the easier transitivity of 'to think' in comparison with 'to reason'. One can 'reason something through' but it is hard to say that 'one reasons what is undivided' in preference to 'one thinks what is undivided', which is the translation given for the verb 'to reason' or 'to think' (*noein*) in *DA* III 6 (*noein to adiaireton*; 430b7).

One other important point, also a potential disadvantage for this rendering, but equally a concern for any other translation as well: 'object of reason' is given for *noêton*, in preference to 'object of thought' or 'intelligible'. It should be emphasized that *noêton* is directly parallel to *aisthêton*, object of perception, and that both can be either factive or modal. That is, for *aisthêton* we sometimes want 'object of perception', i.e. something actually perceived, and sometimes 'perceptible', i.e. the kind of object that can be perceived. (Colours, not sounds, are objects of sight.) Similarly, *noêton* may be used factively or modally, but for the modal use 'reasonable object' simply will not do. So, it should be borne in mind that 'objects of reason' means either 'objects actually thought' (= factive) or 'objects which can be thought' or 'can be engaged by reason' (= modal). Thus one might say, e.g., 'An abstract mathematical function is an object of reason, not of perception'—that is, it is the kind of thing which can be thought but not perceived. The two can, of course, overlap: if Grüber is just now contemplating the cosine function, then the cosine function is the current object of his thought as well as an intelligible, the kind of thing which can be thought but not perceived. At the risk of straining the English unduly, the translation prefers 'objects of reason' for *noêta* simply to retain the wanted connection with 'reason' (*nous*), the faculty whose objects *noêta* are.

On the general principles of hylomorphic analysis pertinent to this faculty, see the General Introduction § II; on the special issues arising from its application to reason, see the General Introduction § IV.C.

Early in the chapter Aristotle draws attention to the fact that his analysis of reasoning (or thinking, *noêsis*) will proceed along the same lines as perception, namely that it is to be treated as a further instance of form reception (see notes to 429a13–18 and 429a29–b9). Still, he finds an immediate disanalogy between

reasoning and perceiving, insofar as reason (*nous*) lacks an organ and indeed ‘is in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons’ (429a24), a surprising contention given the general hylomorphic model in terms of which Aristotle’s analysis of reasoning is couched. In that framework, standard hylomorphic alterations require categorially paired agents and patients, where the patient manifests a suitable passive capacity, which capacity is rooted in some actual feature of the altered object. Thus, a white fence is made grey by receiving the form of grey already realized in a quantity of paint, but only then if there is a surface present to receive that form. We might by parity of reasoning expect there to be a recipient, material or otherwise, suited to acquire a form involved in reasoning. Some have thought Aristotle’s reluctance to locate such a recipient a consequence of his woeful empirical ignorance: he simply had no inkling of the brain or central nervous system. In fact, however, as an analysis of this chapter shows, for better or worse, his reasoning in this regard is not a consequence of any simple empirical ignorance. On the contrary, he maintains that there are in-principle objections to reason’s having an organ. These in-principle objections stem from reason’s *plasticity*, that is from reason’s being unconstrained with respect to its potential objects (see note to 429a18–29).

The chapter is fairly orderly, and may be divided into the following main sections: (i) introduction (429a10–13); (ii) an analogy between reasoning and perceiving (429a13–18); (iii) the plasticity of mind and the ramifications of its being so (429a18–29); (iv) a disanalogy between reasoning and perceiving (429a29–b9); (v) reflections on abstraction and the relation of reason to what has magnitude (429b10–21); (vi) two puzzles about reason (429b22–9); and (vii) solutions to these puzzles (429b29–430a9).

**429a10–13: Introductory Matter; an Analogy between Reason and Perception:** Aristotle opens the chapter by speaking of the part of the soul by which *the soul* (*hê psuchê*) knows and understands (429a10–11; cf. 411b5–7, 413a5, 429a23), thus putting some pressure on a stricture advanced in *DA* I 4 (408b1–15), where he seems to insist that it is the human being (*ho anthrôpos*) rather than the soul which is appropriately said to pity or learn or think. The remark made in the earlier passage has induced some ancient

commentators, including Themistius (*in DA* 92, 32) to substitute 'human being' for 'soul' in the present passage. This is unnecessary, however, since Aristotle is not in the earlier passage denying that the soul is the subject of such psychological predicates, but rather claiming only that it is not subject to any intrinsic motions as may be implicated by the manifestation of such predicates (see note to 408a29–b18).

Aristotle introduces as topics for consideration in the present chapter the general question of how reasoning comes about and what the differentia of reason is. In recommending a consideration of reason's differentia, Aristotle is probably not using the term in its most technical taxonomical sense, where it specifies the feature whose presence sorts one species under a genus into another (*Top.* 122b12–24, 128a20–37, *Met.* 1020a33–b1), but is speaking in a more relaxed sense, as at 413b19, such that he is merely asking what the distinguishing feature or mark of reason might be.

This first sentence also contains a more vexing clause. Aristotle raises as a topic for investigation regarding reason 'whether it is separable or is not separable in magnitude but only in account' (429a11–12). The grammar of the sentence strongly suggests that this is not a free-standing question, on a par with the others it mentions as worth investigating. Rather, Aristotle is suggesting that reason is *at least* separable (or separate, *chôriston*) in account (*kata logon*; 429a12) and that it may also be separable (separate) in magnitude (*kata megethos*; 429a12) as well; at any rate, this seems to be the purport of the contrast as it is drawn. In the remainder of the chapter, however, he speaks simply of what is separate, without specifying the sort of separation he has in mind.

It is puzzling, however, that Aristotle should introduce as a topic of consideration whether reason is possibly separable in magnitude (*chôristos kata megethos*), since he does not seem to conceive of it as a magnitude in the first place (429a24–5; see note to 429a18–29). It may be that he is drawing the intended contrast somewhat loosely, so that he means not that reason is itself a magnitude, but that it is separate by not being related to the magnitude of the body as the faculty of perception is. He elsewhere in *De Anima* tends to speak not of separation in magnitude but rather of separation in place (*en topô(i)*) (though cf. 432a20, where we have the same contrast between separation in account

(*logo(i)*) and in magnitude (*megethei*)), and seems to use the expressions interchangeably, or at least to contrast them both with separation in account (*kata logon*) in similar ways (403a11, 413b15, 427a5, 432a20, 433b24–5). If that is right, then the intended contrast here may simply amount to his first suggesting that reason is separate in account from the other capacities of soul, and then wondering in passing whether it is also separate in place. That is, however, not strictly what he says here.

See the Introduction to I 1 for a review of types of separation in Aristotle; Miller (2012) reviews them and investigates in detail Aristotle's attitudes towards the separability of reason.

One final point about this first sentence concerns Aristotle's manner of framing his question about reasoning (*to noein*): 'it is necessary to consider what its differentia is and how reasoning ever comes about' (429a12–13). The phrase translated as 'how reasoning ever comes about' (*pôs pote ginetai to noein*; 429a13) is intended to be, so far as possible, neutral as between two ways of understanding Aristotle's question, one genetic and the other analytical. The genetic version: how does reasoning (*to noein*) ever develop in a human being? The analytical version: what in the world is reasoning (*to noein*)?

The questions have very different emphases. The genetic question is most naturally asked of reasoning considered as a cognitive activity, to the effect of wondering how human reasoning, which is, for instance, able to grasp necessary truths, develops out of sense perception (*aisthêsis*) and experience (*empeiria*). On this approach, his concern is continuous with the sorts of discussions he conducts about the development of reasoning in humans in *Metaphysics* A 1 and *Posterior Analytics* II 19. If it is taken as an analytical question, Aristotle is introducing as a topic for investigation the nature of the reasoning (*to noein*), together with the related question of the nature of the faculty of reason (*nous*). On this approach, he is asking: what sort of thing is reasoning (*to noein*), such that its faculty, reason (*nous*), is affected by the objects of reason (*noêta*), as general hylomorphism requires when applied in this domain, even though this faculty is unaffected (*apathês*) and unmixed with the body?

It would be appropriate for Aristotle to pose either sort of question, given where he has come thus far in *De Anima*. It is not inconceivable that he is asking both sorts of questions, but

then he would be packing a surprising amount into a pithy phrase. As it turns out, with respect to the phrase itself, we have little guidance from parallel constructions in Aristotle. One reasonably close parallel, which may shed some modest light on his orientation here, is found in the *Prior Analytics* in a report that it has been shown ‘when *and* how a deduction comes about’ (*pote kai pôs ginetai sullogismos*; *A. Pr.* 52b39; cf. 25b27, 66b4)—though, again, that is not a strict linguistic parallel. See also, however, *Gen. An.* 733b23–34 and 734b5–6, where the genetic meaning seems more prominent.

In view of this paucity of guidance, one can best come to a fuller understanding of Aristotle’s orienting interest by reflecting on the sorts of concerns he evinces with respect to reason (*nous*) and reasoning (*noein*) in this and subsequent chapters.

