

# THE LANGUAGE OF DIVINITY

Master's thesis: A philological analysis of Aristotelian intellect  
in *De Anima*, *Metaphysics*, and *Nicomachean Ethics*



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## Preface

This Master's thesis has been partially written in Germany. During the *Sommersemester* of 2016, I studied at the Freie Universität Berlin, where I took a course on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (book A) as well. Prof. dr. Uhlmann was my supervisor abroad and I would like to thank her for her input on the first chapter. In this period of time I also attended several lectures on Aristotelian ethics. Moreover, as I lived in the German capital, I decided what picture should be on the front page of my thesis. "Thoughts become things" is an example of the widely varying world of Berlin street art. This particular text can be found on a hotel in Moabit, in the vicinity of where I lived at the time. I have cycled past it many times. Doing so, it made me think of the active intellect in *De Anima* Γ.5, which makes potential thoughts actual.

For the most part, however, my research was done in Nijmegen. Therefore, I also want to thank dr. ir. Frederik Bakker for his supervision and support during the writing process. He also assisted me when I was writing my Bachelor's thesis on Aristotelian and Platonic friendship. And now, as I ascended from this very earthly topic to the almost heavenly soul and intellect, our paths have crossed once more. And maybe we will meet again in the future, should I decide to keep using my intellect, devoting myself to that activity which is according to Aristotle most akin to divine matters: philosophy.



„Man versteht den Aristoteles nicht, wenn man bei ihm stehen bleibt. Man muß auch wissen, was er nicht sagt, und selbst muß man die Wege gewandelt haben, die er wandelt, die Schwierigkeiten, den ganzen Proceß, den er durchlaufen, durchempfunden haben, um zu verstehen, was er sagt. Ein bloß historisches Wissen ist in Bezug auf keinen Philosophen weniger als auf Aristoteles möglich.“

F.W.J. Schelling, Philosophie der Mythologie (1856)

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## Introduction

In contemporary psychology, the soul is having a hard time. Recent physiology of the brain claims to be able to read thoughts, reducing intellectual activity to mere neuronal impulses. We do not seem to need the soul anymore to explain certain processes. At the same time, our belief in a soul which lives on after death is strongly decreasing. Secularization is widely spreading in the modern world, threatening notions of soul, transcendency and also God. How different was this for the ancient philosophers? According to the LSJ, in ancient philosophical treatises the Greek word for 'soul', ψυχή, means something like 'the source of life and consciousness', 'the spirit of the universe' or 'the immaterial principle of movement and life'. Plato strongly upheld the soul as the moral and intellectual self. Its existence was not even at issue. For Aristotle, the soul was the principle of life. History has delivered us his treatise *On the Soul*, *De Anima* (Greek: Περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς), in which he gives our capacity of thinking, the intellect (ὁ νοῦς) a very important place. Also in *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics* he comes to talk about the intellect, and frequently talks about it in terms of divinity. It is this intellect, its place in our soul and especially to what extent the intellect can be labelled divine, which is the central point in this thesis.

Modern research seems to be tempted to ascribe the study of Aristotelian mind to other fields of research than psychology. Caston claims the second intellect does not belong to human psychology, but rather to theology.<sup>1</sup> Macfarlane and Polansky consider it to be part of physics.<sup>2</sup> Hamlyn argues for 'philosophy of mind',<sup>3</sup> Wedin for 'psychological theory'<sup>4</sup> and Gerson for 'hylomorphic psychology'.<sup>5</sup> Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Bernard of the University of Rostock, who recently held a lecture at the Freie Universität Berlin which I attended, claimed *De Anima* to be a *Spezialgebiet der Physik*. Now, Aristotle lived in a time when institutionalized science like we have now did not yet exist. Ascribing *De Anima* and the chapters about the mind to specific demarcated fields of science, therefore, could be

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<sup>1</sup> Caston (1999), p.199.

<sup>2</sup> Van Riel (2009), p.108.

<sup>3</sup> Hamlyn (1968), ix.

<sup>4</sup> Wedin (2004), p.161.

<sup>5</sup> Gerson (2004), p.349.



dangerous and anachronistic. It is, however, interesting to see when analysing the different opinions on the ‘divinity’ of human mind, how commentators attempt to do so. Besides, the very title of Aristotle’s work, Περὶ τῆς ψυχῆς, means no less than *On the soul*, which can easily be translated as *psychology*. I might add that Aristotle in *De Anima* 415a11-12 seems to be saying that the discussion of theoretical mind does not belong in the study of soul at all. But interpreting the words περὶ δὲ τοῦ θεωρητικοῦ ἕτερος λόγος as evidence that the mind cannot be discussed in *De Anima* whatsoever, but can be in another work, would be rash.

But, apart from the question to what field of study we should attribute *De Anima*: How does our intellect function? And how divine is our intellect really? What does it mean to be divine? Does Aristotle literally speak about the divinity of mind, or are those words put in his mouth by later exegetes? Since antiquity these problems, and in particular whether Aristotle’s ‘active intellect’ can be identified with the famous ‘unmoved mover’, have led and still lead to controversy. Recent commentators, however, have not always found it necessary to base their arguments on the Greek itself. Therefore, it is useful to approach my research question from a philological point of view, by exploring both the arguments of secondary literature and Aristotle’s arguments as well. What is he really saying to us?

Therefore, the central research question of this thesis is:

**When analysing Aristotelian intellect, are there reasonable philological arguments for identifying the active intellect in *De Anima* Γ.5 with the divine intellect of the unmoved mover of *Metaphysics*?**

In order to answer this question, I will first discuss the intellect in *De Anima* in the chapters preceding Γ.5 (chapter 1), then I will analyse chapter Γ.5 at length, providing a translation of my own of the text as well (chapter 2), and then I will point to crucial passages in *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, which also treat the intellect (chapter 3). The main goal here is not to present a full and complete overview of everything that has recently been written on this highly controversial subject. Within the framework of a master’s thesis, this would simply be too much. It is my particular interest,

however, to see how arguments based on the Greek and the structure of Aristotle's argument can lead to an identification of νοῦς ποιητικός with the unmoved mover, or with any divinity whatsoever. I will argue that, on philological grounds, human mind is in a way *godlike*, being something akin to the Aristotelian idea of divinity, but it is not God itself.

## Chapter 1: The intellect in Aristotle's *De Anima* A.1-Γ.4: Contextualisation and *status quaestionis*

### 1.1 Prefatory remarks

The main focus of this chapter is to see how Aristotle introduces the notion of the intellect and how this is embedded in the sections of *De Anima* preceding chapter Γ.5. It will become clear that the parallels with sense-perception, as well as the distinction between matter and form are vital for this thesis and will therefore receive ample treatment in this chapter. The way Aristotle speaks about perceiving and its objects is striking and important for the interpretation of the intellect. The Greek is extracted from Ross' edition published in the Oxford Classical Texts (1961), with some minor adaptations, and the numbering is Bekker's. Translations of the Greek are all mine, except for when the discussion requires translations of others.

### 1.2 Introduction of 'the intellect'

The notion of 'intellect', ὁ νοῦς, which has been translated as *intellectus* since the first Latin commentaries on Aristotle, does not make its first appearance in *De Anima* Γ.5. In fact, the intellect appears quite early in *De Anima*. After listing the names of his predecessors who philosophised on the soul and on the intellect<sup>6</sup> (e.g. Democritus said soul and intellect to be identical (ταυτόν); Anaxagoras said the intellect to be onefold (ἄπλοῦν), unmixed (ἀμιγῆ) and pure (καθαρόν); Alcmaeon said the soul to be incapable of death (ἀθάνατον), and Heraclitus named the soul 'that which is most incorporeal' (ἄσωματώτατον), Aristotle makes his first reference to his own views on the intellect, by arguing that, though it is common to say that 'the soul is pained or glad or courageous or afraid', it would be better to say 'not that the soul pities or learns or thinks discursively (διανοεῖσθαι), but that a man does so *with the soul*'.<sup>7</sup> This passage is frequently cited as emblematic of Aristotle's hylomorphism.<sup>8</sup> A few lines further, at 408b29, he holds 'the intellect to be *probably* (ἵσως) something rather godlike (θειότερόν τι) and unaffected' (ἀπαθές). This statement is important, because it is the only place in *De Anima*

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<sup>6</sup> *De Anima* 403b20-405b30.

<sup>7</sup> *De Anima* 408a34-b18.

<sup>8</sup> Hylomorphism is simply a compound word composed by the words ὕλη "form" and μορφή "matter". Aristotle's view of body and soul can be described as "matter-formism". Cf: Shields (2016) on Aristotle's psychology.

where Aristotle talks about the divinity of the intellect. To see the intellect as something which is probably something rather godlike, Aristotle seems to intend it as a value of judgement. He does not explain, however, to what extent or in what way it is divine, let alone what it means to be divine in the first place. Secondly, it is important because, as we will see in chapter two, the question about the ‘affectivity’ of the intellect, i.e. whether the intellect is affected or not, is not yet solved.

Intellect is thus implicitly contrasted with the composite of soul and body, and it is ‘unaffected’ by things that happen to the composite, owing, presumably, to its being of a different nature. Things like loving and hating and thinking, then, are not attributable to the intellect, but to that which has intellect, namely, the composite.<sup>9</sup> One should not overlook these early notes on the intellect, especially because Aristotle does not seem to make explicit claims or strong definitions, but he keeps an almost academic distance: Intellect is probably something divine, but we just do not know it for sure.

### 1.2.1 Potentiality and actuality; definition of soul

At the beginning of *De Anima* B,<sup>10</sup> Aristotle makes a distinction between matter (ύλη) and form (εἶδος). Matter is potentiality (δύναμις), form is actuality (ἐντελέχεια). When speaking about things as substance (οὐσία), there is firstly matter, which in itself is not a particular, secondly shape or form, in virtue of which it is then spoken of as a particular, and thirdly the product of these two. Aristotle’s definition of the soul is therefore:

διὸ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐστὶν ἐντελέχεια ἡ πρώτη σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶν ἔχοντος. τοιοῦτον δὲ ὁ ἄν ἥ ὀργανικόν.<sup>11</sup>

Hence the soul is the first actuality of a natural body which has life potentially. And such a body is one that has organs.

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<sup>9</sup> Gerson (2004), p.351.

<sup>10</sup> *De Anima* 412a3-11.

<sup>11</sup> *De Anima* 412a27-412b1.

The soul is thus the substance qua form of a natural body which has life potentially. Since the product of matter and form is an *ensouled thing* (τὸ ἔμψυχον<sup>12</sup>), the body is not the actuality of soul, but the soul is a kind of actuality and principle of that which has the potentiality to be such. Accordingly, ‘that therefore the soul or certain parts of it, if it is divided, is not separate from the body, is not unclear, for in some cases the actuality is of the parts themselves. Nothing, though, prevents at any rate some parts from being separable because they are not actualities of any body. Furthermore, it is not clear whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the way that the ‘sailor is of the boat’.<sup>13</sup> Gerson interprets these lines as an another allusion to the intellect, when, again a few lines later, Aristotle makes another comparison between soul and intellect: ‘Concerning the intellect and the theoretical faculty (περὶ δὲ τοῦ νοῦ καὶ τῆς θεωρητικῆς δυνάμεως) it is not yet clear, but it seems to be a different kind of soul (ψυχῆς γένος ἕτερον εἶναι), and this alone can exist separately, just as the eternal [can exist separately] from the perishable.’<sup>14</sup> That intellect is a different kind from soul is hardly surprising, given the fact that it alone is ‘possibly separate’. If intellect were merely one type of psychic activity, its separability would hardly be in question. As Gerson rightly concludes: “the famous suggestion of a comparison of the soul to the sailor of the boat evidently emerges from the contrast between the soul as the actuality of a body and intellect as an actuality of a different kind.”<sup>15</sup> Of what potentiality the intellect is an actuality, however, is not made clear here. As we will see, we will need *De Anima* Γ.5 to answer this question. The soul and the intellect are thus said to be actualities of a certain kind of potentialities, the ‘first actuality’ being a special sort of potentiality, a *hexis*, which is actual in comparison with the potentialities of non-living things. To speak of the soul is to speak of the potentialities which a living thing has for different forms of life.

Without losing ourselves in a comparison between *Metaphysics* of Aristotle and Plato, a brief digression may be appropriate here. Aristotle rejects Plato’s dualism in the second book of *De Anima*, resulting in the definition of soul which is given here. He thinks of soul as strongly connected with the body. Moreover, according to Aristotle there are three kinds of souls when speaking about living things:

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<sup>12</sup> See on ‘ensoulment’ also *De Anima* 403b26.

<sup>13</sup> *De Anima* 413a4-9.

<sup>14</sup> *De Anima* 413b25-27.

<sup>15</sup> See for his whole argument Gerson (2004), p.351-3.

vegetative souls (plants), nutritive souls (animals) and intellectual souls (human beings). Human beings possess all three abilities. The reasons why this should be so are broadly teleological. In brief, every living creature as such grows, reaches maturity, and declines. Without a nutritive capacity, these activities would be impossible.<sup>16</sup> But despite the emphasis on the connection between these psychic abilities and the body, as we will see, Aristotle seems to leave space for immortality of (a part of) the soul.

At the beginning of *De Anima* B.3, Aristotle lists the human capacity of thought alongside nutrition, sense-perception, desire, and movement in respect to place, as literally ‘potentialities of the soul’ (τῶν δὲ δυνάμεων τῆς ψυχῆς<sup>17</sup>), mostly translated as ‘faculties’ or ‘abilities’ of the soul. Sense-perception is important, because Aristotle approaches intellect by comparing and contrasting it with sense. For perception is also spoken of in two ways, namely potentiality and actuality: ‘that which can perceive (αἰσθητικὸν) is, then, potentially such as the object of perception (αἰσθητὸν) already is actually.’<sup>18</sup> We will return to this in the next paragraph.

It is clear that, before the introduction of the notorious ‘active intellect’ and ‘passive intellect’, multiple suggestions about the functions and the ontological status of soul and intellect are given by Aristotle. It will become clear as well that these suggestions are used by commentators on each side of the spectrum to argue in favour of the divine mind and the identification with the unmoved mover, as well as against it. The distinction between potentiality and actuality will turn out to be of great importance in our discussion of the intellect, as well as the discussion of perception.

### 1.3 Thinking, perceiving and their objects (*De Anima* Γ.2-4)

The parallels of the intellect with perception receive great attention in these sections of *De Anima*. Thinking is much like the senses in many ways, despite the fact that it lacks an organ and that it does not have the same physical conditions as the senses, being incorporeal.<sup>19</sup> Within book three, section two goes into the “Sameness Thesis”, section three gives an extensive discussion of imagination, and

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<sup>16</sup> *De Anima* 413b27-414a3, a12-b18; Shields (2016) on Aristotle’s psychology.

<sup>17</sup> *De Anima* 414a29-31.

<sup>18</sup> *De Anima* 418a4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle did not recognize the brain as the physical organ which enables us to think. He located our intellect somewhere ‘in the soul’. More on the specific location of the intellect will be discussed in chapter two.

section four links perception and thinking. Section five to eight investigate subsequently various facets of thinking. The remaining chapters of *De Anima* book Γ are taken up by the concept of motion. Let us now take a closer look at the relation between perception and the intellect, which is given a central role in *De Anima* Γ.2-4.

