

COURSE SYLLABUS

COURSE TITLE: Aristotle's *De Anima*: A Phenomenological Reading

COURSE/SECTION: PHL 415/101

CAMPUS/TERM: LPC, Fall 2017

LOCATION/TIME: McGowan South 204, TH 3:00-6:15pm

INSTRUCTOR: Will McNeill

OFFICE HOURS: TH 9:00-11:00, or by appointment

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“Aristotle for the very first time brought the problem of the soul onto its genuine basis. [...] The fact that with his doctrine concerning the *psuche* Aristotle is aiming at an *ontology of life* is shown by the positive point of departure of his analyses.” —Heidegger, GA 22, 184

“But if we were to take philosophy seriously, nothing would be more desirable than to lecture on Aristotle, for he is of all the ancients the most deserving of study.” —Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

“*He psuche ta onta pos esti panta.*” Aristotle, *De Anima* 431 b21

COURSE OUTLINE

In this course, we shall read Aristotle's classical treatise on the soul or *psuche*, as the first principle of the being of living beings, from a phenomenological perspective. Aristotle's inquiry, we shall show, is itself phenomenological, that is, attentive to beings in their very appearing, in Greek, *phainesthai*, and thus demands a phenomenological reading in order to understand adequately its central claims. Appearing here means presencing, coming to presence, so that opening up a phenomenological perspective on the *De Anima* will mean attempting to understand the key aspects of the soul in terms of the kinds of presence accessible to and experienced by living beings.

To read the *De Anima* from a phenomenological perspective, then, will mean, among other things, opening up the question of presence as it relates to such key phenomena as *aisthesis* (sensation), *phantasia* (imagination), *nous* (intellect), *dianoia* (discursive thought), *logos* (discourse, language), *orexis* (desire), and *kinesis* (movement). Our reading will try to be attentive to a number of critical issues:

1. What does Aristotle mean by claiming at 431 b21 that “The soul in a sense is all beings”? What is he trying to articulate here? In what sense “is” the soul all things? What does it mean to “be” all things? What is meant by “being” here? How should it be understood in relation to appearing and presencing?

2. Examining the meaning of Aristotle's claim at 424 a28 that *aisthesis* is a *logos tis*, a “kind of *logos*.” Does this apply to all *aisthesis*? Is there indeed a sense in which all living beings that have *aisthesis* may also be said to have a kind of *logos*? The stakes are considerable here, if we recall that *logos* is generally in Aristotle identified as the characteristic mark of the human being, of *anthropos* as *zōion logon echon*, the living being that has *logos*. If it should turn out that other living beings, other animals, also have a kind of *logos* and thus participate in something like *logos*, then the distinction between the so-called “animal” and the human—or between the so-called “human” and the animal—may not be as clear or as abyssal as the humanistic tradition would have it.

3. Attending to Aristotle's mention at 433 b8 of the *chronou aisthesin*, the "sense of time" that is the prerogative of certain living beings—specifically, those in which appetitive desire and *logos* can enter into conflict. We shall ask once again: Is this "sense of time" the exclusive prerogative of humans? What is meant by a "sense" of time here? Might other animals too have a sense of time? And if so, would this not likewise problematize the status of the human and the human/animal distinction, given that classically, it is the human being that is considered to have a sense of time (it is the mark of all *techne*, of the ability to plan for and "know" the future, a *techne* likewise denied the mere "animal")?

In sum, then, the constellation that will orient our interpretive perspective in advance this quarter will be that of *aisthesis*—*logos*—*chronos*, approached from the phenomenological perspective of being as appearing and as presence.

REQUIRED TEXTS

1. Aristotle, *On the Soul*, Harvard University Press bilingual edition. ISBN 0674993187.
2. Aristotle's *On the Soul and On Memory and Recollection*, translated by Joe Sachs. Green Lion Press, 2004. ISBN 1888009179.

Students are expected to acquire both translations of the *De Anima*. We shall use the Harvard bilingual edition, with translation by W. S. Hett, as our primary text. The translation by Joe Sachs offers a helpful alternative rendition that we shall refer to from time to time; it also includes a useful Introduction, as well as commentary on the meaning of Aristotle's Greek and Glossaries of key Greek and English terms.