#### **429a13–18: An Analogy Between Reasoning and Perceiving:**

Strictly, Aristotle does not directly assert that reasoning and perceiving are analogous. Instead, the analogy emerges in the antecedent of a conditional, though one evidently endorsed by Aristotle in what follows, and the commentary on this chapter assumes that this is so. A salutary cautionary note regarding this assumption can be found in Lowe (1983), who also offers a useful way of connecting this and the next chapter with III 7 and 8.

Aristotle immediately teases out four apparent implications of his analogy, and also along the way highlights one point of disanalogy:

- (1) Reason is somehow affected by the object of reason, or something else of this sort (429a14–15).
- (2) The disanalogy: Reason is, nonetheless, unaffected (*apathês*; 429a15).
- (3) Reason is capable of receiving forms (429a15–16).
- (4) Reason is potentially the sort of thing its object is, but is not its object (429a16).
- (5) Reason will be in general disposed to its objects as the perceptual faculty is to the objects of perception (429a17–19).

Of these, (5) is unproblematic; (3) simply asserts that reason falls under the hylomorphic account of change, broadly construed (see the General Introduction § II); and to appreciate (4), it is only necessary to recall that just as there are two notions of ‘object’ in

'object of perception', one broad and one narrow (a rose versus the scent of a rose; see the General Introduction § IV.B), so there are two notions of 'object' in 'object of reason' (*noêton*). The locution 'object of reason' thus may be taken broadly as, e.g., the species considered as a collection of animals, or narrowly as the form of the species gorilla, that is, as the property in virtue of which all those animals qualify as gorillas. Put in these terms (4) is pointing out that when reason is informed by the form of the species gorilla, it does not itself become a gorilla (cf. 432a3). In some instances of reasoning, however, the distinction between broad and narrow object may collapse (see note to 430b6).

So much is reasonably straightforward. By contrast, (1) and (2) present difficulties. It is noteworthy that Aristotle qualifies (1) as he does. Applied strictly, the analogy with perception would have him asserting directly that form reception in reasoning proceeds just as form reception in perceiving does (though exactly how that is to be understood has itself proven controversial; see the General Introduction § IV.B and the Introduction to II 12). The qualification 'or in something else of this sort' (*ê ti toiouton heteron*; 429a14–15) suggests that he resists this implication. Importantly, the qualification ranges not over the object of reason but rather over the process of being affected. That is, Aristotle is claiming not that in reasoning reason is affected by an object of reason *or* something else like an object of reason, but rather that it consists either in *being affected* by such an object or in *something like being affected* by such an object. His hesitation to accept the implication of his own analogy of thought with perception presumably derives from several sources, including: (i) the two notions of potentiality marked in 417b2–29, which ends with a forward reference, evidently to the current discussion (see note to 417b2–16; cf. notes to 412a21–7 and 417a14–20), according to which some cases of being affected involve the destruction of a contrary by a contrary, while others preserve and enhance what is affected; (ii) his contention that reason lacks a bodily organ (see note to 429a18–29); and (iii) his need to avoid an obvious contradiction between (1) and (2).

This last point is clearly the most immediate concern he should have in the current context. In (1) we find Aristotle claiming that reason is somehow affected, while in (2), which follows one line later, he asserts that it is unaffected (*apathês*) (429a15). Worse

still, he represents (2) as an inference from (1), with the result that, if he were speaking unqualifiedly, he would be saying something of this sort: since reason, like perception, is *affected* by its objects, it must be *unaffected*—which would be rather like his saying that since a boxer, like a martial arts warrior, is sometimes bloodied when fighting, boxers must be unscathed in the ring. In fact, though, the qualification in (1) shows that he is making no such coarse inference, and is sensitive to the relation between something's being affected in the sense of suffering something (*paschein*) and its being itself unaffected by the thing which it suffers (*apathes*).

Aristotle is claiming, in effect, that, *when suitably understood*, reason's being affected—after a fashion—is consistent with its being unaffected. Here the related distinctions between two notions of being affected (*paschein*) and of alteration (*alloiôsis*) distinguished at 417b2–16 prove crucial. A child is altered by being fed and nurtured; but food does not affect her nature as a human being. On the contrary, her growing to maturity involves her realizing her fullest potential from a state which is already in place and not acquired in the process of her being affected, namely her nature as a human being. Similarly, reason is never altered in its nature when affected by its objects. There is an important wrinkle, however, which undermines this easy illustration to some extent, in that reason seems to have no nature beyond its being potential (429a21–2; see note to 429a18–29 for further discussion).

That allowed, the suggestion that reason is both unaffected and somehow brought about by the efficacy of its objects strains Aristotle's hylomorphic analysis of change almost beyond recognition (see the General Introduction § IV.C). Aristotle has, however, more to say on this matter in the present chapter at 429b23–4 (see notes to 429b21–9 and 429b29–430a9).

**429a18–27: The Plasticity of Reason:** This complex section contains the crux of Aristotle's positive doctrine about the faculty of reason. It comprises a single continuous argument whose outlines are clear, but whose precise commitments and assumptions have occasioned severe controversy. The overarching argument is:

- (1) Reason thinks all things (429a18).
- (2) [If (1), then reason must be unmixed.]
- (3) Hence, reason is unmixed (*amigê*; 429a18).
- (4) [If it is unmixed, the nature of reason must be nothing other than something potential.]
- (5) Hence, the nature of reason is nothing other than something potential (429a21–2).
- (6) [If its nature is nothing other than something potential, then reason is in actuality none of the things existing before it thinks.]
- (7) Hence, reason is in actuality none of the things existing before it thinks (429a22–4).
- (8) [If reason is in actuality none of the things before it thinks, then it is not mixed with the body.]
- (9) Hence, reason is not mixed with the body (429a24–5).

With the exception of (1), the odd-numbered premises represent the inferences drawn explicitly in the text; the even-numbered premises have been supplied to trace the enthymematic premises. (1) is itself simply asserted without argument, evidently as some manner of datum (429a18).

There immediately follows an additional argument for (9), which also serves to give some content to the claim that reason is not mixed with the body:

- (10) If reason could come to be qualified in one way or another, e.g. if it could come to be hot or cold, there would be an organ for it, just as there is for the perceptual faculty (429a25–6).
- (11) As things are, however: (a) there is no organ for it; or (b) it is nothing (429a27).
- (12) (a) Since there is no organ for reason (accepting 11a), it cannot come to be qualified; or (b) since it is nothing in actuality (accepting 11b), reason cannot come to be qualified, and hence there is no organ for it.
- (13) If either (3a) or (3b), reason is not mixed with the body (429a24–5).
- (14) Hence, reason is not mixed with the body (429a24–5).

The disjunction in (11) and the concomitant disjunction in (12) reflect two distinct ways of understanding Aristotle's argument for his contention that reason lacks an organ.

If we accept (11a), which is the standard understanding of the argument, then the sense of being unmixed with the body will be precisely that reason lacks an organ. (11a) reflects an implicit addition, not in the text, but accepted by many translators, who understand Aristotle to be saying 'but as things are, there is no organ for it (*tô(i)*, sc. for *nous*).

On this understanding, Aristotle's reasoning, in paraphrase, is: (a.i) if reason could be qualified by being hot or cold, then there would be an organ for it (= it would have its own organ); but (a.ii) it does not have any organ; so (a.iii) reason is unmixed with the body. This interpretation could be helped along by a reading having some manuscript warrant, according to which the word 'or' (*ê*) is placed before the claim that 'there would be an organ', thus representing this as an independent hypothesis about the requisites of reason's being mixed with the body. The translation does not accept this emendation.

If we accept (11b), which reflects a text without the inclusion of the 'or', Aristotle's point will be that since reason is nothing in actuality, it cannot come to be qualified, which is a condition of anything's having an organ. Periphrastically, then: (b.i) if reason were mixed with the body, it would be able to take on various qualities and would have an organ; but (b.ii) since it is nothing in actuality before reasoning, neither of these results obtains; so (b.iii) reason is not mixed with the body.

On either reading, the ultimate conclusion will be the same, that reason is unmixed with the body; so, it may seem indifferent as to whether we prefer (11a) or (11b). For the purposes of assessing his argument, however, it matters crucially how Aristotle arrives at his ultimate conclusion. (11a) represents him as simply asserting (in a.ii) that reason lacks any organ, perhaps as a result of the impoverished state of empirical science in his time. (11b), by contrast, represents him as relying on a point already established, to the effect that reason is nothing in actuality. Reasons for preferring (11b) are found in Shields (1995); contrasting accounts may be found in Caston (1998), Sisko (1999), and Heinaman (2007); the literature is fairly and clearly reviewed and assessed by Miller (2012). One should, in view of these

complexities tread lightly regarding this passage. There has been a tendency, at least as old as ps.-Simplicius, to maintain, that 'since there is no organ for it, reason (*nous*) is completely separate from bodies' (*in de An.* 227, 30); such precipitate interpretations are consistent with the argument of this passage, but not required by it.