### 1.3.1 Sound and listening (*De Anima* Γ.2)

As I will point out in 1.3.3, Wedin stresses the identity of mind with its object. He calls this the “Sameness Thesis”.<sup>20</sup> In *De Anima* Γ.2, the same thesis is applied to perception:

ἡ δὲ τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ ἐνέργεια καὶ τῆς αἰσθήσεως ἡ αὐτὴ μὲν ἐστὶ καὶ μία, τὸ δ' εἶναι οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ αὐταῖς<sup>21</sup>

The activity of the object of perception and of the sense is one and the same, although what it is for them to be such is not the same;

What Aristotle means by this, is that for example sound does not always actually sounds, and that our capacity of hearing not always actually hears, but when they do, they occur at the same time in activity (κατ' ἐνέργειαν). When I hear a sound, the sound and the effect produced in the organ that allows me to hear this sound in the first place are according to Aristotle the same, but what it means for them to be same is not the same. I will still be able to hear specific sounds and not hear them, and specific sounds can also not sound. But when both, i.e. the sounding and that which can receive the sounding, are active, the actual hearing takes place at the same time as the actual sounding. The only difference is the naming: the first is called hearing, the other is called sounding. This is in line with Aristotle's general dictum that change or movement takes place in that which is moved (cf. 414a4ff and *Physics* 202a15ff).<sup>22</sup>

In the next lines<sup>23</sup> following the passage discussed above, Aristotle suddenly makes an allusion to the unmoved mover. Continuing the argument, he links movement to the discussion of acting and

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<sup>20</sup> Wedin (1988), p.164.

<sup>21</sup> *De Anima* 425b26-27.

<sup>22</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p.124.

<sup>23</sup> *De Anima* 426a2-6

being acted upon by saying ‘if then the movement, i.e. the acting and being affected, takes place in that which is acted upon, then both the sound and the hearing as actual (κατ’ ἐνέργειαν) must be in potential hearing. For the activity of what is moving and active takes places in what is being acted upon.’<sup>24</sup> He continues:

διὸ οὐκ ἀνάγκη τὸ κινεῖν κινεῖσθαι.<sup>25</sup>

It is for this reason not necessarily so that what moves is to be moved itself.

The bulk of this section of *De Anima* is about perception and its objects. Alluding to movement and the unmoved mover, may strike readers as strange. This is, however, not the first time Aristotle alludes to the unmoved mover in *De Anima*.<sup>26</sup> Aristotle’s idea of an unmoved mover is a kind of God who causes everything to move because the world loves him, desires him and strives toward him. Doing so, he does not have to be moved himself, which would imply contingency and potentiality. We will return to the unmoved mover in chapter three.

The example of sound is applicable to all the other senses and their objects of perception as well. It is for this reason that the activity of the object of perception and that which can perceive are one. They exist in that which can perceive. How this ‘sameness’ can be applied to the mind and how, consequently, mind is able to think itself, will be passed in review later.

### 1.3.2 Imagination (*De Anima* Γ.3)

In this chapter Aristotle begins to make the transition from perception to thinking. Imagination (φαντασία) plays an important role in this transition, especially when one recalls *De Anima* 403a2-15, where Aristotle introduces the topic of separability of mind in terms of its dependence, or lack of

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<sup>24</sup> *De Anima* 426a2-5.

<sup>25</sup> *De Anima* 426a5-6.

<sup>26</sup> See *De Anima* 403b29ff, 406a4ff.



dependence, on imagination.<sup>27</sup> Although Aristotle does not discuss imagination at length in Γ.3, he does take a lot of effort to distinguish it from perception and mind.

At the beginning of *De Anima* Γ.3, Aristotle says<sup>28</sup> that ‘there are two distinguishing characteristics by which the soul is generally divided: motion in respect to place; and thinking (νοεῖν), understanding (φρονεῖν) and perceiving (αἰσθάνεσθαι).’ Criticizing ‘the ancients’<sup>29</sup>, who held perceiving and understanding as identical, assuming they were both forms of being affected, Aristotle draws an important line between perception and thinking: ‘Nor is thinking, in which you can be right or wrong, the same as perceiving, right thinking being understanding, knowledge and true belief and wrong thinking the opposite of those. For perception of the proper objects (τῶν ἰδίων) is always true and is found in all animals, whereas it is possible to think falsely as well, and thinking is found in no animal in which there is not also reason; for imagination is different from both perception and thought, and this (i.e. imagination) does not occur without perception, nor supposition without it.’<sup>30</sup>

Thinking is thus contrasted with perception on the grounds that perception is always true, and thinking, in which you can be right or wrong, is not. Imagination, then, is contrasted with perception on multiple grounds. It is said to be ‘that in virtue of which an image occurs to us’ (*De Anima* 428a1-2), where this is evidently given a broad range of application to thoughts, dreams, and mind.<sup>31</sup> Imagination produces images when there is no perception: ‘Perception is either a potentiality like sight or an actuality like seeing, but something can appear to us when neither of these is present, like in dreams’ (*De Anima* 428a5-7). A second argument is that imagination is absent in some animals, even though they have perception, and thirdly, Aristotle claims, perception is always true, whereas imagination can be false also, false “even in fanatic ways.”<sup>32</sup>

We are now led to believe that perceptions are always true and imaginings are not. It must be said that this is not strongly argued by Aristotle. In the first place, it is only of the proper objects, which are inadequately dealt with by Aristotle, that perception is said to be always true. A few lines

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<sup>27</sup> Wedin (1988), p.194. Commenting on these lines, he says “If thought depends on imagination, then even νοῦς will not be separable extensionally.” We will return to this discussion later.

<sup>28</sup> *De Anima* 427a17-19

<sup>29</sup> Parmenides, Empedocles and Democritus; see Hamlyn (1968), p.129-30.

<sup>30</sup> *De Anima* 427b9-17.

<sup>31</sup> Shields (2016), on imagination.

<sup>32</sup> Shields (2016), on imagination; *De Anima* 428a5-16.

further,<sup>33</sup> however, he inconsistently leaves room for false perception of proper objects.<sup>34</sup> Secondly, imagination is said to function in dreams when perception is not present either potentially or actually. But how is this possible for a man asleep? Is perception in this case not present potentially? The other reason offered, that thinking is found in some animals only, i.e. those which have reason, is more consistent.

Despite Aristotle's definition of imagination and the comments on his predecessors, his own remarks on thought and perception are remarkably parallel. They involve assimilation of the faculty and its object and the reception of form without matter. The only real difference between perception and the intellect is that the intellect has no organ and cannot be interpreted as a physical or physiological faculty.

Apart from this, Aristotle defines imagination, as a rather casual remark, in *De Anima* Γ.7<sup>35</sup> as a necessary premise for thought in the first place:

διὸ οὐδέποτε νοεῖ ἄνευ φαντάσματος ἢ ψυχῆ.<sup>36</sup>

Hence the soul never thinks without an image.

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<sup>33</sup> 428b19: 'The perception of proper objects is true, or is only capable of error in the lowest sense'.

<sup>34</sup> Hicks (1965) comments briefly on this rather strange term of Aristotle's: "Of thinking you can say that it is done "rightly" or "wrongly": you cannot say this of perceiving in the normal case, to which the term sense-perception strictly and properly belongs, τῶν ἰδίων αἰσθησις. p.456; Schomakers (2015) points to *De Anima* B.6 (418a11-16), where Aristotle elaborates on (the truth of perception of) "one's own", τὰ ἴδια: that which cannot be perceived by another sense, e.g. sight has colour.

<sup>35</sup> In *De Anima* Γ.8 (432a8-14), Aristotle once again mentions imagination: 'So even when we think speculatively, we must necessarily have some mental picture as object to speculate of; for mental pictures are like objects of perception, except that they are without matter. But imagination is not the same thing as assertion and denial; for truth and falsehood involve a combination of notions. How then will the simplest notions differ from mental pictures? Surely neither these simple notions nor any others are mental pictures, but they cannot occur without such mental pictures.'

<sup>36</sup> *De Anima* 431a17-18.

Our thinking is thus always connected with imagery. As we will see in chapter three, this is a point where our intellect differs from that of the unmoved mover, who is not only just intellect, but also pure intellect, i.e. not connected with imagination.

### 1.3.3 Thinking is like perception (*De Anima* Γ.4)

At the very beginning of *De Anima* Γ.4, Aristotle speaks once more of the intellect and its activities:

Περὶ δὲ τοῦ μορίου τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς ᾧ γινώσκει τε ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ φρονεῖ, εἴτε χωριστοῦ ὄντος εἴτε μὴ χωριστοῦ κατὰ μέγεθος ἀλλὰ κατὰ λόγον, σκεπτέον τίν' ἔχει διαφοράν, καὶ πῶς ποτὲ γίνεται τὸ νοεῖν.<sup>37</sup>

With regard to that part of the soul by which the soul thinks and understands, **whether this is distinct or not** distinct spatially but only by definition, we must inquire what distinguishing characteristics it has, and how thinking ever originates.

Wedin takes these lines, especially the words ‘whether this is distinct or not distinct’ (εἴτε χωριστοῦ ὄντος εἴτε μὴ) to be proof that Aristotle “thinks the cognitivist program can be pursued without settling the ontological question.”<sup>38</sup> Even before the introduction of the ‘active intellect’ and its arguable separateness, here, the phrase ‘whether this is distinct or not’ is something we must take into account, because Aristotle seems to be indecisive about the separability of mind here. One could also interpret these lines as I did in 1.2: no doctrine is introduced, and thorough investigation on the question of separability is postponed. We will return to this topic later.

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<sup>37</sup> *De Anima* 429a10-12.

<sup>38</sup> Wedin (1988), p.160.

### 1.3.3.1 Thinking is affected or unaffected

The crux of the analogy between perception and the intellect lies in the following statement:

εἰ δὴ ἐστὶ τὸ νοεῖν ὥσπερ τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι, ἢ πάσχειν τι ἂν εἴη ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ ἢ τι τοιοῦτον ἕτερον· ἀπαθὲς ἄρα δεῖ εἶναι, δεκτικὸν δὲ τοῦ εἶδους καὶ δυνάμει τοιοῦτον ἀλλὰ μὴ τοῦτο, καὶ ὁμοίως ἔχειν, ὥσπερ τὸ αἰσθητικὸν πρὸς τὰ αἰσθητά οὕτω τὸν νοῦν πρὸς τὰ νοητά.<sup>39</sup>

For if thinking is akin to perceiving, it would be either being affected in some way by the object of thought or something else of this kind; in that case it is necessarily unaffected, but capable of receiving the form and potentially such as it, though not identical with it, and as that which is capable of perceiving is to the objects of perception, so must the intellect similarly be to the objects of thought.

Thinking is thus, according to Aristotle, *akin to* (ὥσπερ) perceiving. That which is capable of perceiving and the object of perception are similar. Similarly, that which is capable of thought, i.e. the intellect, is similar to the object of thought. In this context, the ‘Sameness Thesis’ seems to be reduced to a ‘Similarity Thesis’. The analogy is highly problematic. Fact is that the intellect, in Aristotelian terms, has no organ, and therefore the formulae applied to perception are hard to apply in the same way to the intellect. One could object by pointing to the fact that Aristotle used the word ὥσπερ, which means *like*, or, as I translated it, *akin to*, and not something stronger like ἴσως or ὡσαύτως, *equal to*, deliberately leaving space for differences and avoiding an alleged equalization between perceiving and thinking. He also clearly said that thinking is ‘capable of perceiving the form and potentially such as it, *though not identical with it*’. Nonetheless, Aristotle inadequately resolves this problem.

Is thinking, then, something like being affected by the object of thought, πάσχειν ὑπὸ τοῦ νοητοῦ (429a14), or is it something else of this kind, i.e. necessarily unaffected, ἀπαθὲς (429a15)? As I said in 1.2, in *De Anima* A.4 Aristotle held the intellect to probably be something rather godlike and *unaffected*. Hamlyn points to the fact that Aristotle started this discussion in *De Anima* B.5 with the notion that perception was a form of being *affected*, and then proceeded to put refinements and qualifications on that thesis in a way which eventually leads to the positive rejection of the original

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<sup>39</sup> *De Anima* 429a14-17.

idea.<sup>40</sup> This could be an explanation of the difficulty of this analogy. The formulae invoked in B.5 were relevant to sense-perception because the latter relies on sense-organs; whereas the intellect has no organ. It seems likely that Aristotle himself was not quite sure about this matter when working on *De Anima*. Anyway, let us return to 429a14-15. Ross comments on this question as follows: “Aristotle rejects in lines 14-15 the first of the two alternatives he has just named, and accepts the second.”<sup>41</sup> In that case, thinking would be *unaffected*. It must be said Aristotle is vague on this point and contradicts himself here. A few lines below this passage, however, Aristotle says that ‘it is clear from a consideration of the sense-organs and perception that the impassibility (ἡ ἀπάθεια) of that which is able to perceive (τοῦ αἰσθητικοῦ) and that which is able to think (τοῦ νοητικοῦ<sup>42</sup>) is not the same.’<sup>43</sup> If Aristotle speaks about the impassibility of both that which can perceive and that which can think, even though they differ<sup>44</sup> in this respect, we can assume that he did reject the first of two alternatives in 429a14-15 and upholds our intellect for something which is unaffected by the object of thought.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.3.3.2 Thinking is unmixed

It follows that thinking must be unmixed (ἀμιγῆ εἶναι, 429a18) as well<sup>46</sup>: ‘That part of soul, then, which is called intellect (and I speak of intellect as that by which the soul thinks discursively and supposes) is actually none of the existing things before it thinks (οὐθεν ἐστὶν ἐνεργείᾳ τῶν ὄντων πρὶν νοεῖν). Hence, too, it is reasonable that it *cannot be mixed* with the body; for then it would become a certain kind, either cold or hot, or it would even have an organ, like in the case of the faculty of perception; but as things are, this is not the case. Those who say, then, that the soul is a place of forms (τόπον

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<sup>40</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p.136.

<sup>41</sup> Ross (1961), p.291-2.

<sup>42</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p.137. Hamlyn rightly points to the fact that Aristotle must be referring to the ‘faculty of perception’ and the ‘faculty of thinking’ here, using the -ικον terminology. These words can also be translated as ‘that which can perceive’.

<sup>43</sup> *De Anima* 429a29-b5.

<sup>44</sup> For, as 417b17-19 makes plain as well, ‘what produces the activity of perceiving is invariably something external, whereas in the case of thinking it is somehow something in the soul’.

<sup>45</sup> Another possible solution to this problem is that Aristotle might have understood ‘affection’ as a physical process, and that the intellect is thus ‘unaffected’ because it does not experience physical influences, which is due to the fact that the intellect has no organ and is to be located somewhere in the soul. This might be material for additional research.

<sup>46</sup> *De Anima* 429a22-29.