In terms of secondary literature, a good starting place is the compendium *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima*, edited by Nussbaum and Rorty (Oxford University Press). Although the essays in it are written almost exclusively from an analytic perspective, this volume is recommended as an overview of the current state of Aristotle scholarship on the *De Anima*. It contains detailed bibliographies of both classical commentaries and more contemporary work on the *De Anima*, and is worth buying for that alone. Other useful commentaries are those by Aquinas, Gendlin, and Bröcker.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A note on Greek: Much of our interpretation will concern questions of translation, and we shall be referring to the original Greek text throughout. Students are not expected to be able to read Greek, but you will be expected to acquire an understanding of many of the central Greek terms, such as those used above. In many ways, the task of understanding the *De Anima* from a phenomenological perspective entails learning how to translate ourselves back into the Greek.

The course will be run in seminar format. In addition to attendance, preparation, and participation, all students are required to complete two written assignments:

1. A **protocol** of the previous week's class, summarizing the most important points that were addressed, and raising questions or issues that merit further discussion. This should be no longer than 2 pages, single spaced. Your protocol should be posted on D2L no later than 24 hours before class, and a copy emailed to me. We will begin each class by reading the protocol and discussing

the issues it raises.

2. A **final paper** of 12-15 pages, double spaced. Your paper should address one of the following questions:
 - a) Explain Aristotle's claim that "The soul is the primary *entelecheia* of a natural body that has the potential for life, and such will be any body that possesses organs." (412 a28)
 - b) Explain the meaning and implications of Aristotle's claim that "all *aisthesis* is receptive of the form of sensible objects without the matter" (424 a18).
 - c) Examine Aristotle's account of active and passive *nous* with respect to the claim that "*nous* is the form of forms" (432 a2).
 - d) Examine Aristotle's account of what enables movement in space (*kinesis kata topon*) for a living being.

Final papers are due by Friday, November 17th, 2017 at 12:00 midnight. Students are reminded that no Incomplete grades will be given; therefore, if your paper is not received by the due date, your grade will be an "F".

APPROXIMATE SCHEDULE OF STUDY

Week 1

Thursday, Sept. 7

Aristotle as phenomenologist.
 Fundamental Aristotelian concepts.

De Anima I ch.1: The kind of being of the soul
 The mode of investigation

Week 2

Thursday, Sept. 14

De Anima II ch. 1 (412a-413a):
 The soul as primary actuality of the body
 The Platonic background: *Theaetetus* 184b-187a

De Anima II ch. 2 (413a-414a):
 The soul and its capacities

Week 3

Thursday, Sept. 21

De Anima II ch. 3-4 (414b-416b):
 The fundamental capacities of life

De Anima II ch. 5-6 (417a-418b):
 The fundamentals of sensation

Week 4

Thursday, Sept. 28

De Anima II ch. 7-12 (418b-424b):
 Outline of the different senses
 Summary of the essence of sensation

Week 5

Thursday, Oct. 5

De Anima III ch. 1-2 (424b-427a):
 Common sensibles & the discernment of difference.

Week 6

Thursday, Oct. 12

De Anima III ch. 1-2 (424b-427a):
 Common sensibles & the discernment of difference, continued.

De Anima III ch. 3 (427a-429a):
 Imagination

Week 7
Thursday, Oct. 19

NO CLASS (SPEP)

Week 8
Thursday, Oct. 26

De Anima III ch. 4 (429a-430a):
Thinking and *nous*.

De Anima III ch. 5 (430a):
Active and passive *nous*

Week 9
Thursday, Nov. 2

De Anima III ch. 6 (430b):
Truth and falsity

De Anima III ch. 7 (431a):
Thought and imagination

Week 10
Thursday, Nov. 9

De Anima III ch. 8 (431b):
Summary: thought, imagination, and perception.

De Anima III ch. 9-10 (431b-433b)
How is movement possible?

Week 11
Thursday, Nov. 16

De Anima III ch. 10-11 (433b-434a):
Movement, appetite, and desire

De Anima III ch. 12-13 (434a-435b):
The soul and life

Friday, Nov. 17

FINAL PAPERS DUE