However one understands its final phase, the bulk of the argument proceeds in (1)–(9). Each of the premises has proven challenging. As presented, the argument ultimately rests upon a single, slender claim, namely that reason thinks all things (*panta noeî*; 429a18). This is not the false claim that reason at any time, or even over all of time, thinks everything which can be thought; it is, rather, the intriguing claim that reason is unconstrained with respect to its objects. In this respect reason is, in Aristotle's estimation, unlike perception. A too intense light, though being an instance of the kind of thing which can be perceived, blinds; an intense thought, Aristotle contends, only sharpens the mind (cf. 424a28–34, 426a30–b3; notes to 422a20–31 and 429a29–b9). He infers, on this basis, that reason cannot have any positive features of its own.

One factor influencing Aristotle in drawing out this consequence of unrestricted plasticity is precisely the hylomorphic framework within which reasoning (or thinking, *noêsis*) is being articulated here: something cannot change into what it already is, either where the destruction of contraries is concerned, as in the base case, nor with respect to a level of actuality, as in the more attenuated case of alteration (see 417b2–16 and note to 429a18–29 for the distinction). Hence, if reason were a certain way, it could not be made to become that way; accordingly, it could not change in that respect; and consequently it could not think what it already was and so could not think all things. See Brentano (1867) for a philosophically penetrating development of this line of thought, though one which also swiftly leaves behind the contours of Aristotle's text as we have it. Shields (1995) attempts a detailed reconstruction of the argument of this passage.

Among the many remaining difficulties with the argument, some of the most severe are those attending to (7), the interim conclusion that reason is none of the things existing in actuality before it thinks (429a22–4). (See the General Introduction § IV.D

for an exposition of this worry.) One might think that Aristotle's view is simply untenable here, on the grounds that, necessarily, if  $x$  is to be affected by an object of reason, then  $x$  must in the first instance exist in actuality in order to be affected. After all, if there is nothing actual to be affected in some alteration, then evidently no affection can take place: one cannot paint a fence white when there is no fence to be painted. There is some latitude for Aristotle here, however. He may be supposing only that reason exists in potentiality *as a faculty* of a human being before it thinks, at which time it becomes something actual. Thus,  $S$ 's capacity to swim across the English Channel, although grounded in actual facts about  $S$ 's physical constitution, is nothing in actuality before  $S$  learns to swim. One must in this vein distinguish between: (a)  $S$ 's actually having this or that capacity (Getrude has a capacity to swim, whereas her copy of *The Mill on the Floss* does not); and (b)  $S$ 's capacity being actualized or not (because he is a swimmer, Tom's capacity was actualized when he learned to swim and then again, in a different way, when he swam across the Channel, whereas Maggie's was never actualized at all because she never learned to swim). This much would respect what seems a minimal condition of adequacy, namely that necessarily if  $x$  is potentially  $\phi$ , then there is some  $y$  such that  $y$  is actually  $\psi$ , and  $y$ 's being actually  $\psi$  grounds  $x$ 's being potentially  $\phi$ . This would perhaps be a rather deflationary way of looking at Aristotle's striking claim, though it would still at least serve to distinguish reason from the faculty of perception, which is actual in sense (b) from the outset of life (see note to 417b16–27).

In any event, Aristotle's contention in this regard would seem to undermine, or rather to answer, his tentative query in 408b18–19 as to whether reason might not be a *substance* (*ousia*). For it seems impossible that something which is in its nature nothing other than potential could be a substance.

**429a27–9: Qualified Praise for Plato:** Aristotle punctuates his core argument regarding the nature of reason with qualified praise, evidently for Plato. He does not, however, mention Plato by name; nor are there any clear expressions of this view in the Platonic dialogues given in just the terms used here by Aristotle (though there are some remarks tending in the direction in mainly critical passages in the *Parmenides* at 132b5, 133c5, and 134a10).

He may also be alluding to Plato's doctrine of recollection, as at *Meno* 80e–86d. If this is intended, then the second of Aristotle's qualifications is so severe as to eviscerate Plato's intended meaning. For, on this approach, if we wish to think of the soul as 'a place of forms' (*topon eidôn*; 429a27–8), Aristotle recommends that: (i) we should not speak of the whole soul, but only the rational soul as this place of forms; and (ii) that forms are only potentially in the soul, and not actually.

Whoever the intended target may be, Aristotle does adhere to his own formulation of this doctrine at 410a10–13, 417b22–4, and 431b28.

**429a29–b9: A Disanalogy between Reason and Perception; the Separability of Reason:** So far we have seen that Aristotle's analogy between reasoning and perceiving, if imperfect in several respects, at least provides a familiar framework for articulating the nature of reason. Aristotle now proceeds to draw attention to significant features of disanalogy between reasoning and perceiving and draws some striking consequences for reason. Earlier he had claimed that sensory organs (*aisthêtêria*) were that in which the capacity (*dunamis*) of perception (*aisthêsis*) is located (424a24). Now, on the basis, in part, of differences between reasoning and perceiving, Aristotle asserts that reason is separate (*chôristos*), evidently from the body (429b5).

It is essential in evaluating this passage to recall the striking claim of *DA I I*, that a sufficient condition for the *soul* (*psuchê*) to be separate was its having affections peculiar to it (403a10). He seems here to make a directly analogous point regarding reason (*nous*) and also to derive the consequence left undrawn regarding the whole soul. The precise connection between these two consequences is partly a function of the mereology of soul presupposed by Aristotle (on which topic, see notes to 403a3–27, 410a13–22, 411a26–b14, and 413b11–414a3).

In the current passage, the source of disanalogy highlighted by Aristotle pertains to the way in which perception and reason fail to be affected by their corresponding objects. Undue intensity in its objects deadens or destroys the faculty of perception, whereas more elevated objects enhance the power of reason (cf. 424a28–34, 426a30–b3; note to 422a20–31). The argument of the passage appears abductive: we observe a marked difference

between perception and reason; the best or only explanation is that reason is without the body; hence, reason is without the body, and so is separate.

That said, on a second possible interpretation, Aristotle is not arguing here for the separability of reason so much as accepting it as already established by the argument of 429a18–27, in which case he is merely appealing to the fact to explain and ground the disanalogy he observes between reasoning and perceiving.

**429b5–9: Self-Moving Reason:** In this passage, Aristotle relies on his distinction between grades of potentiality and actuality (discussed in notes to 412a21–7 and 417a14–20; cf. *Phys.* 255a33, *Met.* 1050a21–3), according to which an actualized potentiality which is not actively operative is a first but not a second actuality: if someone learns to read Old Church Slavonic, then they are actual readers of that language, even if they are at present reading the *New York Times*. When they put down the newspaper and turn to the appropriate liturgical texts, they are actual readers of Old Church Slavonic to a higher degree. This is also the kind of change which does not involve destruction, but rather preservation and development into a full actuality (as discussed in note to 429a18–29).

In the present connection, Aristotle says, on the reading adopted in the translation, that when one is in the relevant first actuality, one can move to the highest level, a second actuality, of one's own accord. This seems to have the consequence that reason is a sort of self-mover (cf. 417a27–8, b23–4). On the sometimes problematical results of this consequence, see Wedin (1994), Shields (1994), Burnyeat (2002), and Heinaman (2007).

It should be noted, however, that the text translated is controversial, and owes to an emendation at 429b9 proposed by Bywater in 1885, who argued that the text as transmitted 'itself' (*de hauton*) should be altered to 'through itself' (*di' hautou*). With the emendation, 'And then one is able to move to actuality through oneself,' Aristotle's point is that once intellectual forms have been acquired, one can reason at will, a reading deriving some, though hardly conclusive support from 417a27. Without the emendation, 'And then it is able to think itself,' the reasoning or thinking in question is reflexive, so that Aristotle's point will be that only when it has acquired some intellectual forms and so has

moved from potentiality into actuality, is reason able to think itself. This reading gains some support, again hardly conclusive, from Aristotle's remark earlier in the chapter that reason is nothing in actuality before reasoning (see note to 429a18–27). It is possible that the unemended text should stand, but it is difficult to grasp why Aristotle should suddenly, without warning or following comment, wish to make a point about reflexive reasoning or self-awareness. The issue is comprehensively and intelligently discussed by Owens (1976), who makes the plausible but not overwhelming case for avoiding Bywater's proposal.

**429b10–21: Magnitudes, Abstraction, and Reason:** This section concludes with a claim which recommends careful study of the entire passage, namely that reason's own separation somehow tracks the ways in which its objects are themselves separate from matter. Unfortunately, in view of its interlocking textual and interpretive difficulties, the passage has proven vexing to commentators. Malcolm (1983) reviews some of the issues regarding this passage and offers a reading which seeks to situate it in the programme of the chapter as a whole.

Aristotle distinguishes magnitude and water from what it is to be a magnitude and what it is to be water—or more literally 'being a magnitude' (appropriately also translated as 'being for a magnitude', *to einai megethei*; 429b10) and 'being water' ('being for water', *einai hudati*; 429b11), where the contrast intended is one between a thing and its being or essence (*einai*). In these cases, the things in question, water and magnitude, are not the same as their essences. To this class of entity, Aristotle opposes two other sorts which, he says, *are* the same as their being or essence. So, we have two interlocking distinctions: (i) things and their being or essence; and (ii) things which are identical with their being or essence and things which are not. These distinctions evidently draw upon *Metaphysics Z 6*, a chapter which should be read in connection with this passage, but which has, unfortunately, itself been subject to a variety of interpretations.