εἰδῶν), speak well, except that is not the whole soul but only the part that can think (ἡ νοητική), and it is not actually but potentially the forms (οὔτε ἐντελεχεῖα ἀλλὰ δυνάμει τὰ εἴδη).’ Thinking must be unmixed, because thinking is capable of thinking all things potentially, without actually being those things. It must therefore be solely potential, if it is to think all things, and it is nothing actual until it thinks. If the intellect is not unmixed, it is not able to think all things. Aristotle’s view of the intellect as a pure potentiality is a direct consequence of his view that it must be able to think all things. But this makes the status of the intellect quite obscure. How is it possible to exist as a potentiality which is not one of any physical organ? And, furthermore, if the intellect is nothing actual before it thinks, what is its exact status as a mere potentiality in the first place? It is capable of thinking all things, but what is the intellect, then?

Ross comments on Aristotle’s use of the words τὰ εἴδη (forms) that Philoponus thinks this refers to Plato. Without quoting Philoponus directly or even giving the lines where he would have made such a claim, Ross says the evidence is very poor and that the phrase τόπος εἰδῶν does not occur in Plato.<sup>47</sup> Hamlyn says that these people who speak well “are probably Platonists and will fit in his view, as long what they say is reinterpreted in terms of his formula and applied to his view of the intellect.”<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3.3.3 Thinking is separable

Intellect is thus said to be unaffected, unmixed, merely potential, but also separable:

τὸ μὲν γὰρ αἰσθητικὸν οὐκ ἄνευ σώματος, ὁ δὲ **χωριστός**<sup>49</sup>.

for while the sensitive faculty needs a body, the intellect is separable.

This is also strange, because at the beginning of *De Anima* Γ.4 (429a10-12), Aristotle left the separability of mind open. In this sentence, however, he strongly contrasts that which can perceive with that which can think in terms of separability. But why must this be the case? We have seen that the

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<sup>47</sup> Ross (1961), p.292.

<sup>48</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p. 136.

<sup>49</sup> *De Anima* 429b4.

impassibility of the senses and the intellect differ in the way that that which produces the activity of perceiving is something external and a form of being affected, and that thinking is a form of being unaffected, and, as we will see in chapter two, it has to be something inside<sup>50</sup> the soul. Here, Aristotle seems to be saying that the sensitive faculty is connected to the body, but the intellect is not dependent of the body. At 429b9, intellect is said to be able to ‘think itself’ (καὶ αὐτὸς δὲ αὐτόν<sup>51</sup> τότε δύναται νοεῖν). Gerson comments on these lines that if the intellect were bodily in nature, it would not be able to think itself. The fact that the intellect is able to think itself, is in this way a guarantee for non-bodily status. The only way intellection can occur is if that which acquires the form is identical with that which is aware of its acquisition. The intellect is actually the same as the object that produces the thinking, so the intellect is able to think and also to think itself.<sup>52</sup> But how does this work, then? How can the intellect be separable if it does not have a physical organ, like the senses? What does ‘separable’, χωριστός, mean precisely? As we will see, *De Anima* Γ.5 is needed to answers these questions fully.

#### 1.3.3.4 More difficulties

In the above, I have discussed the analogy between perception and thinking by pointing to several characterisations of the intellect in *De Anima* Γ.4. Intellect is unaffected by the object of thought, unmixed, separable and it is able to think itself. What all these characterisations mean, is far from clear. Wedin, who distinguishes seven features of distinctive mind in *De Anima* Γ.4, reads the chapter as follows:<sup>53</sup>

1. Thinking is something like being affected (429a14-15)
2. One can think of what one wishes (429b7)

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. footnote 44.

<sup>51</sup> Ross (1961, p.292) reads δι’ αὐτοῦ, translating ‘he can then know at will’. His argumentation: “The MSS., Themistius, Philoponus (lemma), and Simplicius read δὲ αὐτόν, but there would be no point in a reference here to self-knowledge. Wedin (1988, p.167), however, rejects this popular transition, by pointing to this very thorough manuscript agreement for reading δὲ αὐτόν. I agree with Wedin and most of the manuscripts, reading δὲ αὐτόν.

<sup>52</sup> Gerson (2004), p.362.

<sup>53</sup> Wedin (1988), p.163-4.

3. Actual thinking is produced by the object of thought (429a13-14)
4. Mind is nothing actual until it thinks (429a24)
5. Mind is the same as its object (430a3-5)
6. Mind thinks itself (429b9)
7. Whenever one actually thinks (that is, when one's mind is the same as the object of thought), then the mind thinks itself

Wedin, just like Hamlyn, notes that the analogy between perceiving and thinking generates two alternatives: either thinking will turn out to be a certain 'being affected', or, as Aristotle says, 'something else of this kind'.<sup>54</sup> Wedin rightly says Aristotle wants the second alternative, but he does not point to this alternative being the opposite, namely *unaffected*. This makes the first feature of his orderly schematic of *De Anima* Γ.4 rather strange: 'thinking is something like being affected' equals 'unaffected'. Features 2 - 5 pose difficulties as well. The intellect is solely potential, and it is nothing actual until it thinks. At the same time, when the intellect thinks, it is the same as the object of thought, just as perception. We already asked how this is possible for the intellect without being a physical organ. When one can think of what one wishes, how is this tenable with non-existing objects? If one thinks about a seven-footed dog, one's intellect would have to be same as the object of thought. This activity is to be located somewhere in the soul, as opposed to sense-perception, which has its objects outside of our souls, but how does this work? Feature 5 is what Wedin calls the Sameness Thesis: "Mind's sole nature is that it is potentiality. This last thesis most likely means simply that mind's sole nature is the potentiality to be the same as any possible object of thought."<sup>55</sup> But as we have seen in 1.3.3.1, Aristotle seems to reduce the analogy of thinking to perceiving to a 'Similarity Thesis'. Features 6 and 7, finally, are rather mysterious as well. What does it mean when the intellect thinks itself?

At 429b22-28, two questions can be raised. 1) How will it (i.e. the intellect) think, if thinking is being affected in some way, while the intellect has just shown itself to be 'unmixed', which means it has nothing in common with things other than intellect? And 2) how can it think itself? Is intellect

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<sup>54</sup> *De Anima* 429a14.

<sup>55</sup> Wedin (1988), p. 163-4.



itself intelligible? At the very end of Γ.4, Aristotle concludes that we must consider the reason why it (i.e. the intellect) does not always think (430a8). Considering the structure of the argument in *De Anima* Γ.4 and Γ.5, Wedin, among others, suggests that the chapters Γ.4 and Γ.5 are closely connected. In his view, Γ.4 does not yet provide a description of how the mind really functions, and Γ.5 will answer the questions that were raised in Γ.4. Gerson also argues that chapter five “does not introduce a new topic or fit ill with what has gone before; rather, in Aristotle’s mind, it contains material necessary to answer the questions fully.”<sup>56</sup>

However, there are many commentators, among them Shields, who argue that after characterising the intellect in Γ.4, Aristotle does take a surprising turn. According to Shields, Aristotle surprises his readers enormously by introducing the notion of the ‘active intellect’, which is separate, unaffected and unmixed, and also deathless and everlasting, “because earlier in the work Aristotle had treated the mind (*nous*) as but one faculty (*dunamis*) of the soul (*psuchê*), and he had contended that the soul as a whole is *not* separable from the body (DA B 1, 413a3–5).”<sup>57</sup> Note that at the start of *De Anima* Γ.4, Aristotle left the question regarding separability open. As said, Caston goes even further and identifies the active intellect in chapter 5 with God. It may be clear that the ‘active intellect’ has been widely disputed from antiquity on, and before giving an overview of recent arguments both in favour of and against this ‘second intellect’ and its supposed identity with the unmoved mover, I provide a translation of *De Anima* Γ.5 at the beginning of chapter two.

## 1.4 Conclusion

The intellect is mentioned several times in *De Anima* before chapter Γ.5. It is implicitly contrasted with the composite soul – body, it is probably something rather godlike and unaffected. The definition of soul is given in the context of the distinction between actuality and potentiality: soul is the first actuality of a natural body which has life potentially. The intellect is to be understood as an actuality of a certain potentiality as well, but what this exactly is, is yet unclear. Thinking is, in short, analogous to perception in the sense that they are similarly related to their objects: That which is able to perceive / think, i.e. the sense-organs and the intellect respectively, are capable of perceiving their

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<sup>56</sup> Gerson (2004), p.360.

<sup>57</sup> Shields (2016) on Aristotle’s psychology.

objects. Imagination (φαντασία) produces images when there is no perception and this is applicable to thoughts, dreams and our mind. Moreover, imagination is always connected with our thinking: The intellect never thinks without an image. Furthermore, Aristotle probably sees the intellect as something unaffected by the object of thought, unmixed and separable, but these characterisations are far from clear. Perception is a form of being affected, whereas thinking is unaffected.

Until our mind thinks, it is nothing actual. The intellect is distinct from the body, because it is a mere potentiality and has no organ. In that way it differs from the senses, and it is this very point which makes the analogy problematic. For the faculty of sense-perception is not independent of the body, whereas the intellect is distinct. But where does it come from, then, and how does it function? Chapter Γ.4 does not give an exclusive answer to this question. Most of the commentators argue for a close connection between chapters Γ.4 and Γ.5, and I agree with them.

## Chapter 2: *De Anima* Γ.5

### 2.1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will deeply go into chapter Γ.5. First, I will give the Greek text (2.1.2), followed by my translation and a few words regarding textual issues (2.1.3). Then, I will discuss several difficulties at length, which discussion falls apart in mainly three sections: The question of the number of intellects (2.2), the analogy soul and nature (2.3) and separation and immortality (2.4). Doing so, I will interpret the Greek objectively and scrupulously, and, at the same time, criticize those who did not. Both philological and philosophical arguments will be discussed, with as much reference to the Greek as possible. It must be noted that this chapter contains difficulties which have been disputed since antiquity. Aristotle has left us with mysterious and perhaps insolvable questions. Sometimes, he tends to speak metaphorically to us, making it even harder to interpret him correctly. I would therefore be pretentious, if not extremely impious, to claim to solve it all. What I offer is just a contribution to this debate, by giving a critical analysis of the text, grammar and recent interpretations, resulting in a non-dualistic reading.

### 2.1.2 Working translation *De Anima* Γ.5 (430a10-a25)

Ἐπεὶ δ' ὥσπερ ἐν ἀπασῇ τῇ φύσει ἐστὶ τι τὸ μὲν ὕλη 10  
ἐκάστω γένει (τοῦτο δὲ ὃ πάντα δυνάμει ἐκεῖνα), ἕτερον δὲ  
τὸ αἴτιον καὶ ποιητικόν, τῷ ποιεῖν πάντα, οἷον ἡ τέχνη  
πρὸς τὴν ὕλην πέπονθεν, ἀνάγκη καὶ ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ ὑπάρχειν  
ταύτας τὰς διαφοράς· καὶ ἔστιν ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς τῷ πάντα  
γίνεσθαι, ὁ δὲ τῷ πάντα ποιεῖν, ὡς ἕξις τις, οἷον τὸ φῶς· 15  
τρόπον γάρ τινα καὶ τὸ φῶς ποιεῖ τὰ δυνάμει ὄντα χρώ-  
ματα ἐνεργεῖα χρώματα. καὶ οὗτος ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ  
ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀμιγής, τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὦν ἐνεργεῖα. αἰεὶ γὰρ τιμιώτε-  
ρον τὸ ποιοῦν τοῦ πάσχοντος καὶ ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς ὕλης. τὸ δ'  
αὐτὸ ἐστὶν ἢ κατ' ἐνέργειαν ἐπιστήμη τῷ πράγματι, ἢ δὲ 20  
κατὰ δύναμιν χρόνῳ προτέρα ἐν τῷ ἐνί, ὅλως δὲ οὐδὲ χρόνῳ,  
ἀλλ' οὐχ ὅτε μὲν νοεῖ, ὅτε δ' οὐ νοεῖ. χωρισθεὶς δ' ἐστὶ μόνον  
τοῦθ' ὅπερ ἐστὶ, καὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίδιον, (οὐ  
μνημονεύομεν δέ, ὅτι τοῦτο μὲν ἀπαθές, ὁ δὲ παθητικὸς  
νοῦς φθαρτός)· καὶ ἄνευ τούτου οὐθὲν νοεῖ. 25

Since just as in the whole of nature there is something on the one hand that is matter to each kind of thing (it is this which is all those things potentially), while on the other hand there is something which is their cause and is productive, by producing all things, like the way art stands in relation to its matter, so, too, must these differences be in the soul. And the intellect is on the one hand such by becoming all things, [15] and on the other hand by producing all things, as a sort of disposition, like light, for light too, in a way, makes that colours, which are potential, turn into actual colours. And this intellect is distinct / separate, unaffected and unmixed, being in its essence actual. For that which acts is always more honourable than that which is affected, and the first principle is (more honourable than) matter. [20] Actual knowledge is equal to its object, but potential knowledge is in the individual prior in time, but in general not prior in time, but it is not the case that it sometimes thinks, and then sometimes not, once separated it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and everlasting, (but we

do not remember, because this is unaffected, whereas the passive [25] intellect is perishable), and without this nothing thinks.

### 2.1.3 Brief comments on text and translation

430a10 - Ross brackets in the first line two words, ὥστερ and τι. I have chosen to maintain those words. ὥστερ in my opinion essentially marks the beginning of the analogy between soul and nature, as we will see in paragraph 2.3. τι needs to be retained because otherwise ἐστὶ would not have a specific subject, 'there is *something*'. The Loeb edition of *De Anima* rejects the omission of these words as well.

430a14-15 - 'And the intellect [sc. the passive] is such on the one hand by becoming all things, and [sc. the active] on the other hand by producing all things.' The particles ὁ μὲν ... ὁ δὲ are also discussed in paragraph 2.2.1, so I will not discuss them in detail here. My translation, however, already reveals something about the interpretation: no strong distinction between two separate intellects is meant here.

430a19-22 - Ross brackets these lines entirely. In his view, they seriously interfere with the course of thought. In addition to that, he argues, almost all the words in these lines recur in *De Anima* 431a1-3, and they must have been misplaced by an early editor. I will not exclude this last possibility, but I have chosen to maintain these lines as well. 'Actual knowledge is equal to its object' clearly reflects the "sameness thesis", which I discussed in chapter 1.3, and it is not misplaced here. The Loeb edition of *De Anima* also rejects the omission of these words.

430a23 - Caston reads this line, as he says himself, 'without punctuation': οὐ μνημονεύομεν δὲ ὅτι τοῦτο μὲν ἀπαθές, ὁ δὲ παθητικός; 'we do not remember that while this cannot be affected, the intellect that can be affected is perishable'.<sup>58</sup> First of all, he inconsistently does place a comma between ἀπαθές and ὁ, which renders his reading not 'without punctuation'. Second of all, Ross and the Loeb edition of *De Anima* do place a comma between δέ and ὅτι, which I believe is correct.

430a24-25 - In his 1961 edition of *De Anima*, Ross does not elaborate at all on this extremely vague last phrase, nor on the round brackets, which are retained in the Loeb edition. What is it that we do not remember? In *Aristotle* (1949), however, Ross offers four possible translations for the last four words.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Caston (1999), p.214.

<sup>59</sup> Ross (1949), p.149.

