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Aristotle's Causal Definitions of the Soul

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Abstract: Does Aristotle offer a definition of the soul? In fact, he rejects the possibility of defining the soul univocally. Because "life" is a homonymous concept, so too is "soul". Given the specific causal role that Aristotle envisages for form and essence, the soul requires multiple different definitions to capture how it functions as a cause in each form of life. Aristotle suggests demonstrations can be given which express these causal definitions; I reconstruct these demonstrations in the paper.

Does Aristotle offer a definition of the soul? Most commentators would say yes: they would point to one or another of Aristotle's general formulations about the soul from *De Anima* II.1-2 as his considered definition of soul. But this is not correct. In fact, he rejects the possibility of a single, univocal definition of soul altogether. Aristotle was keenly attuned to the important differences between forms of life and the repercussions these differences have for the task of definition. In light of these distinctions, Aristotle argues that a unique essence-specifying definition of the soul belongs to each form of life. In other words, "soul" is actually a *homonymous* term for Aristotle: its usage in distinct contexts (e.g., when describing plant life vs. animal life) requires disparate essence-specifying definitions (*Cat*. 1, 1a1-12). This is appropriate given that "life" is itself a homonymous term, and that soul is understood as the cause of each form of ensouled life. Aristotelian definitions reveal an essence specifically by articulating the cause of being (i.e., the formal cause) of the definiendum. If the various forms of life differ essentially from one another, then they will require fundamentally different causal explanations. Thus "soul" will lack a single, all-encompassing definition; instead, it will need to be defined differently for each form of life. I first defend this interpretation of the *DA*, then show how Aristotle's theory of demonstration allows us to reconstruct the causal demonstrations which reveal the specific definitions of the soul for each form of life.

1: The problem of defining the soul

At the beginning of *DA* II.1, Aristotle sets as his task "to determine [or, perhaps, *to define*: διορίσαι] what the soul is and what would be the most common account of it" (*DA* II.1, 412a4-6).[1] We are to seek the "most common account" (κοινότατος λόγος) of the soul, one which will apply over its full extension. In fact, he goes on to provide three variations on that account within *DA* II.1 alone:[2]

> Therefore, it is necessary that the soul is substance as the form of a natural body that has life as a potentiality. But substance is fulfillment; therefore, [soul is] a fulfillment of this kind of body. (*DA* II.1, 412a19-22)
>
> Thus, the soul is a fulfillment of the first kind of a natural body that has life as a potentiality. (*DA* II.1, 412a27-28)
>
> If it is necessary to say what is common to all soul, it would be that it is a fulfillment of the first kind of a natural, instrumental body. (*DA* II.1, 412b4-6)[3]

When he lays out that third variation on the "most common account", he states that he is articulating "what is common to all soul" (τι κοινὸν ἐπὶ πάσης ψυχῆς). As such, these accounts, either singly or taken together, are sometimes taken to be Aristotle's "definition" or "definitions" of the soul.[4] Most recently, Brian Julian has defended the position that the first of these three variations from *DA* II.1 is Aristotle's "considered definition" of the soul, which (according to Julian) he goes on to defend in subsequent chapters of the *DA* (Julian 2020). Of course, if this is a definition, it must apply univocally to all its instances; otherwise, it could hardly qualify as a good

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[1] All translations are my own.

[2] To the following three variations, Bolton adds a fourth "definition", which is the "essence and defining principle" of a natural body which possesses the source of its own change and stability (*DA* II.1, 412b15-17; cf. Bolton 1978, 260).

[3] On the translation of ὀργανικοῦ as "instrumental", cf. Menn 2002,108-117.

[4] E.g., Aquinas 1999, 126; Balme 1992, 90; Johnston 2011, 194; Julian 2020; Ross 1961, 223. Alexander of Aphrodisias in his *Mantissa* refers to the third variation as a definition (Alexander 2004, 18 = 104,8-9), while in his *De Anima* he qualifies that the common account is not fully perspicuous because it does not completely reveal the nature of each type of soul (Alexander 2012, 44 = 16,18-17,8; cf. Caston's n. 156). Polansky consistently refers to the most common account as a "definition" or "general definition", despite the fact that he recognizes that soul does not admit of "the strictest sort of definition" (Polansky 2007, 194-96). Hicks refers to it as a "generic definition", by which he means a definition of the genus (of which the nutritive, perceptive, and intellective are species) (Hicks 1907, 334).

definition. But Aristotle does insist that the third variation is "common to all soul"; if the three variations are extensionally equivalent, then presumably it does so apply.