For the present, however, let us focus on the second distinction, and following Aristotle's illustration, call members of the first class *snub kinds* and members of the second class *formal kinds*. The snub (*to simon*) is Aristotle's preferred example of a thing whose definition requires that it be realized in matter of a

specifiable sort: snub is concavity in a nose (cf. *Met.* 1025b32, 1030b28, 1064a23). The main function of the distinction between formal and snub kinds in the current passage is to draw attention to two ways of judging or discriminating snub kinds. It is entirely possible to make judgements about the being or essence (*einai*) of water or the being or essence (*einai*) of magnitude; but, according to Aristotle, one manages to do so only by means of a faculty other than the faculty required to make judgements about water or magnitude themselves. Or, at any rate, Aristotle allows, in a retreat from the surprising strength of his initial conclusion, that if one does in fact judge by means of the same faculty, this faculty must be in different conditions when judging in these different ways.

Presumably Aristotle intends to accept the first of these alternatives, suggesting that reason discriminates formal kinds and the essences of snub kinds, while perception discriminates snub kinds insofar as they have sensible qualities. If that is so, it is a bit puzzling as to why he allows that the diverse tasks might be handled by a single faculty in two distinct conditions. Probably Aristotle introduces the unfavoured alternative simply because the argument offered here is a bit slight, unless augmented by additional considerations. In any event, his entrenched policy of individuating faculties by their objects forces him towards the first alternative, that different faculties discriminate these different kinds (for this policy, see 402b9–16, 415a14–22, Introduction to II 4, and note to 418a11–17).

The concluding sentence of this section asserts that as things stand in the case of entities without matter, either formal kinds or essences abstracted from snub kinds, so too do they stand with respect to reason. Aristotle's precise intention in drawing this comparison is disputed. Some ancient commentators took the extreme view that in this passage Aristotle committed himself to a multiplicity of distinct human reasons, ranging from the enmattered reason (*enhulos nous*) to the immaterial reason (*anhulos nous*), corresponding to different kinds of abstract entities, belonging to snub kinds and formal kinds respectively (see, e.g., *Them.* 97, 5). This seems an extravagant overinterpretation, however. Aristotle's more likely meaning is that reason tracks degrees and kinds of abstractness or separation from matter by its own abstractive activities: it must abstract essences from snub kinds,

which are separate only then and only in definition, but kinds existing separately *simpliciter* may be grasped directly and completely as they are, without any abstractive activity on the part of reason.

For the distinction between kinds of separation (*chôriston*), see the Introduction to I 1 (cf. *Gen. et. Cor.* 317b10, 329a25; *Met.* 1019a1–4, 1028a33–4, 1042a29; *EN* 1102a28–32); for the types of separation as they pertain to reason (*nous*), see Miller (2012).

**429b22–9: Two Puzzles:** Aristotle closes the chapter by framing two puzzles which threaten his account. The first puzzle is fairly clear, as is its solution; the second puzzle, along with the solution proffered to it, is comparatively obscure. That said, both puzzles seem appropriate, in view of the commitments of the chapter thus far.

*Puzzle One:* How can reasoning occur if reason is unaffected? The aporetic argument confronting Aristotle is:

- (1) Reason is unaffected.
- (2) Reasoning is a kind of being affected.
- (3) If (2), then since it reason, reason is itself affected.
- (4) Hence, reason is affected ((2) and (3)).
- (5) Hence, reason is and is not affected in reasoning (by (1) and (4)).

This puzzle should concern Aristotle. He has articulated (1) at 429a15, and (2) at 429a14–15, having accepted them both ((1) somewhat surprisingly) as consequences of the analogy between reasoning and perceiving; see note to 429a13–18; cf. *Gen. et Corr.* 314b26–7, 324a34–b7. Together (1) and (2) suffice to generate a *prima facie* puzzle.

*Puzzle Two:* How can reason think itself? Here the aporetic argument is a bit more complex and also a bit more impressionistically put:

- (1) If reason thinks itself, then either it is present in other things or it will have present in it something rendering it a suitable object of reason.
- (2) If reason is present in all other things, then everything can reason.
- (3) It is not the case that everything can reason.

- (4) Hence, reason is not present in all things (by (2) and (3)).
- (5) If reason has something present in it rendering it a suitable object of reason, then it will not be unmixed.
- (6) Reason is unmixed.
- (7) Hence, there is nothing present in reason capable of rendering a suitable object of reason (by (5) and (6)).
- (8) Hence, reason cannot reason itself (by (1), (4), and (7)).

Here again an earlier commitment of the chapter engenders a problem, for Aristotle had accepted (6) at 429a18 and 429a2–4 as a consequence of the plasticity of reason (on which, see note to 429a18–27).

**429b29–430a9: Solutions to these Puzzles:** In an effort to solve Puzzle One, Aristotle reaches back to his distinction between ways of being affected. See, in this chapter, note to 429a13–18; this should be read together with 417b2–29 and notes to 412a21–7, 417a14–20, and 417b2–16.

In the current context, Aristotle mainly seeks to explain the relevant kind of being affected by appeal to the potentiality exhibited by a writing tablet. Significantly, this analogy is not intended to represent reason as a kind of Lockean *tabula rasa*. Aristotle has, rather, a more limited illustration in view, pertaining to the kind of potentiality displayed by a writing tablet. There are some actual facts about a tablet which make it suitable to receive an inscription; but these facts are consistent with its being in potentiality relative to *all* letters, at least before it is written upon. So, it is in potentiality with respect to all of them, and is thus nothing, so to speak, inscribed in actuality before being written upon.

If this is Aristotle's intended meaning, two consequences follow. First, in repeating that reason is 'in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons' (429b31; cf. 429a24), Aristotle is supposing, as was suggested in the note to 429a18–27, not that reason mysteriously pops into existence when it begins reasoning, but rather only that its capacities, being infinitely plastic and grounded in actual features of a cognizer, are not actualized until reasoning in fact begins. Second, he is thus evidently intending to deny (3), which holds that if reasoning is itself a kind of being affected, then since reason thinks, it is affected. Reason

remains in its essence fully potential, just as a writing tablet remains unaffected in its nature as potentially inscribed, until such time as letters are written upon it. Even then it retains the grounding potentiality of being able to have letters inscribed upon it. So, reasoning may itself be a kind of being affected without reason's being affected in its nature by the activity of reasoning.

Aristotle's solution to Puzzle Two is a bit more vexing. He seems implicitly to advert to the distinction drawn earlier between what we called *snub kinds* and *formal kinds*, as discussed in the note to 429b10–21. The puzzle proceeds by forging a dilemma: either reason is capable of being thought through its own nature and so is actually something, and hence is not unmixed; or it is unmixed but it is capable of being thought by virtue of things other than itself. If the latter, however, and if what is thought and what thinks are the same in form, it will follow that other things are not only intelligible, but are in fact instances of intellect, or reason. Neither alternative seems happy, since if everything has reason, then everything thinks. On the other hand, if reason is actually in some determinate state or is some definite thing, then it is not unmixed, and so not infinitely plastic.

Aristotle evidently seeks to deny both horns of the dilemma. As for things thought, they do not therefore have reason simply in virtue of their being thought; for the sense in which reason is identified with them is only without their matter (430a2), just as reason thinks snub kinds only having first abstracted their essences. So, the sense in which it is right to say that water is one with reason is just to say that the essence of water informs reason and is one with it formally. This leaves no temptation to ascribe mindedness to water. Unfortunately, however, this observation provides no ready reason for thinking that one or another of the premises in the second puzzle, as explicated, is false.

On the other side of the dilemma, matters are at least a bit more hopeful. Things without matter can be one with reason; if the pure or formal kinds at least include intellectual beings, as presumably they do (*Met.* 1074b29–1075a5), then reason can, so to speak, think reason by being actualized by them. Presumably the subsidiary worry voiced by Aristotle (430a5–6) confirms that he is proceeding along these lines: if a sufficient condition for reason to reason is the actual presence to it of an existing reason as an instance of a pure or formal kind, something, accordingly,

standing in no need of abstraction, then why is reason not forever reasoning reason?

If this captures the outlines of Aristotle's solution, three additional observations are pertinent. First, in some instances, Aristotle will refer to the form without the matter, even though he is not thinking of elevated immaterial beings, as in *De Anima* II 12, where he speaks of receiving forms without matter in connection with perception (see note to 424a17–24). Second, even if we adopt this approach, it will remain unclear precisely how Aristotle rejects either of the premises in his second aporetic dilemma. Finally, and more importantly, if this accurately tracks Aristotle's intended solution, then the puzzle itself may have to be reconfigured. It sounds initially as if it is a puzzle about the reflexive reasoning in which individual minds engage when they think of themselves. The solution sketched seems rather a solution to a more general puzzle about how reason as such can think reason as such, whether or not that reasoning is reflexive. If, that is, reason's reasoning, e.g. of the divine intellect, qualifies as reason thinking itself, then there is no immediate suggestion that the puzzle requires reflexivity to be generated (as, by contrast, a somewhat similar puzzle does about perception; cf. note to 417a2–14). Note, in this connection that Aristotle's language in setting the puzzle is somewhat circumspect: he wonders 'whether it [reason] is itself an object of reason' (*ei noētos kai autos*; 429b26). Perhaps, then, the puzzle never was one directly concerned with reflexive thought. Conversely, if it really was intended to be a puzzle about reflexive thought, then it is unclear how this response qualifies as any kind of solution.