Without offering any reason for his choice, he approved of ‘and without the active reason, nothing knows’. The interpretation of νοεῖ is difficult. What is its subject? It surely cannot be οὐθέν, because that would imply that without the active intellect, *nothing* thinks. This would be strange, because apart from the passive intellect, nothing else could be expected to think at all. It seems highly likely that we must read the passive intellect as its (hidden) subject: ‘without this [i.e. the active intellect], it [i.e. the passive intellect] thinks nothing’.

## 2.2 Two intellects?

In this paragraph, I will discuss several (linguistic) views on the quantity of intellects in *De Anima* Γ.5. Is there one or two, or even more? And if there are two intellects, is the active intellect to be interpreted internally or externally, being possibly divine?

### 2.2.1 ὁ μὲν ... ὁ δέ (430a16-17)

Caston explains why in his view there should be two intellects in the first place. According to Caston, one of the most distinctive features of Aristotle’s psychology is his drive towards unification, and Aristotle is therefore anxious about the danger of dividing psychological ‘faculties’ to infinity. For Aristotle, the only real divisions are those that manifest themselves ‘taxonomically’, a term often used but not explained properly by Caston. In *De Anima* B.3, therefore, Aristotle divides the soul into nutritive, perceptual and noetic faculties. Later, Caston speaks of many different intellectual abilities, without ever marking a distinction in faculties, whereas in my opinion, as I said in chapter one, ‘abilities’ and ‘faculties’ both correspond to δυνάμεις, which literally translates ‘potentialities’. These abilities would, though distinguishable, not tell against their unity: Aristotle could always invoke the principle that they differ only ‘in being,’ while remaining ‘one and the same’. After all: ‘capacities of the soul are different in being, have different functions but share the same kind of unity’.<sup>60</sup> The reason why Aristotle is nevertheless referring to two distinct intellects is, according to Caston, simple. First there is the strong linguistic particle distinction in 430a14-15: ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος νοῦς ... ὁ δέ (bolds are mine), and then, at the end of *De Anima* Γ.5, the intellects are said to differ in an essential property: the first is perishable (φθαρτός, 430a25), the second is immortal and eternal (ἀθάνατον καὶ αἰδίον,

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<sup>60</sup> *De Anima* 431a12-14.

430a23). To quote Caston literally: “They cannot, therefore, be a single intellect – *one can exist in the absence of the other*. They must genuinely be two.”<sup>61</sup> It will become clear that these arguments are of great importance. Let us investigate the second claim by Caston, regarding the particles. The first one is discussed in chapter 2.4.3.

The particles mentioned are maintained by most editions of *De Anima*, as well as by Ross and the critical apparatus in his edition of the text makes no mention of other manuscript readings here. Therefore, they cannot be ignored. The philosophical implications of Caston’s interpretation of the particles, however, pose other difficulties. Denniston, in his almost encyclopaedic work on the Greek particles, defines particles in multiple ways, one of the definitions being ‘a mode of thought’. He states, concerning the normal use of  $\mu\epsilon\nu$ , of which  $\delta\epsilon$  is by far the commonest counterpart, “that the antithesis varies within wide limits.”<sup>62</sup> Denniston makes no mention of metaphysical distinctions put forth by the particles  $\mu\epsilon\nu \dots \delta\epsilon$ . Even though it is widely admitted that  $\mu\epsilon\nu \dots \delta\epsilon$  pose an antithesis, we must draw a line somewhere. Rijksbaron *et al.* (2000), for instance, refuse to go that far as well. On the contrary: “*Partikels hebben geen betekenis die verwijst naar ‘iets’ in de werkelijkheid, zoals concrete en abstracte inhoudswoorden als οἰκία ‘huis’ en σοφία ‘wijsheid’ (de referentiële betekenis). Partikels zijn functiewoorden, in die zin dat ze een rol spelen bij de opbouw van teksten, bij het aangeven van de houding ten opzichte van wat hij zegt, en bij het inspelen op (mogelijke) verwachtingen van de gesprekspartner.*”<sup>63</sup> Particles do not refer to anything in reality, nor beyond reality, and by nature they also do not intend to cross lines between different ‘levels’ of reality. They can make distinctions between different entities, especially in the combination with an article like  $\acute{o}$ , but they cannot, in my opinion, form the decisive argument for the existence of two separate intellects here. They are far too weak for such a thing. My translation, ‘the intellect is *on the one hand* ( $\mu\epsilon\nu$ ) such by becoming all things, and *on the other hand* ( $\delta\epsilon$ ) by producing all things’, is just as plausible. Particles can be characterized as the ‘traffic lights of the Greek language’, having merely a guiding function.<sup>64</sup> Caston, therefore, in my opinion goes too far by invoking the particles in his argument for two separate intellects.

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<sup>61</sup> Caston (1999), p.201-3.

<sup>62</sup> Denniston (1954), p. xxxvii-xxxlii; p.370-1.

<sup>63</sup> Rijksbaron *et al.* (2000), p.155.

<sup>64</sup> All credit for this expression is due to dr. Willeon Slenders, who uttered it in a lecture on Greek linguistics, somewhere in the course of my study.

Gerson, on the other hand, almost dedicated his entire article “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle’s *De Anima*” to prove Caston wrong on this point – and not only on this point. According to him, no second intellect is introduced here. In fact, it is possible to interpret the so-called ‘agent intellect’ and ‘passive intellect’, which has little to do with a dichotomy of intellects and which has everything to do with Aristotle’s analysis of human thinking, with emphasis on the unity of intellect. Following Wedin, who, as I pointed out above, stresses the continuity of chapters four and five as well, Gerson takes the beginning of the passage (430a10) ἐπεὶ δ’... to be a continuation of the train of thought of chapter four and not the introduction of an entirely new subject. He translates these first two words with ‘since just...’, which I believe is correct. Then, responding to Caston’s argument directly, he states that the contrast ὁ μὲν... ὁ δὲ, though frequently understood as undeniable proof that there are two intellects, is evidently meant to reflect the τὸ μὲν... ἕτερον δὲ contrast in lines 10-11.<sup>65</sup> This is a possibility, but it is by no means a certainty. Moreover, Gerson admits this argument does not exclude the possibility of the existence of two separate entities.

More convincingly, as Caston and others have noticed, the word νοῦς is used in *De Anima* both for the substance and for the activity. Thus, Aristotle can speak of ‘practical intellect’ (πρακτικὸς νοῦς<sup>66</sup>) as well as ‘theoretical intellect’ (θεωρητικὸς νοῦς<sup>67</sup>) using this word, both pointing to different ways this intellect, which is one in kind, can function.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, he can speak about soul as ‘nutritive’ (θρεπτική), ‘generative’ (γεννητική) ‘thinking’ (νοητική) and ‘generative thinking’ (διανοητική).<sup>69</sup> The distinction of the two principles, that is, the two aspects of the intellect, no more indicates two intellects than does the distinction between practical and theoretical intellect and no more than the distinction among psychic functions indicates multiple souls<sup>70</sup>, according to Gerson. Therefore, postulating a second intellect does not solve any of our problems. Gerson gives this claim even more weight by pointing to the fact that Aristotle has said in Γ.4, and will say many more times in the rest

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<sup>65</sup> Gerson (2004), p.362; Gerson does not, unfortunately, go deeply into the nature of the particles

<sup>66</sup> *De Anima* 433a16.

<sup>67</sup> *De Anima* 415a11-12.

<sup>68</sup> Gerson (2004), p.364 elaborates on this matter: “Practical intellect is equivalent to the type of ὑπόληψις that is φρόνησις and theoretical intellect is equivalent to the type of ὑπόληψις that is ἐπιστήμη. In both cases, ‘intellect’ refers to that ‘owing to which’ the soul engages in a type of thinking. Cf. Γ.4, 429a23.”

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *De Anima* 416b25; 429a28; 431a14; 434a22.

<sup>70</sup> Gerson (2004), p.364.



of chapter three, that thinking must be identical with what is thought. The ‘active intellect’ might be obscure, but regarding it as a second intellect does not help our situation. Scholars may be tempted because of the difficulties to excise chapter five altogether, but according to Gerson, we have already seen that a continuation of the questions raised in  $\Gamma.4$  is needed. Contra Caston, who stated that ‘they genuinely must be two’, Gerson rightly claims that it is “the duality of a single intellect that is at issue.”<sup>71</sup>

It is noteworthy that neither Hamlyn<sup>72</sup> (1968) nor Wedin<sup>73</sup> (1988), two gratefully consulted commentators, speak about the number of intellects in *De Anima* with a critical eye on the Greek. Caston and Gerson seem to be the only two authors who took the necessary effort to base their arguments on the text itself and to use the particles in their argumentation.

Philoponus, a fifth century Christian philosopher and commentator, even says in his extended commentary *In Aristotelis De Anima* that Aristotelian intellect is threefold. Commenting<sup>74</sup> on the first lines of *De Anima*  $\Gamma.4$ , he declares ‘**Triplicem** autem intellectum ait esse Aristoteles’, distinguishing between intellect in potentiality, which is present in children, ‘dispositional’ intellect, which is present in people who know but who are not using their knowledge, and intellect in actuality having its operations already on display. Furthermore, there is another contemplative intellect distinct from these, in which there is no potentiality in respect of anything, but which is actuality without potentiality.<sup>75</sup> It is possible that Philoponus had another text of *De Anima* at his disposal, but it may be

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<sup>71</sup> Gerson (2004), p.363; Gerson also refers to a striking quote of De Corte (1934): ‘...l’intellect agent et l’intellect possible forment deux entités réellement distinctes en tant qu’ils sont agent et patient, c’est-à-dire en tant que facultés, mais ils sont intelligence. L’intellect agent n’est pas intellect, l’intellect possible n’est pas l’intellect, mais intellect agent et intellect possible sont l’intellect’.

<sup>72</sup> Hamlyn’s commentary (1968), p.77-156, is predominantly philosophical. He does invoke the Greek once and a while, but not regarding the question of the number of intellects.

<sup>73</sup> Wedin’s chapter “Thought and the language of divinity”, though very useful, lacks such an analysis as well.

<sup>74</sup> Philoponus wrote in Greek, but the original comments on the chapters concerning the intellect are disputed. Wildberg (2016) rightly questions the authenticity of the commentary’s third book, because a Latin version attributed to Philoponus differs extensively from the text transmitted in Greek. Verbeke goes even further: ‘L’original grec du *De Intellectu* a disparu, on le sait; mais un ensemble de citations en ont été recouvrées récemment’. Given the controversy of the text, I quote from the Latin translation. This specific line, however, cannot be traced back to the Greek text.

<sup>75</sup> Philoponus, *In Aristotelis De Anima Libros Commentaria* 4,55-9.

clear that a trinity of intellects is not what Aristotle must have meant. In addition to this, Philoponus may have had, like many modern scholars have as well, his own agenda commenting on *De Anima*. An explanation for his statement that Aristotelian intellect is threefold, may be due to the fact that in Christianity three is an important number, given the traditional Christian doctrine that the one God exists in three equally divine entities, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How divine Aristotelian intellect really is, we will see in the following.

### 2.2.2 ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ (430a15)

Let us proceed with the assumption that in the human soul, there is an intellect which is on the one hand (μὲν) active and on the other hand (δέ) passive. Now, we can take examine the active intellect and its exact *place*. What does ‘in the human soul’<sup>76</sup> mean? Ross, who edited and published the text of *De Anima*, notes in his commentary that the distinction between the active and the passive reason falls **within the soul** (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ can hardly mean ‘in the case of the soul’), which is fatal to any interpretation which identifies the active reason with a divine reason falling entirely outside the individual human being.<sup>77</sup> Ross is, with Gerson (and me), against a two-substance doctrine. According to him, soul and body are not two substances, but inseparable elements of one substance. He also says that “the one reason is analogous to matter by becoming all things, the other is analogous to the efficient cause by making all things, in the manner of a positive state of light”<sup>78</sup>, a vision I completely agree with, but Ross fails to comment linguistically on the question of two intellects.

Rist (1966), another author, sides with Ross in this matter. After having clearly stated that ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ<sup>79</sup>, just like Ross, means ‘inside the individual soul’, rejecting the ancient and medieval interpretations, Rist argues that in each individual soul there is an active and a passive intellect: “If we are to put any weight at all upon Aristotle’s comparison of the Active and Passive Intellects to Art and its material, we must say that it is not Active Intellect, but a **particular** Active Intellect, that is, the

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. footnote 19.

<sup>77</sup> Ross (1961), p.304.

<sup>78</sup> Ross (1961), p.304; *De Anima* 430a13.

<sup>79</sup> On this matter, Gerson says, unfortunately only in a mere footnote, that Caston, though correct in pointing out “that ‘in’ (ἐν) has many different senses in Aristotle’s corpus, fails to see that chapter five is right in the middle of the section of *De Anima* that discusses thinking in the human soul and it would be extremely odd if Aristotle were here introducing divine thinking.”

element in the soul which “makes all things”.<sup>80</sup> As we will see in 2.3, Rist will corroborate his claims with much reference to the Greek, but on the matter of two intellects, he unfortunately does not. In addition to Ross’ and Rists’ interpretation, whatever meaning ‘ἐν’ may bear, there is no dictionary that will give the opposite translation, like *beyond*, which would imply transcendency. ‘In the soul’ could, in this interpretation, also be an ontological limit.

The discussion of the number of intellects in *De Anima* Γ.5 can be characterized by one word: Disunity. The thoughts of both recent commentators and an ancient author are widely divergent. The nature of their arguments differ as well. Some authors argue more philosophically, others more philologically. On the other hand, it has become clear that these two disciplines cannot be set apart so easily.

On this particular question I will side with Gerson, who stated that, to cite him once again, “the duality of a single intellect is at issue”. Passive and active intellect are evidently different, but their combination, which is to be located in the soul, is one.

### **2.3 Analogy soul and nature (430a10-17)**

Let us take a closer look into the first seven lines of *De Anima* Γ.5. This analogy<sup>81</sup>, ‘just as in all of nature... so too in the soul’, is also important to Caston’s interpretation. According to him, everything in *De Anima* Γ.5 hinges on the analogy between nature and soul. Besides, Caston criticises Ross bracketing the initial ὥστερ, which marks the beginning of the analogy. Aristotle argues, in Caston’s formulation, that “because certain natural kinds exhibit differences of specific kinds, rational souls must show these differences as well.”<sup>82</sup> His argument, which is very technical, comes down to the following: “‘In the whole of nature’ and ‘in the soul’ serve as restrictions on the relevant kinds or types: the opening generalization concerns all *natural* kinds, the conclusion *psychological* kinds, kinds which can be said to be in nature or in the soul in the exact same sense as a species can be said to be in a genus. Aristotle’s argument is therefore a taxonomical one, establishing a difference between

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<sup>80</sup> Rist (1966), p.8.

<sup>81</sup> *De Anima* 430a10-17.

<sup>82</sup> Caston (1999), p.205.

psychological kinds, and not parts within an individual soul. The so-called “agent intellect” belongs to one type of soul and the “patient intellect” to another. To speak of two intellects is to draw a distinction between *two kinds* of mind.”<sup>83</sup> First of all, Caston does not elaborate on what he means exactly with ‘kind’. Secondly, he does not philologically explain how he has come to such an analysis, which is very unclear.

