In this seminar, we aim to examine Aristotle’s theory of the soul as given in De Anima book II. We focus on two aspects of that theory:

(i) The attempt to define soul in general in chapters 1-3, including his famous definition of the soul II 1 as "first actuality of a natural body that potentially has life" (412a27-8), his claim in II 2 that this definition fits the various kinds of soul that there are (nutritive, perceptive, intellectual, and any others there might be), and his claim in II 3 that these different kinds of soul do not form a unified genus.

(ii) The elucidation of one important capacity of the soul, namely sense-perception, which characterizes one of those kinds of soul. Aristotle’s discussion of this capacity is his most well worked out philosophical account of a constitutive capacity of soul. We are interested in these issues:

(a) the hylomorphic analysis both of acts of sense-perception and of sensory capacities, together with a discussion of whether acts of sense-perceptions are or contain changes (II 5 & 12);

(b) the discussion of the particular senses, concentrating on sight (II 7) (drawing on relevant passages from the accounts of hearing (II 8) and smelling (II 9)), taste (II 10), and touch (II 11);

(c) The common sense and the place of awareness in sense-perception (III 1, 2).

Syllabus

(1) Introduction: (a) Aristotle on Science, Is Psychology a science?, What is the place of the study of the soul in the De Anima in Aristotle’s treatment of natural science? Role of definitions, science as axiomatic. (BM)

(b) De Anima as a whole. Book II in particular. Texts and translations. (HL)

(2) The common account of the soul: II 1 (HL, BM)

(3) II 1 & 2 (HL, BM)
(4) II 2 (HL)
(5) II 3 (and selections from 4) (BM)
(6) II 5 (HL)
(7) II 6 and 7 (Student presentation)
(8) II 10 (Student presentation)
(9) II 11 (Student presentation)
(10) II 12 (Student presentation)
(11) III 1 (BM)
(12) III 2 (HL)

Bibliography

Text
OCT

Translations
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