Further discussion of the puzzling features of these puzzles may be found in Kahn (1966) and De Koninck (1994), who connect them with thought about the divine intelligences discussed in *Metaphysics* Λ; Lewis (2003), who rightly stresses their connection to some Anaxagorean theses which Aristotle finds congenial; Caston (1999), who draws from them data about Aristotle's approach to consciousness; and Kosman (1975) and Gill (1991), who see them as presaging problems addressed only in the next chapter. Miller (2012: 319–20) provides a crisp overview of the problems and some approaches to them, and then also provides a plausible account of Aristotle's reasons for introducing them.

## CHAPTER 5

**Introduction to III 5**

This terse, suggestive chapter has excited more exegetical controversy than any other in the Aristotelian corpus. Even though we have seen Aristotle reserving reason (*nous*) for special treatment throughout *De Anima*, and even though the previous chapter characterizes reason as unmixed (*amigê*; 429a18) and unaffected (*apathes*; 429a15), nothing has quite prepared the reader for the striking claims of *De Anima* III 5. Aristotle now distinguishes an active from a passive reason (or a productive from an affected reason; *nous poiêtikos* from *nous pathêtikos*—though he does not, in fact, ever use the term ‘*nous poiêtikos*’ directly), and contends that active reason is not only unaffected and unmixed and separable, but also ‘in its essence actuality’ (*tê(i) ousia(i) ôn energeia*; 430a17–18), and moreover ‘deathless and everlasting’ (*athanaton kai aïdion*; 430a23). All of this raises the prospect that despite his plain denial that the whole soul is separable in *De Anima* II 1, reason, taken by itself, may yet be separable, with the consequent result that perhaps he regards personal immortality as compatible with hylomorphism after all. This possibility in turn brings into sharper relief the qualification Aristotle immediately offers even when issuing his ‘plain denial’ of the separability of the soul: ‘Therefore, that the soul is not separable from the body, or some parts of it if it naturally has parts, is not unclear’ (413a2–5). Others find little connection to the apparent qualification of *De Anima* II 1, reading this chapter instead as isolated from the rest of *De Anima*, and as a change of topic from human reason to divine reason.

We find, accordingly, two dominant exegetical tendencies in response to this chapter. The first, a *Divine Interpretation* (DI), holds that the reason (*nous*) as characterized by Aristotle in this chapter is not a human faculty at all, but rather a detached and everlasting divine mind. The second, a *Human Interpretation* (HI), maintains, on the contrary, that the reason (*nous*) described in this chapter is precisely human reason. HI, but not DI, thus treats the reason under consideration in this chapter as the same reason (*nous*) he has been characterizing in III 4 and will carry on characterizing in the chapters which follow.

HI was typically espoused by exegetes in the medieval Latin tradition seeking to develop a form of hylomorphism congenial to

Christian doctrine. An especially ingenious and powerful exponent of this general approach is to be found in Thomas Aquinas, who revisits the chapter again and again in his writings, both within and without his Aristotelian commentaries.

Those pursuing a version of DI robustly reject this entire orientation. On this general approach, which found a powerful exponent already in Late Antiquity in the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, the active reason Aristotle finds cause to characterize in this chapter as deathless and everlasting is not a faculty of human beings at all, and so has nothing to do with the apparent qualification of *De Anima* II 1. According to this approach, the subject of this chapter is rather the divine intellect to which Aristotle elsewhere commits himself (*Met.* Λ 7 and 9).

Although at most one of these interpretations makes maximal sense of the chapter, neither can be ruled out on narrowly textual grounds. Further, in view of the strong proponents on either side, each deserves an equal hearing. Consequently, the commentary proceeds as follows. For each section of the chapter, it advances—so far as possible—a neutral exposition, followed by two running commentaries in tandem.

The Divine and Human Interpretations introduced in this section of the commentary are regrettably generic, and little effort is made to trace out the many sub-variations within each approach. Still, each individually represents one of the dominant lines of interpretation of this rich and provocative chapter; it is hoped that they jointly offer a glimpse of the lively dialectic which has characterized debates regarding *nous poiêtikos* (active reason) down through the centuries. At a minimum, the presentation of these contrasting approaches is intended to equip those readers wishing to enter the debate themselves to do so with at least a rudimentary map of the terrain in hand.

Unsurprisingly in view of the heated exegetical controversies over *nous poiêtikos*, the literature on this chapter is vast. Among the works cited in the bibliography, the most detailed, thorough, and philosophically uncompromising is Brentano (1867/1977: 163–229); others, including Hicks (1907), provide more philologically and historically sensitive running commentaries. Whether or not one adopts Brentano's interpretation, it is salutary to appreciate how well his discussion illustrates the

complexity occasioned by this one short stretch of text: his commentary on a chapter of fifteen lines runs to sixty-six pages.

For a very clear and succinct taxonomy of the main approaches to this chapter, see Miller (2012), who uses a slightly different manner of classification from that employed here. He divides the schools of interpretation into *internal* and *external* interpretations, based upon whether the interpretations treat *nous poiêtikos* as internal or external to the human soul. Beyond offering a judicious overview, Miller provides a succinct and useful taxonomy of various sub-variations of his two main approaches (321, with 333, n.47). It should be noted that Miller's taxonomy shows one way in which the division employed here is not exhaustive: one could, for instance, believe that the active reason is not a human faculty all, without thereby identifying it with the divine mind. One might think, for example, as a very few commentators have thought, that the active reason Aristotle describes is a not a human capacity, but not the divine mind either. It could, for instance, be a common, non-divine mind, perhaps a kind of active principle of nature. The overview here sets aside such (minority, but not therefore false) views. It, nonetheless, provides references to the minority views, alongside the dominant approaches, where appropriate.

### **General Orientations of the Divine and Human Interpretations:**

**DI:** As was already seen by the greatest of the ancient commentators on Aristotle, namely Alexander of Aphrodisias (*DA* 89. 9–10), active reason is pure actuality, and thus devoid of all matter and free from potentiality. This is the same intellect called by Aristotle the one which enters 'from without' (*thurathen*; *GA* 736b27). This intellectual being is not a human being, nor a part of a human being, and so not a faculty of the individual human soul. This being is the deity whose illuminating activity makes thought possible for otherwise benighted humans.

As we have already learned in *De Anima* II 1, Aristotle believes (i) that the human soul is not separable (413a4–6; see note to 413a3–7), and (ii) that the rational soul is not merely a detachable stratum on top of the perceptual soul which might be peeled off like the top layer of a cake (see note to 415b8–27). On the contrary, the rational soul is an essential unity—and indeed an entity whose primary function is to provide for the unity of the

body. Together, these commitments combine to undermine any suggestion that, while the whole soul is inseparable, one part of it, active reason, is. Since, then, active reason *is* separate and the human soul is not, active reason cannot be—or be any part of—the human soul.

Further, when we turn to the governing characterizations of active reason in the present chapter, we find Aristotle comparing it most prominently to light (see note to 430a15–17). In speaking of it this way, he clearly treats it as something external to the human soul, as an enabling condition of a certain sort. So, it would be perverse to regard active reason as somehow internal to the soul, on a par with treating the light which makes colours visible as residing somehow within the eyes themselves. Rather, active reason, as conceived by Aristotle, is something wholly impersonal, existing externally to the individual human soul. It is the divine being characterized in *Metaphysics* Λ.

It may be that the consequences of the divine interpretation are welcome or it may be that they are unwelcome; but in either case, we would be wrong to foist upon Aristotle a Platonic, or still more anachronistically, a Christian conception of personal human immortality. Such an approach is, *inter alia*, out of keeping with the pervasively naturalistic and biological tenor of *De Anima*, which treats human beings as natural, rational, corporeal beings.

Some proponents of DI, in addition to Alexander of Aphrodisias, are: among the most prominent older writers, Avicenna, *De An.*, 221; Averroes, *Long Comm. in DA* III 18–20; and among more recent writers, Barnes (1971), Clark (1975), Rist (1966), Frede (1996), Caston (1999), and Burnyeat (2008).