As we have seen in 1.5, Caston is clear about his answer to the question of two intellects, invoking the Greek several times. Regarding this analogy, however, Caston is led to this argument without making much reference to the Greek, except for the brief comment on Ross’ bracketing. Besides, in my opinion, he loses himself and his argument<sup>84</sup> in vague technical terms which he inadequately explains.

Then, how should we read the analogy between soul and nature? I think it has much more to do with form and matter than with ‘different psychological kinds’. Just like in nature, where matter and form occur, so too in the soul, there must be such a difference. As we have seen in chapter one, natural beings are composites of form and matter, and consequently, soul stands to the body as form to matter. Subsequently, the active intellect has the function of bringing potential knowing, which is present in the passive intellect, into actuality, just as art transforms the block of marble into statue, just as light in a way realises potential colours into actual colours,<sup>85</sup> and finally, just as an efficient cause shapes matter into a certain form. The active intellect, which is the efficient cause in this matter, transforms the νοῦς παθητικός into a νοῦς νοῶν.

In order to clarify this, we will have to make a brief excursion to the *Physics*, where Aristotle formulates his theory of causes. According to Aristotle, the essential fact about the physical world is movement. ‘Nature’ is what contains the principle of its own movement and rest. All moving things, then, susceptible of change, seem to strive ‘naturally’ to some goal. It is for this reason that Aristotle’s philosophy is so often labelled teleological. In *Physics* B.3, movement is described by four ἀρχαί or

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<sup>83</sup> Caston (1999), p.206.

<sup>84</sup> Moreover, exploring his earlier claim that the intellect belongs to theology rather than psychology, Caston argues that if the intellect belongs to the study of nature, so too must everything that can be thought. But the intellect is capable of thinking *all* things (cf. *De Anima* iii.4 429a18), including mathematical entities and even God himself; yet such things do not belong to the study of nature, but mathematics and theology. The intellect, therefore, must fall outside the boundaries of physics as well. It may be clear that I do not support this vision.

<sup>85</sup> *De Anima* 430a16-7.

‘causes’, which in general apply to all things that require an explanation, including human action: The material cause (the bronze of a statue, ‘matter’, ‘that out of which’), the formal cause (the shape of the statue, ‘form’, ‘the account of what it is to be’), the efficient cause (the art of the bronze-casting statue, ‘the primary source of movement’) and the final cause (that for the sake of which the statue is made, ‘the end’).<sup>86</sup>

In *De Anima* B.4,<sup>87</sup> Aristotle speaks about the soul in terms of these four causes. Three of the causes are mentioned here: The efficient, the final and the formal. The fourth, the material, is not mentioned as it is not relevant to the soul as the form of the body. The soul is the formal cause in the sense that it is the actualisation of the body which is potentially living. It is the cause in the sense of the ‘essence’ of ensouled bodies. It is also the final cause; the purpose for which natural or living bodies<sup>88</sup> function, nature being throughout teleological. It must be said, again, that Aristotle is vague on this point. He literally says that the soul is ‘also the for the sake of which’ (καὶ οὗ ἕνεκα<sup>89</sup>). Hamlyn comments on these lines that it is “presumably meant that the eye, for example, functions in order that there may be perception, i.e. the end is the functioning of the organ, and so the functioning of a living body is the end for which it exists, and for which nature uses it.”<sup>90</sup> The soul is also the beginning of movement<sup>91</sup>, i.e. the efficient cause, in the sense that it is due to it that living things move when they do, or at least change, grow and decay. What this passage makes clear is that the strict demarcations in the four causes made in the *Physics* do not seem to apply to the soul. The soul is interpreted as the final, efficient and the formal cause.

Let us now move back to the intellect. When talking about nature, efficient causes are often human beings. But when talking about souls, the efficient cause is inside the soul. νοῦς, not being an unmoved mover, is in some such way an efficient cause: It is the active intellect. If we look further, the active intellect is analogous to another cause as well. In the *Physics*, Aristotle also distinguishes natural beings from artefacts: The former have internal efficient causes, the latter external. Natural

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<sup>86</sup> Shields (2016), on Aristotle’s causality.

<sup>87</sup> *De Anima* 415b8-27.

<sup>88</sup> This applies to *all* living things, not only human beings!

<sup>89</sup> *De Anima* 415b15.

<sup>90</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p.96.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. *De Anima* 415b11, 415b21-3.

beings are able to initiate change themselves. The efficient cause must therefore be understood not only as that from which the change originates (it is ‘the beginning of movement’), but also as ‘that which moves’ and that which produces the activity or, in the case of thoughts, the actual thoughts. The efficient cause is then capable of actualising the potentiality of the matter to have a certain form because it already itself has that form. In this way, having the efficient cause within oneself also points to having the formal cause within oneself.<sup>92</sup> This is also the case regarding the active intellect. It functions ‘by making all things’, being an efficient cause, and it is analogous to form, being ‘actual thoughts’. By making all things, therefore, the active intellect ‘needs some material to work on’, in a manner of speaking. This ‘material’, i.e. the material cause, is the passive intellect, being potential thoughts. The passive intellect, then, can be seen as an ‘empty’ intellect, which is merely capable of receiving thoughts, being analogous to the material cause, and the active intellect, being analogous to both the efficient cause and the formal cause, makes the potential thoughts in the passive intellect actual.<sup>93</sup>

In the above, I applied the Theory of the four Causes to *De Anima*. Admittedly, this is speculative. The fact that Aristotle mentions the causes in *De Anima* B and interprets the soul in terms of this theory, makes the analogies more plausible. After all, Aristotle held the soul to be analogous to nature, and Aristotle understands nature as movement, which is to be explained with the four causes. Following Rist, we can connect this view with the fact that the object of thought has to be identical with that which is able to think, just as in nature any object of perception is identical with that which perceives, as we have seen in 1.3: “Active intellect is the power<sup>94</sup> which enables the passive intellect to become a νοῦς νοῶν by being made identical with the intelligible forms of the objects of thought.”<sup>95</sup>

## 2.4 Separation and immortality (430a17-25)

Let us now take a closer look at the second section of *De Anima* Γ.5. In line 17, Aristotle describes the active intellect as separate, unaffected and unmixed (ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀμικτός),

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<sup>92</sup> Johansen (2012) p.128-9. Cf. *Physics* 257b6-10.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. 2.2.2 and Ross (1961), p.304.

<sup>94</sup> The efficient cause.

<sup>95</sup> Rist (1966), p.12.

whereas in line 22 he speaks of the intellect as separated (χωρισθείς). Moreover, Aristotle labelled the active intellect ‘immortal and everlasting’ (ἀθάνατον καὶ ἄϊδιον<sup>96</sup>), and the passive intellect ‘perishable’ (φθαρτός<sup>97</sup>), which formed Caston’s second argument in favour of his thesis that there are two distinct intellects. It will become clear that, again, a critical eye on the grammar is needed to interpret this section correctly.

#### 2.4.1 χωριστός

Following Zeller, Hicks, in his renowned 1906 edition of *De Anima*, remarks that “χωριστός means here not merely ‘separable’ but ‘actually separate’, i.e. not involved in physical life.”<sup>98</sup> An important argument for this claim is the following: The three predicates χωριστός καὶ ἀπαθής καὶ ἀμυγής were applied to νοῦς in Γ.4 before any mention had been made of the distinction between active and passive intellect. Hicks believes that in chapter four these epithets are applied primarily to the Passive Intellect and that they must now, in chapter five, be applied a fortiori to the Active. As I said in 1.3, in *De Anima* Γ.4,<sup>99</sup> χωριστός must mean ‘actually separate’, separate, that is, from the body-soul complex. How does this help us with our χωριστός in *De Anima* Γ.5?

It is clear that in *De Anima* Γ.5, Aristotle is not only thinking of the relation of the active intellect to the body, but to the passive intellect as well. Recall lines 17-18: For that which acts (τὸ ποιοῦν, active) is always more honourable than that which is affected (τοῦ πάσχοντος, passive), and the first principle is also more honourable than matter. Active is superior to passive, in short. Consequently, the predicates χωριστός καὶ ἀπαθής καὶ ἀμυγής are explained by a reference to the superiority of the active intellect to the passive intellect. The passive intellect is not ἀπαθής, but, as its very name in line 25 shows, παθητικός: It is receptive of the forms of the objects of its thought. As Rist argues, Aristotle explains this in chapters four and five. He also rightly points to the analogy with matter. The active intellect, i.e. ‘form’, is also more honourable than the passive intellect, i.e. ‘matter’: “Thus when Aristotle says that the Active Intellect is χωριστός and ἀπαθής we must conclude that these words refer not only to separation from the body, as in chapter four, but to the separation of

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<sup>96</sup> *De Anima* 430a23.

<sup>97</sup> *De Anima* 430a25.

<sup>98</sup> Rist (1966), p.12-13.

<sup>99</sup> *De Anima* 429a11.

the Active Intellect from the Passive Intellect also. The word χωριστὸς then must mean here that the Active Intellect is either “separable” or “actually separate” from the Passive.”<sup>100</sup>

#### 2.4.2 χωρισθείς

Most recent writers on this subject have assumed that χωρισθείς in ll. 22-23 refers to the active intellect which Aristotle proclaims to be immortal. As we have seen, χωριστὸς must be translated either with ‘separable’ or ‘actually separate’. However, the active intellect cannot always be separate from the passive intellect. If this were possible, the use of the aorist participle χωρισθείς would be absurd.<sup>101</sup> By translating the passive aorist participle χωρισθείς as ‘once separated’, I have tried to convey the temporal force of the passive aorist participle. However, the Greek language also makes extensive use of aspect distinctions to qualify the type (rather than the time or temporality) of the action. Caston emphasises the aspectual force of the aorist here, translating “When it occurs separately (χωρισθείς), it is solely that which it (essentially) is (μόνον τοῦθ’ ὅπερ ἐστὶ) and this alone is immortal and eternal.” Arguing for a transcendentalist reading, he interprets Aristotle’s concern here not as with events at a given moment in time, but with the intellect which, when it occurs separately, “constitutes a species of soul that is nothing but its essence and that this alone is “immortal and eternal” (...) It follows that this intellect is *nothing but activity* – it is something that lacks all potentiality. This is also a description Aristotle applies to God, who is just intellect.”<sup>102</sup> Caston refers in his argument to Kühner & Gerth (1898), who, in their extensive grammar, elaborate on *Partizip der Zeitformen*. The word ‘aspect’ is notoriously absent in this entire section, but this may be due to the fact that the grammatical notion of ‘aspect’ was quite new in the time of Kühner & Gerth. Therefore, we will also have to consult more recent grammatical treatises.

Let us first take a careful look at the German grammarians. “*Der Infinitiv und das Partizip, welche nie einen selbstständigen Satz bilden, sondern nur abhängige Teile eines Satzes sind, bezeichnen ebenfalls nicht die Zeitstufe, sondern nur die Beschaffenheit des durch sie ausgedrückten Verbalbegriffes; die Zeitstufe selbst aber, in die sie fallen, wird durch die Zeitform des übergeordneten Verbums ausgedrückt.*”<sup>103</sup> If we were to

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<sup>100</sup> Rist (1966), p.13-14.

<sup>101</sup> *Metaphysics*. Γ.7, 1072b26-30; Cf. Ross (1961), p.14

<sup>102</sup> Caston (1999), p.209-11.

<sup>103</sup> Kühner & Gerth (1898), Bd. 1, §398.3-6.



follow Caston in this, χωρισθείς, if it is to lose its temporal meaning, must never be in a main clause, but in a dependent clause (*abhängig Teil eines Satzes*). Only then the *Beschaffenheit* would prevail over the *Zeitstufe* here. However, if we look at the text, χωρισθείς may stand syntactically apart from the rest of the sentence, but semantically it does not, and this is precisely why the temporal meaning is more important here. Consider the situation what would be if the active intellect is in fact separated. The Greek tells us, as Ross indicates, “that after separation from the passive reason, at death, the active reason is just its true self.”<sup>104</sup> ‘After separation’ is one possible translation of the aorist participle χωρισθείς, with emphasis on the tempus. ‘Having been separated’ is a similar translation, maintaining the temporal translation of the aorist.

Moreover, in the more recent *The Syntax and Semantics of the Verb in Classical Greek* (1984), Rijksbaron argues for interpreting semantic value of the aorist stem correctly. He begins his chapter ‘Introduction to the moods and tenses’ by providing the semantic value of the tense stems. The aorist stem, e.g. βουλεύσασθαι, signifies that the verbal action is completed at a point in time given in context or situation. After having distinguished all the stems, he briefly mentions in a note that in Greek linguistics, the terms ‘tense stem’ and ‘aspect stem’ are in general use. He chooses, however, to use the term ‘tense stem’ in the rest of his grammatical discourse, because he considers it more important to establish the order of events and, if I’m not misreading him, closer to the semantic value of the aorist stem than ‘the speaker’s view of the action’.<sup>105</sup> The fact that Aristotle is able to say ‘having been separated’, or ‘once separated’, implies that he acknowledges the possibility of a time when the active intellect is *not* separated. According to Rist, who, as said in 2.2.2, rejects Alexander of Aphrodisias and Averroës, the active intellect, therefore, cannot be wholly transcendent. Because if they are completely separate, i.e. ‘when they do occur separately’, the active intellect would fall outside the boundaries of the human soul and I do not support that interpretation. This is only

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<sup>104</sup> Ross (1961), p.49.

<sup>105</sup> Rijksbaron (1984), p.2-3: “On the other hand, it is often stated that Greek had no proper means to express relative time and that the stems are really *aspect stems*, aspect being defined as ‘the speaker’s view to the action’. Thus the speaker would be free to choose between, for instance, a present stem form and an aorist stem form, a choice simply depending on whether he would view the action as ‘not-completed’ or ‘completed’. In general, this opinion is untenable. For one thing, an important function of, for instance, the imperfect and aorist indicative in temporal clauses is neglected: they serve to establish the order of events, a function especially significant in historical narrative.”

theoretically possible. As Rist concludes: “Since then there is a time when the Active Intellect is not separated but linked in some way to the Passive, as efficient cause to matter, and since, however, separation *does* occur at death, then during a man’s lifetime his Active Intellect must not be separated but *separable* (these italics are mine).”<sup>106</sup> Therefore, I would like to suggest to translate χωριστὸς in line 17 as ‘separable’ and χωρισθείς in line 22 as ‘once separated’, aiming to do justice to the Greek as much as possible, and, at the same time, offering my non-transcendentalist reading of *De Anima* Γ.5.

### 2.4.3 οὐ μνημονεύομεν δέ (430a23-25)

In the previous paragraph, I argued for translating lines 22-23 as ‘*once separated* it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and everlasting’. Aristotle is quite clear: The active intellect, once separated, is immortal. During our lifetime, it is ‘in our soul’, as we have seen in 2.2.2, but once it has been separated, which most probably means when death has occurred, it is just what it is, and this is incapable of death. The passive intellect is, on the other hand, affected, and perishable. When it perishes, the power of memory must perish with it. We do not remember, because ‘we’ do not survive death; our active intellect, which does seem to survive, is unaffected and thus has no memory, because if it were to have memory, it would be affected.<sup>107</sup> Both Hamlyn<sup>108</sup> and Ross<sup>109</sup> argue that Aristotle is parenthetically trying to explain why we forget things in the first place, although there is an active intellect which always thinks and which, therefore, always knows things. The translation of the last three lines is then: ‘And this alone (sc. the active intellect) is immortal and everlasting (but we do not remember (after death, i.e. our life on earth), because the active reason is unaffected, whereas the passive intellect is perishable (i.e. affected)); and without the active intellect, the passive intellect thinks nothing’.

