

Short synopsis of *De Anima* III.4-5:  
On the thinking part of the soul (intellect, *nous*)

**CHAPTER 4**

429a10-13: INTRODUCTION

Two questions concerning the thinking part of the soul (=intellect, *nous*):

Q1: What are its distinctive features?

Q2: How thinking comes about?

[Q0 is left aside: Is it separable only in account, or in magnitude as well?]

429a13-b22: THE DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF THE INTELLECT

- (i) The analogy of thinking with perceiving:
  - (a) if thinking consists in being acted upon by an object of thought, then:
    - (1) the intellect must be **unaffected** (*apathês*)
    - (2) the intellect must be **receptive of forms** (*dektikos tôn eidôn*)
    - (3) the intellect must be **potentially like objects in their form, but not objects themselves** (*dunamei toiouton alla mê touto*)
  - (b) and if the intellect thinks all things, then:
    - (1) the intellect must be **unmixed** (with other things - the Anaxagorean claim; cf. I.2, 405a13-17, b19-21)
    - (2) the intellect has **no nature other than being capable**, i.e. it is nothing in actuality before it thinks
    - (3) the intellect is **not embodied**, i.e. it does not have a bodily organ
- (ii) The disanalogy of thinking with perceiving:
  - (a) the way in which the intellect is unaffected differs from the way in which the sense is unaffected: intense sense-object impedes perception, whereas intense thought-object improves thinking
  - (b) the sense is embodied, and the intellect is separable
  - (c) the intellect needs to be brought into actuality (acquired) by discovery and learning, and even then it remains *dunamei pôs*
  - (d) once the intellect is acquired, it can think “by itself” (*energein di’ heautou*)
  - (e) only once the intellect is acquired, it can think “itself” (*de heauton noein*)
- (iii) Taming the disanalogy: the thinking and the perceptual part of the soul are somehow one
  - (a) the flesh : the essence of flesh :: perception : thought
  - (b) the analogy with the line bent and straightened out

429b22-430a9: HOW THINKING COMES ABOUT

- (i) given that the intellect is **simple** (*haplos*), **unaffected** (*apathês*), **unmixed** (*mêdeni mêden echei koinon* – the Anaxagorean claim), we face two aporiai:
  - APORIA 1: how does the intellect think, if thinking is being affected?  
For, it is insofar as two things have something in common that one acts and the other is acted upon!
  - APORIA 2: how does the intellect think itself?  
For, either (α) the intellect will belong to everything, if it is thinkable not in virtue of something else (and what is thinkable is one in kind), or (β) the intellect will be mixed, which makes it thinkable just like the other objects of thought.
- (ii) solution to A1:  
The intellect is affected by objects of thought because it is *potentially* the objects of thought.
- (iii) solution to A2:  
The intellect is itself thinkable just as the objects of thought.

## CHAPTER 5

### 430a10-25: TWO INTELLECTS

- (i) Analogy 1: just as in nature there is a passive principle (matter) and an active principle (form) in each genus, the same must be the case with the soul too,  
hence there must be a passive intellect (comes to be all objects of thought) and an active intellect (produces all objects of thought)
- (ii) Analogy 2: the active intellect is like light,  
for in some sense light makes colours which are in potentiality colours in actuality
- (iii) Claims about the active intellect:
  - 1. it is **separable** (*chôristos*)
  - 2. it is **unaffected** (*apathês*)
  - 3. it is **unmixed** (*amigês*)
  - 4. it is, in its very being, **actuality** (*energeia*)
  - 5. it is **prior in dignity** (*timiôteros*),  
for the active is always superior to the passive (i.e. form to matter)
  - 6. it is **prior in time**  
though in an individual human being potential knowledge (i.e. potential intellect) is prior in time to actual knowledge (i.e. actualized intellect)
  - 7. it **always** thinks
  - 8. only it is **just what it is** when separated (*chôristheis*)
  - 9. only it is **immortal**
  - 10. and **eternal**
- (iv) But we do not remember because/that the active intellect is unaffected, whereas the passive intellect is perishable,  
and without it one thinks nothing (i.e. without the passive intellect a human being cannot think anything).