**HI:** As the most ancient of all commentators on Aristotle, as well as the only interpreter of the doctrine who actually knew Aristotle, Theophrastus rightly saw that active and passive reason are simply two features of human reason: reason is active insofar as reasoning is hardly a purely passive affair, but reason itself is also, nonetheless, passive, in so far as it involves form reception and so is affected by the objects of reason given to it (*In DA* 110.18–28). This view at first also seems to find an early expression in Themistius, who at one point says: ‘active reason is in the soul and it is like the most honourable part of the human soul’ (*In DA* 103.4–5). As it turns out, however, Themistius denies that active reason is a personal individual faculty belonging to

individual humans (*In DA* 105.28–9). So, Themistius points in the right direction without taking the needed additional steps himself. HI finds a full expression in Philoponus (*De intell.* 57.70–4) and in Aquinas (*In de an.* 742–3), who observed that any suggestion that active reason is external to the human soul, whether it is conceived as divine or not, seems to require that human beings depend upon the agency of an external actor in order to operate. This threatens to render humans essentially incapable of achieving their own good, since human flourishing consists in the activity of reason (*EN* x 6–8); but plainly any such suggestion is anathema to Aristotle’s unambiguously stated belief that human flourishing consists in the realization of essential human capacities—that is, of capacities belonging to human beings themselves.

More importantly, when we turn to the text before us, we discover nothing in the course of *De Anima* which even remotely suggests an abrupt change of subject, as DI requires: throughout, we have been talking about the souls of natural beings, namely plants, animals, and humans, and neither before nor after the present chapter is there the slightest hint that the topic has temporarily shifted to another sort of being altogether. On the contrary, the reason under discussion in *De Anima* III 5 is the same reason under discussion in *De Anima* III 4 and III 6. These chapters are, however, plainly concerned with human reasoning. It is thus unsurprising that *De Anima* III 4 and III 5 both make free use of the sort of vocabulary reserved here for active reason, namely that its being unaffected and unmixed (*apathes* in III 4 at 429a15 and *apathês* in III 5 at 430a18; and *amigê* in III 4 at 429a18 and *amigês* in III 5 at 430a18).

Finally, as for the soul’s parts, Aristotle had said plainly in the first chapter of the work that a sufficient condition of the whole soul’s being separable is there being some affection peculiar to it and not shared with the body (see note to 403a3–27). He has now affirmed the antecedent of that conditional several times over, not least by asserting that the intellect lacks an organ (429a25–6; see note to 429a18–29) and is unmixed with the body (429a18, 24–5). Nor does his doing so contradict any claim about the inseparability of soul: Aristotle did not simply assert that the soul was inseparable from the body, but took pains to qualify his remark even as he introduced it: it is clear, he asserts, ‘that the soul is not

separable from the body, *or some parts of it if it naturally has parts*' (413a3–5). He then straight away hastened to insist that 'nothing hinders some parts from being separable' (413a6–7). See notes to 403a3–27 and 413a3–7.

It may be that the consequences of the personal interpretation are welcome, or it may be that they are unwelcome. That will in turn be partly a function of what the precise consequences are understood to be. For it must be stressed that so far HI is generic in its formulation and so is consistent with a wide range of more fine-grained interpretations. In fact, the (putative) consequences of HI vary greatly from proponent to proponent, since some hold to this general interpretation while insisting that the human active intellect is separable only in account or definition (*logô(i)*), and not ontologically, in its own right, or unqualifiedly (*haplôs*), while others understand Aristotle to be envisaging a form of personal immortality. Depending on the form of HI adopted and developed, then, Aristotle's doctrine will begin to look more or less markedly Platonic.

Some proponents of HI, in addition to Philoponus and Aquinas: among the most prominent older writers is ps.-Simplicius *in de An.* 240.1–248.18; among more recent writers those who hold that the human intellect is ontologically separate include Rodier (1900), Ross (1961), Robinson (1983), Sisko (2000), and Gerson (2004); and, finally, among more recent writers those who hold that the human active intellect is only definitionally separate are Hicks (1907), Wedin (1988), and Caston (1999).

**430a10–14: Active and Passive Factors in Nature and in the Soul:** In nature in general, there are active and passive elements. Indeed, it is at the core of Aristotle's hylomorphic analysis of change that in episodes of alteration something acts while something is affected: a lump of clay does not spontaneously organize itself into a statue, but is made into one by the agency of the sculptor; nor does the sculptor sculpt something from nothing, but only by acting upon a suitable subject. The clay, as matter, is thus passive and in potentiality, and the sculptor, as efficient cause, is thus active, exercising a power when actualizing the clay's passive potential to be a statue. So too in the case of the soul: the changes involved in perception and reasoning must

conform to these general principles. Hence, we must find in the case of the soul, here in the case of the reasoning soul, active and passive factors. This seems a straight application of Aristotle's general hylomorphism. (Cf. *Phys.* I 7– II 8 and *Met.* Z 7–9, esp. 1045a30–2); see also the General Introduction § II on the general principles of hylomorphic explanation.)

**DI:** Aristotle says that the general division of active and passive powers found in all of nature are equally evident 'in the soul', which might be taken to mean that he is here characterizing a distinction internal to the individual soul. The phrase 'in the soul' (*en tê(i) psuchê(i)*, 430a13), however, need not mean 'in the individual soul'. Rather, Aristotle means only 'in case of the soul' or, more loosely, 'where the soul is concerned'. Of course, in this realm, as in others, the basic principles of hylomorphism apply: if reasoning and perceiving are attenuated species of alteration, then both active and passive components must be at play in episodes of these alterations (see the General Introduction § II for general principles of hylomorphic explanation). More than that would not be warranted by Aristotle's general appeal to hylomorphism. On the contrary, it would seem a straightforward fallacy of division to move from (a) in every change in the natural sphere, active and passive elements are present to (b) in every part of the natural sphere, such as the individual soul, active and passive elements must be present. That would be rather like saying that since final causation is present in the whole of nature, it must likewise be present in cases of seeming co-incidence, so that when a creditor happens by chance upon his debtor in the marketplace the meeting must in fact be for the sake of something—an inference Aristotle clearly and rightly rejects (*Phys.* 196b33–197a19).

**HI:** Aristotle maintains that the active and passive elements which are present everywhere in nature are also present 'in the soul' (*en tê(i) psuchê(i)*; 430a13). As Ross (1961: 45) observes, this 'can only mean the human soul'. We are, after all, in the midst of a discussion of the human soul, one according to which, as we have already seen, both active and passive features are required. In particular, Aristotle holds that for reasoning to occur some abstractive *activity* must take place (see note to 429b10–21), so that objects of reason (*noêta*) may be made available for the individual episodes of thought of individual human

beings. Any suggestion to the effect that abstraction is effected for humans by a unified external active intellect, or active reason, has an unacceptable and bizarre result, namely that everyone will forever think the same thoughts at precisely the same times. If the counter will be that this does not follow, since individual souls must still turn themselves towards externally abstracted forms as objects of reason (*noêta*), then that is to concede that both active and passive principles must be present in the individual soul, and nothing will be gained by trying to forestall that consequence. What Aristotle means is that reasoning involves activity and receptivity on the part of reason; and he is surely right about that.

**430a14–15: Producing and Coming to be All Things:** It is not immediately clear what is meant by reason's being active by somehow coming to produce or make all things (*tô(i) poiein panta*; 430a12). A useful clue comes from *Met.* 1033a31, where Aristotle speaks of making (*poiein*) some particular thing from a substrate (cf. *Met.* 1033b2, b22); a second, more local clue, comes from the comparison of reason's agency to the activity of a craft (*technê*; 430a12). Crafts do not produce something from nothing, but rather *fashion* something already in potentiality into something actual. If we combine these two thoughts, then Aristotle is not ascribing any unrestricted creative powers to active reason, but is rather suggesting that reason actively works on something potential to bring about something actual. To take this line of reasoning one step further, it will be natural to understand him as engaging in the kinds of abstractive activities in which reason is implicated (see again note to 429a18–27). If we are prepared to expand Aristotle's meaning in this direction, then the productivity of reason will reside in ordinary intellectual tasks such as concept formation, isolating commonalities between objects in thought, abstracting *in rebus* universals for analysis, and engaging in drawing inferences from one set of propositions to another. In all these ways, reason is appropriately described as active, as *doing* something or other. Note in this connection that Aristotle's general tendency is to think of universals as appropriate objects of reason (*APo.* 81b6, 87b28–37, 87b39–88a7; cf. note to 417a21–b2; *Met.* 1039b28–1040a7, 1087a15–20).

This somewhat deflationary understanding of Aristotle's meaning offers him little motivation to characterize active reason as

deathless and everlasting, as he in fact proceeds to do (430a23). Still, it does fit his remarks in a broader and familiar pattern of Aristotelian explanation. If correct, it also suggests that some who proceed by speaking of '*nous poiêtikos*'—which exact term is in fact never used by Aristotle—as 'the creative intellect' or 'the maker mind' are overblown and potentially misleading. Safer and more appropriate would be characterizations in the neighbourhood of 'active intellect', or 'active mind', or, as the translation prefers, simply 'active reason'. Aristotle does speak of a passive reason, or reason which is passive (*ho de pathêtikos nous*; 43a24–5), where the implied contrast is a reason which is active, or active reason.