These lines are by all means worrying. How can Aristotle seem to be upholding that some part of soul can exist separately after death, given the fact that he strongly emphasizes the unity of the body-soul complex? Even if by ‘we’ in ‘we do not remember’ is in fact meant we human beings, and

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<sup>106</sup> Rist (1966), p.14.

<sup>107</sup> Rist (1966), p.15.

<sup>108</sup> Hamlyn (1968), p.149.

<sup>109</sup> Ross (1966), p.48.

not the intellect, the Greek is unambiguous: ‘This is immortal and eternal’.<sup>110</sup> Rist offers an interesting option. The active intellect, which is devoid of memory, thinks continually and cannot know the external world, must be thinking of itself. In this respect, it would be comparable with the unmoved mover who always thinks himself. This way, we can learn how an identification of the active intellect with God might have seemed plausible.<sup>111</sup> After all, it formed Caston’s second major argument for his transcendentalist reading. This sounds credible, but in my opinion it does not solve the difficulty of these lines with respect to Aristotelian psychology: For Aristotle, the human soul is the form of the material human body, and form and matter cannot exist separately. Perhaps, Aristotle does not mean ‘immortal’ in the sense that the active intellect is metaphysically separate from our body and lives on after the body decays, but in a more metaphorical way, as a value of judgement, just like he argued that the intellect is ‘probably something rather godlike’. It would not be the first time that Aristotle uses very ambiguous, vague language. We may be forced to leave this question unanswered, and maybe even unanswerable. Either way, we will return to this question in chapter three.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In the above, I analysed in broad outline the difficulties of *De Anima* Γ.5. Merely a few of the commentaries and secondary literature I consulted took the necessary effort to base their arguments on the Greek text itself. This concerns not only for the question of separation, but also for the rest of *De Anima* Γ.5. For this reason, it was not always easy to interpret this chapter philologically, especially because Aristotle’s language is frequently arduous. In addition to this, commentators seem to have been tempted to read the Greek in a premeditated way: The interpretation they wanted to convey, was already formed before thorough reading of the text had occurred. Unfortunately, this sometimes led to a rather shallow account of Aristotle’s treatise on the intellect. Therefore, I have tried to read the Greek with due diligence, with both respect to the grammar as well as to the philosophical implications.

In the human soul, there is a duality of a single intellect. Our intellect, which is one in kind, is divided in a passive and active intellect. The particles μὲν and δέ can easily be read as ‘the intellect on

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<sup>110</sup> *De Anima* 430a23.

<sup>111</sup> Rist (1966), p.15-6.

*the one hand... the intellect on the other hand*'. The argument for two separate intellects on the basis of the particles cannot hold, because the particles can also be understood as pointing to two different aspects of one intellect. "ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ" is to be read as 'in the soul'. The philological arguments in favour of this were scarce, but the duality of a single intellect does not necessarily need to be interpreted externally.

Thereupon, a brief look at Aristotle's theory of causes was needed for an attempt to understand the analogy of nature and soul correctly. Just as there are differences in nature between form and matter, so too must these differences be in the soul. Soul stands to the body as form to matter, as we can see in Aristotle's definition of soul, given in *De Anima*: It is the actuality of the body which is potentially living. This way, the soul can be seen as a formal cause. The soul has been shown to be the efficient cause and the final cause as well. The active intellect, which is according to *De Anima* Γ.5 analogous to form and thus the formal cause, is responsible for making the possible thoughts actual thoughts. It is therefore also, by extension, the efficient cause, which *forms* the matter of the passive intellect. The passive intellect, νοῦς παθητικός, undergoes this activity of the active intellect, νοῦς ποιοῦν, and is analogous to matter and the material cause. Therefore, following *De Anima* and some of the exegetes who also support this reading, the mind is the possibility to think all things.

Moreover, the active intellect is separable from the passive mind, but not entirely separate during one's lifetime. As I have hoped to show with sufficient reference to the Greek, χωριστός is best translated as 'separable' and χωρισθείς as 'once separated', giving preference to the temporality of the aorist. The interpretation of the verb χωρίζω turned out to be crucial to the argument. In addition to this, if Aristotle would be introducing in this short chapter of *De Anima* something as grand as divine thinking or the unmoved mover, he would make explicit mention of it, instead of implicit subtle speculation by playing with the verb χωρίζω. Both are absent.

The very last three lines of *De Anima* Γ.5 are very difficult to understand. Aristotle explicitly states the active intellect is immortal, whereas the passive intellect is perishable. When we die, the passive intellect would die with us, but the active intellect lives on. Our ability of memorizing dies with us, along with the passive intellect, but the active intellect, once separated after death, is just what it is and this alone is deathless and everlasting. I carefully put forward the suggestion that Aristotle may have been speaking to us metaphorically here, not literally ascribing immortal status

to the active intellect. The Greek, however, makes this reading not very likely. It may be because of this statement which led commentators to the identification of the active intellect with the unmoved mover of *Metaphysics*. We will return to this question in the next chapter.

## Chapter 3: Human thinking and the intellect in *Metaphysics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*

### 3.1 Introduction

As we have seen in the two previous chapters, the human intellect plays an important role in Aristotle's *De Anima*. In chapter Γ.5, Aristotle seems to be saying that the active intellect, which is incapable of death and everlasting, is immortal and lives on after death. He does not elaborate on this puzzling idea in *De Anima*. Although, as I have hoped to show, a non-transcendentalist reading is possible philologically as well as philosophically, and the fact alone that *De Anima* Γ.5 is far from unequivocal should be reason enough to widen the search for answers on the question of the alleged divinity of mind, and to look further than the boundaries of *De Anima*. In several other works, like *Metaphysics*, *Nicomachean Ethics* but also *De Generatione*, Aristotle speaks about the capacity of our intellect and how we should rate it. Several commentators have used these works in addition to *De Anima* to come to a full understanding of the rather mysterious active and passive intellect. Caston<sup>112</sup> explicitly quotes from famous passages of *Metaphysics* to make his point. His views and the respective Greek texts will be dealt with at length here. The famous notion of the 'unmoved mover' will, receive attention as well. His thinking exceeds human thinking in an astonishing fashion. The role of the intellect in virtue, one of the central themes in Aristotle's moral philosophy, is also passed in review. How should we see our thinking in everyday life? How does it contribute to happiness? And, most excitingly, is our intellect really *divine*, and if not, how much divinity can be foisted upon it? What does it mean to be divine, or to have something of the divine? It will become clear that the answers given to these questions in the last book of *Nicomachean Ethics* are close to my final interpretation of the human intellect and its status towards the divine.

The Greek from *Metaphysics* is again extracted from Ross' edition published by Oxford University Press (vol. II, 1966) and for *Nicomachean Ethics* I used Hupperts & Poortman (2005), who based their edition on Susemihl-Apelt (1912, vol.3). The numbering is Bekker's. When the discussion requires it, I will also refer to the Loeb edition. Translations are all mine.

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<sup>112</sup> Caston (1999), p.211-2

### 3.2 Divinity in *Metaphysics*

In this paragraph, I will firstly explain how Aristotle treats the subject of *Metaphysics* as divine. Secondly, I will briefly go into the notion of the unmoved mover, by giving its definition, its nature and its activity. This is relevant for the subsequent chapter, which will more deeply discuss the divine intellect and the similarities it bears to the active intellect of *De Anima* Γ.5.

#### 3.2.1 The most divine science

In the very first book of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle frankly points out what he takes his subject matter to be. All men naturally desire knowledge, and it is generally assumed that what is called wisdom (σοφία) is concerned with the primary causes (αἰτίαι) and principles (ἀρχαί). These causes and principles<sup>113</sup> are clearly the subject matter of what Aristotle calls ‘first philosophy’, but that does not mean that the branch of philosophy is to be studied first. He describes his subject in a variety of ways: First philosophy, the study of being qua being, wisdom, or, as we shall see, theology. However, the terms which are investigated in *Metaphysics* must fall under the same science, which speculate about first principles and causes. Wisdom is, then, knowledge of these certain principles and causes. This science is not productive, but highly speculative, because it is the only independent science, ‘since it alone exists for the sake of itself’ (μόνη γὰρ αὕτη αὐτῆς ἔνεκεν ἔστιν<sup>114</sup>). It does also, despite poets’ stories, fit human beings, and most importantly, it is most honourable because it is most divine:

ἡ γὰρ **θειοτάτη** καὶ τιμιωτάτη. τοιαύτη δὲ διχῶς ἂν εἴη μόνη· ἢν τε γὰρ μάλιστ’ ἂν ὁ θεὸς ἔχοι, θεία τῶν ἐπιστημῶν ἐστί, καὶ εἴ τις τῶν θείων εἴη. μόνη δ’ αὕτη τούτων ἀμφοτέρων τετύχηκεν· ὅ τε γὰρ θεὸς δοκεῖ τῶν αἰτίων πᾶσιν εἶναι καὶ ἀρχή τις, καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην ἢ μόνος ἢ μάλιστ’ ἂν ἔχοι ὁ θεός, ἀναγκαιότεραι μὲν οὖν πᾶσαι ταύτης, ἀμείνων δ’ οὐδεμία.<sup>115</sup>

For the **most divine** science is also the most honourable. Now there are two ways only in which this [science] can be [divine]: If it is pre-eminently in the possession of God, being the divine [science] amongst the sciences, or if it is concerned with divine matters. This science alone happens to be [divine]

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. 2.3, where I briefly discussed Aristotle’s theory of causes.

<sup>114</sup> *Metaphysics* A 982b28.

<sup>115</sup> *Metaphysics* A, 982a6-11.

in both ways: For God is held to be among all of the causes and a principle, and such [a science] either God alone or God above all would possess. Accordingly, all other sciences may be more necessary than this, but no science is better.

The science of first principles and causes exists for the sake of itself, is above all in the possession of God and studies the divine objects. That is the reason why is it the most divine science. In book E, Aristotle adds another description to this science. Whereas natural science studies objects that are material and subject to change, and mathematics deals with things which are immutable, but presumably not separable, but present in matter, there is still room for a science that studies things which are eternal, being both separable and immutable. Such a science, Aristotle says, is ‘theology’<sup>116</sup>:

ὥστε τρεῖς ἂν εἶεν φιλοσοφαί θεωρητικάί, μαθηματική, φυσική, **θεολογική** (οὐ γὰρ ἄδηλον ὅτι, εἴ ποὺ τὸ θεῖον ὑπάρχει, ἐν τῇ τοιαύτῃ φύσει), καὶ τὴν τιμιωτάτην δεῖ περὶ τὸ τιμιώτατον γένος εἶναι.

Hence there will be three ‘speculative philosophies’, mathematics, physics, and **theology** (for it is not unclear that, should the divine be present anywhere, it is present in this specific nature), and that the most honourable science must deal with the most honourable class of subject.

Aristotle counts theology, then, as the ‘highest’ science, to be followed by the other speculative sciences, and they are followed by the other sciences. Physics was rejected as the highest science because it only studies the material and changeable. Theology is the science that studies the eternal, immaterial and the divine. But whether there is something that is all these things, i.e. immaterial, immutable, eternal and divine, Aristotle does not make clear here. What is this most honourable class of subject? Does theology have an object of study at all? If so, knowledge of it must be of the highest order, and the science that studies it as well.

### 3.2.2 Unmoved mover

Having explained what the most divine science is, we must ask what it is this science studies. In book Λ of *Metaphysics*, Aristotle treats the nature and the mode of operation of the unmoved mover, the

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<sup>116</sup> *Metaphysics* E, 1026a19-22.



ultimate goal of all moving things. It is this prime mover which Aristotle holds to be immaterial and immortal, the object of the world's striving, in the way the beloved moves the lover without being moved itself. It is also, probably, what Aristotle sees as the object of the field of study which he declared to be 'the highest'. Now, it is impossible to dedicate merely a few words to this culminating theory in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. Therefore, a short description of its definition, its nature and its activity will be sufficient and necessary for my thesis. After that, I will link the notion of the unmoved mover to *De Anima*. In *Metaphysics* Λ.7-9, its divine attributes are passed in review. I will discuss three passages briefly (3.2.2.1 – 3.2.2.2).

### 3.2.2.1 *Metaphysics* Λ.7 (1072a19-1073a14)

At the beginning of section 7, Aristotle says that 'the ultimate heaven' must be eternal, and that consequently, there must be something that moves it. The first mention of the unmoved mover lies in the following lines:

ἐπεὶ δὲ τὸ κινούμενον καὶ κινοῦν [καὶ] μέσον, ἴτοιῦν ἔστι τι δὲ οὐ κινούμενον κινεῖ, αἰδῖον καὶ οὐσία καὶ ἐνέργεια οὐσα.<sup>117</sup>

And since that which is moved while it moves is intermediate, there is **something which moves without being moved**, something eternal being both substance and actuality.

As we can see, three important characteristics are already ascribed to the unmoved mover: It is something eternal (αἰδῖον), being both substance (οὐσία) and actuality (ἐνέργεια). It also needs to exist if it is to be the object of the world's desire: It is a final cause. Upon such a principle, Aristotle proceeds, depend heaven and nature.

Its life is like the best life which we temporarily enjoy (μικρὸν χρόνον ἡμῖν<sup>118</sup>). This life it lives eternally, which is beyond our power. It must be in this state always, which is for us impossible, since its actuality is also pleasure. Though in my opinion frequently overlooked, an important claim is made

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<sup>117</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072a24-26; See Ross (1966) p.374-75 for the textual discussion of these lines. I will not go into it here, because it is not important for my argument.

<sup>118</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b15.

here by Aristotle: The unmoved mover lives a life, the best life, which is for a small period of time like ours. We can never live the life the unmoved mover lives, also because it is eternal and beyond our power, but there may be brief moments where we come somewhere near it. For the relation of pleasure to actuality or activity see *Nicomachean Ethics* K.4. We will return to this topic later.

The unmoved mover's thoughts are also of the highest degree. Its thinking in itself is concerned with that which is in itself best. Since the prime mover is pure actuality, and is the highest form of life, Aristotle identifies it with the highest activity – pure thinking. Thereupon, the intellect reappears: 'And the intellect thinks itself (αὐτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς) in grasping the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought by the act of apprehension and thinking, so that thought and object of thought are the same.'<sup>119</sup> This is, again, the Sameness Thesis, which we have seen in the paragraphs above about perception and thinking in *De Anima*. In actualisation, the subject and object of thought are identical.<sup>120</sup> Then, Aristotle comes to speak about the divine part of the intellect:

τὸ γὰρ δεκτικὸν τοῦ νοητοῦ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας νοῦς, ἐνεργεῖ δὲ ἔχων. ὥστ' ἐκείνου μᾶλλον τοῦτο ὃ δοκεῖ ὁ νοῦς **θεῖον** ἔχειν, καὶ ἡ θεωρία τὸ ἥδιστον καὶ ἄριστον.<sup>121</sup>

For that which is receptive of the object of thought and essence is the intellect, and it actually functions when it possesses it [sc. the object of thought]. Hence it is this [actuality, i.e. *having* the objects of thought] rather than that [potentiality, i.e. *being merely capable* of receiving them] which the intellect is held to have of the **divine**, and its contemplation is that which is most pleasant and best.