Note too in this connection that the definite article 'the' found in most English presentations of 'the active intellect' may tend to prejudice one's interpretation in favour of substantival views of active reason. Here some circumspection is warranted. In Aristotle's Greek, 'the active intellect' and 'the passive intellect' might be used to refer to two distinct intellects, or to one and the same intellect, where it might mean 'the intellect, insofar as it is active' or 'the intellect insofar as it is passive.' This would be roughly the difference observed in English between 'The cowardly man always defers to the courageous man' and 'When sober, she is unfailingly polite, but when intoxicated she can be really unpleasant, and, I can tell you, the sober woman is more agreeable than the drunken woman.' So in Greek we may distinguish 'Active reason—*sc.* the one which is active and never passive—is not affected by objects of reason' from 'Insofar as it is active, reason is not affected by objects of reason.' The substantival interpretation of the implied phrase *nous poiêtikos* ('the active intellect') may or may not be correct as an interpretation of the chapter; but as a matter of representation of the actual contents of the chapter, the other, less committal rendering ('active reason') leaves open the possibility that Aristotle means only to speak of reason (*nous*) insofar as it is active.

**DI:** If in its agency reason makes all things, then it is unrestricted in scope or power. No human intellect is so powerful. Clearly, then, active reason is a kind of superhuman agency, something appropriately described by Aristotle later in the chapter as 'deathless and everlasting' (430a23) and elsewhere as 'divine' (*Gen. An. GA* 736b27).

**HI:** Presumably, 'all' in 'all things' is implicitly restricted in its domain. Aristotle had said in the previous chapter that reason

'thinks all things' (429a18), where this meant only that it was unrestricted with respect to its objects, that nothing internal to it would hinder its reception of any intelligible form (see note to 429a18–27; and Shields (1995)). Here he means that reason, insofar as it is affected by intelligible objects existing in actuality, comes to be one in form with them (cf. 4 note to 431b24–432a1), but only after it has prepared itself and its potential objects appropriately.

**430a15–17: Like Light:** Aristotle appeals to light as a kind of positive state (*hexis*) in an effort to explain how it is that active reason is active in producing all things. We have seen earlier how light works in the case of colours. At 418b9–10, Aristotle characterized light as 'the actuality of . . . the transparent, insofar as it is transparent,' and observed further that 'darkness is the absence of this sort of positive state (*hexis*) from the transparent; the result is plainly that its presence is light' (418b18–20). This makes light a kind of enabling condition for the seeing of colour. Light does not make colour seen, though it does make it visible, as Aristotle himself highlights. If that is right, then the point of the comparison is to suggest that objects of reason (*noêta*) may be only potentially such until they are suitably actualized by reason's agency.

On this general approach then, active reason somehow makes the objects of reason available to passive reason, which is informed in the process of coming to think. For instance, if it is true that all kinetic energy ceases at 0° Kelvin, then this is a fact about the universe, captured by the Third Law of Thermodynamics, and this fact can be thought by a sufficiently trained and attuned mind. It is not, however, a simple thought which one might grasp more or less directly by looking out across a (seemingly) motionless meadow. Rather, a fair bit of preparation must first be effected in order for it to be brought into focus; the law must, so to speak, be isolated and revealed to a discerning mind by a process of study. If reason's activity enables thought in this way, as light brings colours into a condition in which they can affect the perceptual faculty, then active reason proceeds by making the medium between mind and object transparent. It illuminates the conceptual space between an object of reason (*noêton*) and the reason (*nous*) which grasps it.

Of course, that much development is already speculative and also somewhat strained: a conceptual space is in fact not a space.

**DI:** As light is external to the perceptual faculty, and is caused, says Aristotle, by ‘the presence of fire or something of this sort in the transparent’ (418b16–17), so the agent intellect, which makes objects of reason fit for reasoning, is something external to human reason. It illuminates conceptual space as the sun illuminates physical space. It is not as if the eyes send out beams to illuminate colours through the darkness; rather, when light is made present by the agency of fire or the sun, then and only then are colours actually perceptible in the transparent. The terms of the analogy thus dictate that active reason is external to the human soul, no less than the sun is external to an animal’s eyes.

**HI:** The analogy does not turn on the *source* but on the *presence* of light. Aristotle appeals to light to explain how active reason makes thought possible. The terms of the implicit analogy are precisely those he specifies, namely that just as light makes colours existing in potentiality into colours existing in actuality (430a16–17; cf. 418b18–20), so active reason makes objects of reason exist in actuality and thus thinkable. On this last point, careful readers will note that Aristotle has said only that light makes colours actual ‘in a certain way’ (*tropon*; 430a16). This is as it should be, since colours are fully actual as objects of perception only when perceived. As Aristotle claims, ‘the actuality of the object of perception and of the senses are one and the same, though their being is different’ (425b26–7; cf. 426a15–16 and note to 425b26–426a26). The relevance of his circumspection here is that something is a fully actual object of reason only when it is in fact thought, but it is made capable of being thought only by some act of abstraction, something accomplished in a specific time and place by the agency of an individual human thinker. Here again active reason is simply reason insofar as it is active.

**415a17–19: The Traits of Active Reason:** Aristotle lists the core traits of active reason. It is: (i) separate (*chôristos*; 430a17); unaffected (*apathês*; 430a18); (iii) unmixed (*amigês*; 430a18); and (iv) in its essence actuality (*tê(i) ousia(i) ôn energeia*; 430a18). Aristotle reels off this list rather abruptly, with no inference made from what precedes, though he does give a glimmer of a justification

in what follows by asserting that ‘what produces is always superior to what is affected’ (429a18–19). There seems a fair distance still to travel, however. If we think that there is a dimension along which a sculptor is superior to clay she moulds, it will not follow that the sculptor is, e.g., unaffected or in her essence actuality.

That said, it would be wrong to read Aristotle as having failed to *establish* that active reason has these traits, because he has not really made any such attempt. Rather, he seems content simply to report his views on the matter. This is unfortunate inasmuch as we are left without the interpretative guidance of a grounding argument, and hence have little determinate evidence about how he understands these traits.

Such guidance as we do have stems primarily from what Aristotle has already said about reason in general in the previous chapter—and it is not uncontroversial that the data of that chapter is relevant to the form of reason characterized in this chapter. Assuming, though, that we can accept guidance from the linguistic data of that chapter, we might come to a clearer understanding of what is being asserted here.

In III 4, it seemed that reason was unaffected insofar as its essence was not altered by reasoning, inasmuch as it was held to be infinitely plastic (see note to 429a18–27); that it was unmixed with the body, in the sense of its lacking an organ (429a24–7; see note to 429a18–27) and being devoid of any intrinsic features, physical or otherwise (429a25–7; see note to 429a18–27); and that it was separate, where that might in principle be construed in a number of different ways (Introduction to I 1), but as 429a10–13 maintains, reason is separable at least in definition, where there is an open question as to whether it is separate also with respect to magnitude (see note to 429a10–15; cf. 413b15, 427a5, 432a20, and 433b24–5).

The brief grounds he gives for claiming that reason is essentially activity, namely that ‘what produces is always superior to what is affected’ (430a18), draws on a common theme for Aristotle, who adheres consistently to principles of priority for cause over effect, and more generally to the priority of the actual over the potential. Often these principles are mainly descriptive (e.g. that a cause is prior in time to its effects), but at times, as here, they are also evaluative. Cf. *Met.* 1049b27, 1051a4, 1072b2–24; *Gen. An.* 723a3–10; *A. Po.* 88a5; *Phys.* 265a22.

**DI:** Key among these traits, and new relative to the characterizations of the last chapter, is Aristotle's contention that reason is in its essence actuality (*tê(i) ousia(i) ôn energeia*; 430a18). This is precisely the sort of language he uses to characterize the divine intellect in the *Metaphysics* at 1071b17–22, 1072b26–7, and 1074b18. This is unsurprising, since he is talking about the divine mind in this chapter. What is more, in characterizing active reason as *essentially* actual, Aristotle commits himself to its being without potentiality altogether. It is difficult to appreciate how human reason could be so characterized.

**HI:** As we have seen, most of the traits of reason listed here have already been mentioned in general in the last chapter. What is new is the characterization of active reason as in its operation essentially active. We have already seen that reason is both affected, in a way, but also unaffected (see note to 429a13–18). This is no contradiction, so long as it is not affected and unaffected in the same respect, or with reference to the same part or features of itself. If we follow that same line of thought, the appropriate way to understand this passage is to read Aristotle as asserting that reason, *insofar as it is active*, is essentially in actuality. This is compatible with its being affected, insofar as it is passive. There is no mystery in this. If a rabid fan of Manchester City Football Club paints his chest blue before the big game, then he is wholly active insofar as he *is painting* his chest, but wholly passive insofar as his chest is a surface *being painted*. Reasoning, as we have already noted, essentially involves both active and passive elements (see note to 430a10–14: HI).

**430a19–21: Interpolation:** These lines recur in their entirety in III 7 at 431a1–4 (see note to which). Here it seems likely that they are an interpolation by a scribe seeking to gloss the sense in which active reason is prior to passive reason, though the attempt adds little. We could decide that they definitely do not belong here, if we had good reason to suppose that they definitely do belong in the later chapter. Unfortunately, they fare only a bit better in the context in which they occur in the later chapter (see the Introduction to III 7).