I took 'the object of thought' as the grammatical hidden object of ἔχων, following Ross. Νοῦς is actual when it has its objects, instead of being merely capable of receiving them. As we have seen in *De Anima*<sup>122</sup>, actuality is better than potentiality. This way, we can begin to see the similarities to the active and passive intellect. It is, however, not clear whether 'that which the intellect is held to have

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<sup>119</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b20-22.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. *De Anima* Γ.2.

<sup>121</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b22-25.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. *Metaphysics* Θ.8.

of the divine' belongs to the unmoved mover or to the human mind. Consequently, ἡ θεωρία can either mean 'God's contemplation' or 'contemplation in general'. Ross<sup>123</sup> offers two possible interpretations, without making a choice. Rejecting another possible reading 'ἐκεῖνο μᾶλλον τούτου', he only says that 'so that that which reason is thought to have belongs to the prime mover (τούτου) rather than to the human mind' is slightly less natural than the two interpretations he offered himself. I think ἐκείνου refers to actuality, which a few lines later<sup>124</sup> is used to refer to the unmoved mover: ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωὴ, ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἡ ἐνέργεια ('for the actuality of thought is life, and he (sc. the unmoved mover / God is that actuality)'). The unmoved mover is actuality, so the ἐκείνου in line 23 refers to actuality as well. ἡ θεωρία, however, need not necessarily be God's contemplation. The unmoved mover is identified with pure thinking, not potential thinking. It is divine, in the sense that it is God, not only *having* those divine attributes, but also *being* them. Its essence and activity are the same. This does not hold for human beings. Our intellect has 'something of the divine', i.e. the potentiality of actualisation of thought. The divine mind is devoid of any notion of potentiality, being purely actuality. In short, that what intellect is thought to have of the divine belongs, in this context, to the human mind rather than to the unmoved mover.

Moreover, through much of the rest of the discussion of the prime mover, Aristotle interweaves comments about humans. As we have seen, its contemplative activity and life of joy and pleasure we only enjoy occasionally, but we do enjoy it, albeit sometimes. There are several more mentions of νοῦς in Λ.7<sup>125</sup>, but they are all meant to refer to the human mind for the purpose of clarifying God's ceaseless activity and life.

### 3.2.2.2 *Metaphysics* Λ.9 (1074b15-1075a12)

In *Metaphysics* Λ.9, Aristotle turns to the consideration of ὁ νοῦς, the supreme intellect which has in the previous passages been shown to be implied as the cause of the movement of heavens. The discussion about the divine intelligence and its activity continues here. Aristotle begins by asserting that νοῦς has some complexities, for it is held to be the most divine thing of all the phenomena (τῶν

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<sup>123</sup> Ross (1966), p.380-81.

<sup>124</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b27-8.

<sup>125</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b10, b21, b22, b23, b27.

φαινομένων θειότατον<sup>126</sup>). This is strange, because τὰ φαινόμενα properly means things discovered by sense-perception. Ross comments that φαίνεσθαι can also be used as what is discovered by reason, and it seems to be used here as all the things discovered whether by sense or by reason.<sup>127</sup> This may be the case, but what Aristotle seems to mean here is that the intellect is the most divine thing that we directly experience, i.e. our own mind. Aristotle moves on by saying that it must think, and that its activity must be self-thinking, because if its thinking is determined by something else, mind is only a potentiality, and not the highest actuality. But what is it exactly that his divine intellect thinks? What does self-thinking mean? The following passage will try to make this clear, providing us at the end with Aristotle's most precise, albeit extremely vague, definition of the unmoved mover.

ἔτι δὲ εἴτε νοῦς ἢ οὐσία αὐτοῦ εἴτε νόησις ἐστὶ, τί νοεῖ; ἢ γὰρ αὐτὸς αὐτὸν ἢ ἕτερόν τι· καὶ εἰ ἕτερόν τι, ἢ τὸ αὐτὸ αἰεὶ ἢ ἄλλο. πότερον οὖν διαφέρει τι ἢ οὐδὲν τὸ νοεῖν τὸ καλὸν ἢ τὸ τυχόν; [25] ἢ καὶ ἄτοπον τὸ διανοεῖσθαι περὶ ἐνίων; δῆλον τοίνυν ὅτι τὸ **θειότατον καὶ τιμιώτατον νοεῖ**, καὶ οὐ μεταβάλλει· εἰς χεῖρον γὰρ ἢ μεταβολή, καὶ κίνησις τις ἤδη τὸ τοιοῦτον. πρῶτον μὲν οὖν εἰ μὴ νόησις ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ δύναμις, εὐλογον ἐπίπονον εἶναι τὸ συνεχὲς αὐτῷ τῆς νοήσεως ἔπειτα δῆλον [30] ὅτι ἄλλο τι ἂν εἴη τὸ τιμιώτερον ἢ ὁ νοῦς, τὸ νοούμενον. καὶ γὰρ τὸ νοεῖν καὶ ἡ νόησις ὑπάρξει καὶ τὸ χερίστον νοοῦντι. ὥστ' εἰ φευκτὸν τοῦτο (καὶ γὰρ μὴ ὁρᾶν ἔνια κρεῖττον ἢ ὁρᾶν), οὐκ ἂν εἴη τὸ ἄριστον ἢ νόησις. αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, **καὶ ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις**.<sup>128</sup>

Again, whether its essence is intellect or thinking, what does it think? For it must either think itself or something else: And if something else, then it must either think the same thing always, or something else. Does it make any difference, then, or not, whether it thinks which is good or thinks at random? [25] Surely it would be out of place if it is to think about some objects; it is thus clear that it thinks that which is most divine and honourable, and does not change; for this change would be for the worse, and something of this kind already implies some sort of movement. Firstly, therefore, if the intellect is not thinking but a potentiality, it is reasonable that the continuity of its thinking is laborious; secondly, it is clear [30] that there must be something else which is more honourable than the intellect, namely the object of thought. For both the thinking or thought will belong to the thinker of the worst. Therefore,

<sup>126</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1074b16.

<sup>127</sup> Ross (1966), p.397.

<sup>128</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1074b21-35.

if this is to be avoided (which is the case, for it is better not to see some things than to see them), thinking would not be the best. Therefore, intellect thinks itself, if it is that which is best, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking.

The unmoved mover thinks what is most divine and estimable, and it does not change. Both τὸ νοεῖν and ἡ νόησις, which I both translated as ‘thinking’, cannot be the objects of its thoughts. Clearly a divine intellect cannot think now about one thing and then about another. It can think only of what is most divine and best: Itself. Divine thought is itself irreconcilable with any potentiality; it must always be activated by actually thinking that which is most thinkable. What we see here is a correspondence between the essence of the unmoved mover and its activity: Pure thinking. The intellect thinks itself, and its thinking is a thinking of thinking. But thinking of thinking of what? Is the object of divine science, i.e. God himself, nothing but pure thought? Moreover, how is God’s life then to be understood as joyous and ‘the best’ life, if it is nothing but pure thought?

The three passages I discussed above seem mysterious enough; especially such phrases as ‘the intellect thinks itself in grasping the object of thought’, and ‘its thinking is a thinking of thinking’. An attempt to unravel these mysteries, would first of all irreversibly drag us into a war of commentators, seeking to find the core of Aristotelian theology, but second of all, and more importantly, it would drive us away too far from that what this thesis is all about: The divinity of mind in *De Anima* Γ.5 and the language Aristotle uses to describe this. In the following, I will go deeper into *Metaphysics* passages, but always with the active and passive intellect on the background.

### **3.3 Similarity or identification?**

There are recent commentators who, following some of Aristotle’s Alexandrian commentators and their Islamic followers, find the language in *De Anima* which describes the human mind so similar to that of *Metaphysics* that they drew the conclusion that Aristotle must have been speaking about one and the same mind. Caston lists the distinctive characteristics of the active intellect (separate, impassible, unmixed, in its essence actuality, more honourable, the same as the object of thought, prior in time to capacity in general, uninterruptedly thinking, solely what it [essentially] is, alone

immortal and eternal and the necessary condition of all thought), followed by the list of attributes of the Divine Intellect in *Metaphysics* (separated from sensibles, impassible and unalterable, without matter, actuality, most honourable, the same as its object, prior in time to capacity, eternally thinking, just its essence; thinking, eternal and the necessary condition of everything). He concludes: “Without engaging in sheer speculation, then, the only reasonable conclusion is that the second<sup>129</sup> intellect and the Divine Intellect are identical.”<sup>130</sup>

It must be admitted that the list of features is very similar. Going from similarity to identification, however, is a step with profound consequences, and as we will see, it is a step too far. In the following, I will give three counterarguments, which are both philological and philosophical. By doing so, we are coming close to answering the research question of this thesis. As we have seen, divinity plays a large role in *Metaphysics*. It is a divine science, which is among other things called ‘theology’, and the unmoved mover thinks about what is most divine and honourable. This divine thought is to be understood as pure actuality, and is identified with the unmoved mover itself. If we compare this language to *De Anima*, we can see not only remarkable similarities, but also a striking difference. Macfarlane & Polansky (2009) have made it their key argument in their essay “God, the divine and ΝΟΥΣ in relation to *De Anima*.”<sup>131</sup> The basis of the argument, and I agree completely after thorough reading of the entire work, is that *De Anima* does not intend to get much outside natural science, and the mind, though it may be divine, is hardly God.

### 3.3.1 θεός, θεῖον and θειότερόν τι

The first argument in favour of this is, is the fact that the word θεός ‘God’ appears explicitly in *De Anima* three times, all in book 1 (402b7, 407b10 and 411a8).<sup>132</sup> God, thus, enters infrequently as a topic of the treatise. Moreover, the adjective θεῖον ‘divine’ appears once in book 1 in connection with Alcmaeon’s view of soul, and three times outside this book, the passage at *De Anima* B.4 (415a29) being perhaps the most striking one: ἵνα τοῦ ἀεὶ καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μετέχωσιν ἢ δύνανται ‘in order that they partake in the divine as much as they can’. This line is taken from a passage where Aristotle speaks

<sup>129</sup> Caston (1999), p.211-2; by ‘second’, Caston means the active intellect.

<sup>130</sup> Caston (1999), p.211-2.

<sup>131</sup> Van Riel (2009), p.107-123.

<sup>132</sup> Van Riel (2009), p.109.

about nourishment and reproduction as the function of the nutritive soul of mortal living things. This way, we may be able to start thinking of an interpretation of the intellect as the most divine thing in us, human beings. This is in line with the passage I previously discussed, where that what intellect is thought to have of the divine belonged to the human mind rather than to the unmoved mover. It seems that the intellect in general is that which approaches God the most, but will never reach it completely. Hence Aristotle keeps his treatise on the soul within the framework of physics as much as possible. Then, in addition to the argument of McFarlane & Polansky, the word θεῖον ‘divine’ in combination with the intellect only occurs in the previously discussed passage (in chapter 1.2 of my thesis) in the first book of *De Anima*<sup>133</sup>, where Aristotle said that the intellect is probably something rather divine (θειότερόν τι). Given the fact that this is the only place where Aristotle speaks explicitly about divinity of mind in *De Anima*, it is useful to leave no doubt in the grammatical interpretation of the text.

The probability of this utterance was already weakened by the preceding ἵσως, ‘probably’, and it is made in a passage<sup>134</sup> where Aristotle suggests that the failure of what is an affection of the composite of soul and body (like thinking, loving, hating and remembering) is due to the failure of the body. The intellect, he concludes, is probably something more divine, and unaffected. θεϊότερόν τι is a comparative, ‘something more godlike’. According to *Ancient Greek Grammar* by Herbert Weir Smyth (1968), ancient Greek comparatives can be interpreted in nineteen ways.<sup>135</sup> Since that which the intellect is contrasted or compared with, the ‘something else’, is explicitly absent in the sentence, we could be tempted to translate it with fairly / rather / pretty divine. The Greek allows such a reading. The comparative stands alone here, and is not followed by a genitive of comparison or ἢ ‘than’. However, I believe it is implicitly contrasted with the failure of the body, which is mentioned in the lines preceding the comparative. As one of the possible interpretations, Smyth mentions that “the comparative may stand alone, the second part being implied, like οἱ σοφώτεροι ‘the wiser’, i.e. those wiser than the rest.”<sup>136</sup> The intellect is probably something more divine, i.e. than the failure of the

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<sup>133</sup> *De Anima* 408b29.

<sup>134</sup> *De Anima* 408b24-30.

<sup>135</sup> Smyth (1968), p.279-282.

<sup>136</sup> Smyth (1968), p.281.

body. The perishable is granted a certain measure of divinity as well, only in a lesser degree. Thus, being divine, in this context, does not necessarily entail eternal duration. It can easily be kept within the vague limits of having certain qualities to a certain degree. Therefore, the fact that the intellect is reasonably godlike, i.e. it is like God in the way that it is more divine than the defective and perishable human body, does not pave the way for a promotion from comparison to identification. To interpret the comparative as an identification, i.e. it *is* God, is not correct. The intellect, *probably*, approaches divinity to a certain degree, a likeness to God, but the Greek provides no ground for an interpretation of similarity. Attribution of divinity does not secure transcendental status of the active intellect of *De Anima* Γ.5. This becomes even less probable because of the fact that this remark is the only time Aristotle links the notions of divinity and the intellect in *De Anima*.

### 3.3.2 Potentiality vs. actuality

The second argument of McFarlane & Polansky is that the very way in which Aristotle defines soul, as I pointed out in chapter 1, restricts soul to mortal living beings. The language of divinity in *Metaphysics* corroborates this as well. ‘Soul is the first actuality of a natural body having life in potentiality, and such a body is one that has organs’.<sup>137</sup> This applies only to *embodied* beings. Divine beings, such as the unmoved mover, cannot be embodied, because having a body implies mortality, and thus potentiality. Consequently, they also cannot be ensouled, even though they are alive. They are pure actuality and devoid of all notions of potentiality, whereas soul on the other hand is defined as an actuality of a certain potentiality. Neither can divine beings like the heavens, that are, though bodily, eternal, have souls according to the definition of soul. For Aristotle the heavenly bodies have matter only for their ‘everlasting rotational motion’.<sup>138</sup> Only quite accidentally those bodies, composed of aether, change. By restricting his definition of soul to mortal beings, Aristotle keeps *De Anima* within the limits of physics. This makes an allusion to the eternally actual and soulless unmoved mover in *De Anima* Γ.5 less probable. McFarlane & Polansky conclude: “As mortal these ensouled beings are not divine even if their living, reproducing, and perceiving aim to make them as divine and God-like as possible. But

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<sup>137</sup> *De Anima* 412a27-29.