**430a22: Not Sometimes Reasoning and Sometimes Not:** This line is also sometimes thought to be an interpolation, perhaps trailing after the intrusive words immediately preceding it. (So, for

instance, already in late antiquity Philoponus (*De intellig.* 60.31) relays the information that some commentators known to him thought this line needed to be excised; and it is not present in ps.-Simplicius (*in de An.* 245.5.) That may be; it does seem disconnected with what has immediately preceded the interpolation. If it is retained, it is best regarded as parenthetical.

On the somewhat dubious assumption that they belong here, these lines would be picking up on a promissory note at 430a5–6 to investigate why reason is not always reasoning. The problem there, at least on one understanding (see note to 429b29–430a9), is that if a sufficient condition of reason's reasoning is the presence to it of a suitable object of reason (*noêton*), then, since there are always such objects available, it should always be reasoning.

If that is the correct parallel, then we cannot regard Aristotle as providing the wanted answer here, unless he is simply understood as conceding the point that reason always reasons. For here we have only a simple denial: reason in fact does not reason intermittently. Since it presumably reasons at some times, it must always be reasoning.

**DI:** As we have just seen, since reason sometimes reasons, and since it does not reason intermittently, it must always reason. Human reason does not always reason; it is not always active. Indeed, human reason 'is in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons' (429a24). So, the reason we are characterizing here must be the divine intellect, and not human reason at all.

**HI:** Because we are speaking of reason insofar as it is active, Aristotle will naturally avoid describing it as something operating intermittently. Fire does not sometimes burn and sometimes not burn. When there is fire, it burns in actuality, and not intermittently. Here active reason, like fire, being 'in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons' (429a24), is either actual or nothing at all. This is the sense in which 'it is not the case that sometimes it reasons and sometimes it does not' (430a21).

**430a22–25: Once Separated:** These lines in some ways encapsulate the high controversy surrounding this entire chapter. They contain, in neutral terms, the following claims:

- (i) once separated, this alone is just as it is;
- (ii) this alone is deathless and everlasting;

- (iii) we do not remember; because
- (iv) this is unaffected, whereas
- (v) passive reason is perishable; and
- (vi) without this nothing reasons.

The first and most obvious question concerns the referent of 'this' in (i), (ii), (iv), and (vi); in (i), (ii), and (iv)) it is most natural to assume that the referent is active reason, whereas in (vi), linguistically speaking it might equally be active or passive reason. We may assume that the natural referent is the right one in (i)–(v), while leaving open the question regarding (vi). If so, Aristotle here claims:

- (i) once separated, active reason alone is just as it is;
- (ii) active reason alone is deathless and everlasting;
- (iii) we do not remember; because
- (iv) active reason is unaffected, whereas
- (v) passive reason is perishable; and
- (vi) without this [either active or passive reason] nothing reasons.

On this account, Aristotle concludes the chapter by offering a final summary of the features of active reason.

With that in place, one may begin by asking about the relation between (i) and (ii), the claims that once active reason has been separated, it alone is just as it is. The tense and aspect of Aristotle's Greek lead one to assume that he means that active reason is at some time not separated, and then comes to be separated. This does not immediately entail that it is a personal capacity (the divine intellect never having been non-separated), since: (a) there are different types of separation (on which, see the Introduction to I 1); and (b) the natural way of taking Aristotle's Greek is certainly not the only acceptable way. As regards (a), if one supposes that the separation in question is separation *simpliciter*, then the claim suggests a resolution to the disjunct given at 429a11–12 to the effect that reason, at least insofar as it is active, is indeed separate more than in account or definition (*logô(i)*). Still, Aristotle may mean something much less striking, suggesting only, for example, that when active reason is isolated in thought, it is purely what it is.

As for (b), the tense and aspect of the word translated as 'having been separated' (*chôristheis*) need not be ingressive, as is sometimes assumed (where it would signal that reason is entering into a state or condition that it had not been in before), but rather simply indicating the complete state of its subject, regarded in its totality.

The claim translated as (ii) that active reason 'alone is just as it is' reflects a decision about what 'alone' (*monon*) modifies. An alternative translation, less likely but still possible, would be: 'only having been separated, this is as it is'. The difference in paraphrase would be: 'having been separated, active reason, taken by itself, is purely what it is,' vs 'only when it has been separated is active reason just as it is'. Perhaps the difference is only one of nuance, but the suggestion of the alternative translation would be that it is only by its being separated that active reason becomes untrammelled by matter and thus something which is purely its own nature, whereas the translation adopted suggests something less determinant, that it is the only thing surviving separation and emerging just as it is. Similar considerations affect (iii).

The claim (iv), that we do not remember, requires some explanation from Aristotle. Why and how is our not remembering relevant? As we shall see, both Divine and Human Interpretations are possible.

That passive reason is perishable (v) is now stated directly, by contrast with active reason (430a24–5), which has already been characterized as deathless and everlasting. The passage calls to mind 413b24–6, where Aristotle had maintained that things were unclear with respect to reason, as to whether it might be separated, 'in the way the everlasting is from the perishable'. Here, by contrast, he seems clear, at least as regards active and passive reason.

The chapter's closing claim (vi), that without this nothing thinks, might linguistically be taken as making a claim about active or passive reason. If active reason is intended, Aristotle is simply tidying up a bit, and reminding the reader of the opening of the chapter (on which, see note to 430a10–14). If it is rather passive reason that Aristotle has in view, then the closing is more consequential, and we would probably best understand him as connecting (v) and (vi) and as explaining the fact that we do not remember when active reason is separated, in fact or in thought,

because passive reason is required for remembering. Aristotle might have grounds for reasoning this because he supposes that reasoning requires images (*phantasmata*) and that passive reason has a special role to play in their collection and storage. Clearly, though, such a thought is speculative. See, however, note to 432a3–9 on the role of images in thought.

**DI:** While an HI-style interpretation of these last remarks cannot be ruled out on narrow linguistic grounds, any such interpretation of them is, nonetheless, unnecessary and unwelcome, especially given what Aristotle has already said in the chapter. To begin, the claim about separation need not mean ‘when active reason becomes in fact separate’ from the other faculties of the soul or the body. Rather, Aristotle is suggesting only that when the divine intellect, which is active reason, is isolated in thought, it alone is appreciated as what it is, something deathless and everlasting. This is because the divine mind is fully actual, and anything with any kind of matter is somehow potential (*Met.* 1050b27). Indeed, as Aristotle asserts, all and only those entities which are everlasting qualify as utterly bereft of potentiality (*Met.* 1050b6–18). Further, the claim that we do not remember indicates only that we do not remember the agency of active reason in its preparation of objects of reason for our intellection because we are ourselves not involved in any such agency. On the contrary, it is precisely because it is the activity of a divine active reason which prepares objects for our contemplation that we are in a position to think at all.

Finally, given that nothing is both everlasting and perishable, it follows that active reason is numerically distinct from passive reason.

**HI:** While a DI-style interpretation of these last remarks cannot be ruled out on narrow linguistic grounds, any such interpretation of them is, nonetheless, unnecessary and unwelcome, especially given what Aristotle has already said in the chapter. For in fact, any such interpretation is contorted as a rendering of Aristotle’s Greek. To begin, the claim that active reason is at some time separated is clearly stated, and this implies that there was a time when it was not separated. This is not, however, the divinity. First, the divinity never was anything but separate; and, further, any suggestion to the effect that the separation in question was merely conceptual is implausible in the extreme, since

there is no reason at all to believe that the divine mind is deathless and everlasting only when it is isolated in abstraction. That is false: it is never anything but.

Aristotle's plain meaning is that active reason is purely what it is when it has been separated from the body and other faculties of the soul, which is just the possibility he had entertained at 429a11. It being unfathomable that he was thinking of the divine mind in the earlier passage, it is hard to credit the suggestion that he is doing so here. Moreover, the claim that *we* do not remember serves as confirmation of the personal interpretation: Aristotle is making a direct claim about *us* and our activities. He is speaking about our active reason. Here too there is an earlier passage which serves to secure both the referent and the content of his current claim, namely 408b24–9:

Reasoning and loving or hating are not affections of reason, but rather of that which has reason, insofar as it has it. As a consequence, when this is destroyed, one neither remembers nor loves. For these did not belong to reason alone, but to the common thing, which has perished. But reason is presumably something more divine and unaffected.

Finally, we should not even suppose on the basis of these lines that active and passive reason are distinct in the manner of distinct substances, the first being everlasting and the second perishable. Rather, reason, as a whole, is everlasting, as it plainly must be if one of its capacities is everlasting. Reason is, after all, one being with active and passive abilities, each of which is required for human concept acquisition and cognition. Furthermore, Aristotle has just said that reason, when separated, is just as it is, and in its essence actuality. When reason is separated from the body and the other faculties of the soul, its passive capacities run dormant, and it becomes essentially activity.

His point, then, is not terribly complicated. Reason is like a doctor who is ill and yet able to treat herself with a course of medication. While ill, she has the passive ability to be cured no more or less than the active ability to cure. Once better, she has lost that passive ability. Plainly, it would be fallacious to infer that there were two doctors there all along, the ill doctor and the curing doctor. Rather, there was, and is, but one doctor, who was not but is now whole and healthy.