<sup>138</sup> *Metaphysics* Λ, 1072b4-7.



human beings among the mortal living beings have the exceptional capacity for thinking. This seems an ability more linked to the divine than any of the other capacities of mortal beings.”<sup>139</sup>

Moreover, the mind’s role is striking in *De Anima*, especially compared to *Metaphysics*. Possession of mind is having the possibility for thinking all things. Since the intellect is fundamentally a *potentiality*, it would be completely inappropriate to say that God is mind, because God is pure actuality. Our intellect, knowledge and wisdom are mere potentialities. The intellect is capable of thinking all things, and in this way it is the most divine of the phenomena and the other human senses, but God thinks unchangingly of what is most divine, and this is itself. God may be identified with its own intellect, but not with the human νοῦς, because as treated in *De Anima*, this is merely the capacity to think all things. Moreover, unlike the divine intellect, it needs additional φαντασία to make thinking possible. By virtue of its dependence on imagination, the mind must be regarded as unified with the soul. The mind not only has a structural affinity and, thus, no substantial identity with the divine mind, this connection to the lower faculties, like imagination, must not be overlooked as well. The intellect thinks itself, because it is nothing apart from thought and it is nothing actual before it thinks. The thoughts it does think are bound to images, which leads to the conclusion that the human intellect is in the end conditioned by temporality (and thus contingency). In short, the unmoved mover, Aristotle’s God, is activity with no mere potentiality. Its thinking is a thinking of thinking. Therefore, God is νοήσις, rather than any sort of νοῦς.

### 3.4 The intellect in *Nicomachean Ethics*

The intellect and the divinity of human thought are discussed in several places but the *locus classicus* is *Nicomachean Ethics* K.7-8. In no other work does Aristotle speak so explicitly about our mind and how it is to be understood in terms of divinity. In order to come to a full understanding of Aristotelian intellect and its divinity, we must therefore discuss some passages of the *NE* as well. As we will see, the conclusion drawn from these passages are perfectly in line with my argument.

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<sup>139</sup> Van Riel (2009), p.113-115.

### 3.4.1 Θεωρητική

The following passage is to be read in the discussion of the sort of activity which is to count as happiness.

εἰ δ' ἐστὶν ἡ εὐδαιμονία κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐνέργεια, εὐλογον κατὰ τὴν κρατίστην αὕτη δ' ἂν εἴη τοῦ ἀρίστου. εἴτε δὴ νοῦς τοῦτο εἴτε ἄλλο τι, ὃ δὴ κατὰ φύσιν δοκεῖ ἄρχειν καὶ ἡγεῖσθαι καὶ ἔννοιαν ἔχειν περὶ καλῶν καὶ θείων, **εἴτε θεῖον ὃν καὶ αὐτὸ εἴτε τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν τὸ θειότατον**, ἡ τούτου ἐνέργεια κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν εἴη ἂν ἡ τελεία εὐδαιμονία· ὅτι δ' ἐστὶ **θεωρητική**, εἴρηται. ὁμολογούμενον δὲ τοῦτ' ἂν δόξειεν εἶναι καὶ τοῖς πρότερον καὶ τῷ ἀληθεῖ. κρατίστη τε γὰρ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνέργεια (καὶ γὰρ ὁ νοῦς τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ τῶν γνωστῶν, περὶ ᾧ ὁ νοῦς).<sup>140</sup>

And if happiness is an activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it is in accordance with the highest virtue. And this will probably be the virtue of the best part of us. Whether this is the intellect or something else, which is naturally thought to rule and lead the way and to have reflection on fine and divine things, either also as being itself divine or as the most divine of things in us, the activity of this [part of us?] in accordance of the virtue proper to it will be perfect happiness; and it has been said that this is speculative<sup>141</sup> [activity]. And this would seem to be in agreement both with what has been said before and with the truth. For this activity is the best, since the intellect is [the best<sup>142</sup>] of things in us, and the objects with which the intellect is concerned are [the best of] the things to be known.

Perfect happiness is that activity which exercises the highest virtue, being θεωρητική. Aristotle most likely means philosophical consideration, or simply philosophy.<sup>143</sup> This activity is in accordance with virtue, and this virtue is of the best part of us. This best part of us is either the intellect, or something

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<sup>140</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a13-21.

<sup>141</sup> Earlier, I translated φιλοσοφία θεωρητικά in *Metaphysics* 1026a19-22 as 'speculative philosophies'. I believe Aristotle here simply means 'philosophy', but I translated θεωρητική the same as before, as the adjective 'speculative', and I took 'activity' as its hidden complement.

<sup>142</sup> In this last line, in order to make the translation more coherent, I complemented two times κρατίστη 'the best'.

<sup>143</sup> Hupperts & Poortman (2005), p.617 and p.619-21; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b14-a5, 1139a6-17, 1141a18-b3, 1143b33-a6 and 1145a6-11.

else which guides us and reflects upon that which is noble and divine. Then, the best part of us is divine itself or it is the most divine part in us. Either way, the activity of this best part of us, in accordance with the peculiar virtue (κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν ἀρετὴν), will be philosophy. Aristotle answers one of these two questions: The intellect is the best thing in us. The other option, ‘something else’, is not, but we can assume that the intellect also guides us and reflects upon that which is noble and divine. For the objects with which the intellect concerns itself (περὶ ἃ ὁ νοῦς) are the best of the things to be known. Whether the intellect is divine itself or is the most divine part in us, he does not answer here. However, as Wedin says, θεωρητική “may have the divine as its object, it does not follow that this is activity of something that is fully divine. (...) So at the very least the passage establishes that mention of the most divine element in us is not ipso facto mention of god or something divine without qualification.”<sup>144</sup> Wedin is right about this. Besides, this passage does not mention the divinity of mind, only in a highly hypothetical way. We must therefore look further.

### 3.4.2 “As-if”-immortality

In the lines subsequent to the passage discussed above, Aristotle moves on to argue that the activity which realises perfect happiness is philosophy. He already said it is the activity of our highest part, i.e. the intellect. It is also the most continuous activity, the most pleasant, and the most self-sufficient.<sup>145</sup> This activity is the only activity that is loved for its own sake as well: It produces no result ‘beyond the act of contemplation itself’.<sup>146</sup> After having contrasted the practical pursuits displaying the virtues which are directed to some further end and not chosen for their own sake, with the intellect, it follows that it is the activity of the intellect that constitutes complete human happiness, having lived a complete life. Such a life, a life devoted to philosophy, however, is beyond the human level. 1177b26-1178b29 cautions that this is not possible. A man will not lead this life insofar he is human (ἢ ἄνθρωπος ἐστίν), but only insofar he has something within him that is divine (ἢ θεῖόν τι ἐν αὐτῷ ὑπάρχει). One is not capable of this activity by virtue of his humanity, but by virtue of having something divine. It follows that by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature

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<sup>144</sup> Wedin (1988), p. 210.

<sup>145</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177a22-b1.

<sup>146</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b2-3.

(τοῦ συνθέτου), by so much is its activity superior to the exercise of the other forms of virtue. What Aristotle means by ‘composite nature’ is that human beings are a soul-body complex. Aristotle proceeds to gloss, νοῦς, just as he did in 1177a20 (‘the best thing in us’), as only *relatively* divine:

εἰ δὴ θεῖον ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὸν ἄνθρωπον, καὶ ὁ κατὰ τοῦτον βίος θεῖος πρὸς τὸν ἀνθρώπινον βίον. οὐ χρὴ δὲ κατὰ τοὺς παραινούντας ἀνθρώπινα φρονεῖν ἄνθρωπον ὄντα οὐδὲ θνητὰ τὸν θνητόν, ἀλλ’ ἐφ’ ὅσον ἐνδέχεται ἀθανατίζειν καὶ πάντα ποιεῖν πρὸς τὸ ζῆν κατὰ τὸ κράτιστον τῶν ἐν αὐτῷ· εἰ γὰρ καὶ τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι, δυνάμει καὶ τιμιότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει.<sup>147</sup>

If then the intellect is divine in comparison with<sup>148</sup> man, the life according to this is also divine in comparison with human life. It is not necessarily so that, as those who enjoin this, he who is man should think human things, nor the mortal things<sup>149</sup>, but one ought to take upon oneself as much as possible the act of immortalizing and to do all to live in accordance to the best thing in him; for though this may be small in bulk, but in power and value it far surpasses everything else.

If the intellect is divine, so too must the life according to this be divine. We are urged to achieve immortality as far as possible, but we will never reach the perfection of God, who is immortal and pure actuality. In engaging in this activity, however, we ‘immortalize’ ourselves. This part of ourselves which enables us to do this, is our best part ‘especially’ (μάλιστα<sup>150</sup>). With this intellectual activity, we can enjoy the highest form of happiness. Moreover, it makes us more than human beings, because this form of life is divine in comparison to the life of man qua man. Wedin calls this an “as-if”-immortality, and I agree with his conclusion: “If, as we are suggesting, productive mind is to be rung in to explain the relative divinity of theoretical thought, then it must also account for the sense of immortality accorded this activity. And just as that is manifestly weak, something like an “as-if”-immortality, so, too, I suggest, the productive mind of *De Anima* Γ.5 need be given no stronger sense of immortality.”<sup>151</sup> In thinking, we merely access a divine activity, but we do not become God.

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<sup>147</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b30-1178a2.

<sup>148</sup> For this use of πρὸς with accusative, see Smyth (1968), p.385.

<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Rhetorics* 1394b24-25.

<sup>150</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b7.

<sup>151</sup> Wedin (1988), p.210.

Aristotle closes his account on ‘speculative activity’<sup>152</sup> by arguing that this activity is solely and explicitly the activity of God. The last line of the previous passage intimated that the human amount of divinity is small (τῷ ὄγκῳ μικρόν ἐστι).<sup>153</sup> He unambiguously confirms the possibility that the activity of God differs from that of his human counterpart:

ὥστε ἡ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνέργεια, μακαριότητι διαφέρουσα, θεωρητικὴ ἂν εἴη. καὶ τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων δὴ ἡ ταύτη συγγενεστάτη εὐδαιμονικωτάτη.<sup>154</sup>

It follows that the activity of the god, surpassing in blessedness, will be speculative activity. Hence amongst the human activities that which is most akin [to the divine activity] will be the greatest source of happiness.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In short, these passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* show that we as mortal human beings sometimes engage in the same divine activity as God always does: Intellectual contemplation. Of all the human activities, it is this one which is *most akin* to the divine activity, and this will be the greatest source of happiness. As we have seen in *De Anima*, the formulation ‘akin to’, whether as a conjunction (ὥσπερ) as in *De Anima* 429a14, as an adjectival comparative (θειότερόν) as in *De Anima* 408b29 or as an adjectival superlative (συγγενεστάτη) as in the passage above, points to a similarity, but not to an identification. We try to be as immortal as we can, and we do this by using the ‘best part in us’, which is our intellect, but we will never reach immortality. That which is divine in us is small in mass and, as we have seen in *Metaphysics*, we enjoy this merely temporarily, because we cannot, like God, always use our intellect. Besides, we have more abilities than just intellect, which Aristotle holds to be ‘lower’. God is only intellect: His activity falls together with its essence. These considerations will lead to my conclusion, which I will provide in the final chapter of my thesis.

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<sup>152</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1178b7-23.

<sup>153</sup> Cf. 3.2.2.1; God’s life we temporarily enjoy, μικρόν χρόνον, *Metaphysics* 1072b15.

<sup>154</sup> *Nicomachean Ethics* 1178b22-24.

## Conclusion

We have come to the end of an extraordinary journey. The interpretation of Aristotelian intellect, its divinity, and in particular the marvellous chapter *De Anima* Γ.5, has a long history. In this thesis, I hope to have made a contribution to this tradition by employing a critical philological eye. Some of the secondary literature did not turn out to be as precise as it perhaps should be; drivelling in technical terms, commenting premeditatedly and trying to interpret Aristotle with one's own agenda by losing oneself in much too abstract theories without foundation in the original text, is probably something that would make many a classicist shiver. It has at least made me shiver. But Aristotle, my most beloved Greek philosopher as source of moral guidance, inspiration and support, has sometimes made me shiver as well. His language is often vague, contradictory and inconsistent. Nevertheless, when reading him closely, with due consideration of the grammatical boundaries of the Greek, my interpretation is hopefully made plausible.

First of all, the notorious active and passive intellect can be grammatically interpreted as two aspects (μὲν and δέ) of our one intellect, instead of two distinct intellects. The duality of a single intellect, consequently, which is *in the soul* (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ), does not necessarily need to be interpreted externally. The active intellect is separable (χωριστὸς) from the passive intellect, but not entirely separate during one's lifetime. When we die, the passive intellect perishes, but the active intellect, once separated (χωρισθείς) lives on, being 'immortal and everlasting'. What Aristotle exactly meant by this, is something we may have to guess eternally. I suggested Aristotle may have been speaking figuratively here, which makes it hard to understand him correctly. It led several commentators to identify the active intellect with the eternal and self-thinking unmoved mover, but there are several philological arguments which make this reading unlikely.

Second of all, Aristotle scarcely speaks of God (θεός), the divinity of mind or divinity (θεῖον) whatsoever in *De Anima*. The one and only utterance where he explicitly links the notions of divinity and the intellect, is not unequivocal: 'the intellect is probably something more divine (θειότερόν τι) than the failure of the body'. This makes it probable that Aristotle wanted to keep his treatise on the soul away from theology and transcendent speculation. The characterisations of the active intellect

in Γ.5, however, bear similarities to certain passages in *Metaphysics*. In the latter work, divinity plays a more important role. Aristotle comes to speak extensively about the most divine science and ‘the unmoved mover’, who thinks himself eternally, is pure actuality and is devoid of any notion of potentiality. The unmoved mover is understood as the final cause, it is this transcendent entity towards which the world strives. His activity corresponds with his essence: Its thinking (νοήσις) is a thinking of thinking. And this is an essential difference with the human intellect (ὁ νοῦς), which is to be defined as the potentiality to think all things.

Third of all, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle holds our intellect to be the most divine thing in us. When we use ‘the best part of us’, i.e. the intellect, we ‘immortalize’ (ἀθανατίζειν) ourselves. We gain access to a divine capacity of ours. God always thinks, and when we humans think, i.e. when we devote our life to ‘speculative activity’, or philosophy, we become a bit like him. We sometimes, briefly, enjoy the perfect life he lives. We all try to be like God, we yearn for him, in a way, as he is the final cause of the world, the ‘for the sake of which’. With this intellectual activity, we can enjoy the highest form of happiness. This activity is, among all of the human activities, the one which is *most akin* to the divine activity or eternally thinking. Our capacity of thinking, the intellect, is thus divine, but it is not God.

Concluding: On philological grounds, the active intellect can hardly be identified with the unmoved mover, Aristotle’s God. *De Anima* Γ.5 does bear similarities with the language of *Metaphysics*, but going from similarities to identification is rash. Our capacity of thinking may be the best thing in us, but by realising this capacity, or, to speak more *aristotelisch*, by actualizing this potentiality, we engage in an imperfect imitation of the divine, and, therefore, we do not become God.

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