However, many commentators have argued that Aristotle in fact views these statements about the soul in *DA* II.1 as preliminary articulations which are inadequate in some way, and so do not fully qualify as a "definition" or "definitions".[5] Robert Bolton's widely cited article on the topic is a representative example of this approach (Bolton 1978). Bolton cites Aristotle's claim that the account of soul in II.1 has only been "sketched in an outline" (τύπῳ…ὑπογεγράφθω; 413a9-10) and argues that the three variations on the "most common account" found in II.1 are only "nominal" definitions which pick out sufficient, but *not* necessary conditions for being ensouled. In doing so, Bolton suggests, they all identify one and the same "generic form", "generic actuality", or "generic essence"; each different variation simply picks out a sufficient condition for qualifying as an instance of this "generic" type (Bolton 1978, 264-66). According to Bolton, it is only in *DA* II.2 that Aristotle delivers his "scientific" or "real" definition of the soul as the cause of life (Bolton 1978, 267-68). For Bolton, this "real" definition of the soul is the definition of a genus, for which it is also necessary to provide the proper definitions of each species (i.e., of the nutritive, perceptive, and intellective).

For some other interpreters, though, the project of identifying a *single* definition of soul is altogether mistaken. Johansen for example argues that the task of defining the soul actually results in multiple, different definitions corresponding to the different capacities characteristic of various kinds of living things (Johansen 2012, Chapter 2). By suggesting that Aristotle considers "soul" to

[5] E.g., Bodéüs 1993, 137 fn. 7; Bolton 1978, 263-64; Diamond 2015, 37-42; Hamlyn 1968, 85; Ibn-Rushd (Averroes) 2009, 121, 138-39; Johansen 2012, 50; Menn 2002, 103-8; Philoponus 2005, 58-60 = 255,17-257,25, esp. 257,18-19); Rodier 1900, 216-20; Shields 2016, 195-96, who aligns himself with Bolton 1978; Sprague 1996, 104; Themistius 2013, 66-68 = 48,7-49,12; Ward 1996, 114. Julian 2020, 330 fn. 4 says Ps.-Simplicius identifies the "most common account" as a definition, but in fact Ps.-Simplicius recognizes that soul is non-univocal (Simplicius 1995, 143-44 = 106,33-107,35), and so belongs in this latter camp. For a different breakdown of the positions in the literature on these topics, cf. Diamond 2015, 37-38 and his notes.

be a homonymous term, I am thus aligning myself with this more radical interpretation. The interpretation is by no means novel; ancient commentators also observed that soul is a homonymous concept for Aristotle.[6] However, my analysis improves upon the available arguments for this position (and upon Johansen's in particular) by showing how Aristotle's views on definition and essence from the *Posterior Analytics* and *Metaphysics* directly inform his argument in *DA* II.2 and can be used to reconstruct the causal demonstrations he suggests are needed there. Other commentators have applied this background material to the *DA* incompletely, and so have not fully appreciated the rigor of Aristotle's argument for the homonymy of soul.

2: Conventional and causal definitions

On all sides of the debate regarding defining the soul, there is an agreement that the transition between *DA* II.1 and II.2 is crucial for understanding Aristotle's position. Here Aristotle reflects on his results from *DA* II.1 and explicitly raises questions about what qualifies as a good definition and how to provide one. Because these lines bridge the division between *DA* II.1 and II.2, allow me to refer to this passage as the "transition passage"[7]:

> So then, let things be distinguished and sketched in outline in this way concerning soul. But since what is clear and more knowable according to reason comes to be from what is unclear but more apparent, it is necessary to attempt again to make headway about the soul in this way. For the definitional account needs to make clear not only *what is the case*, just as the majority of definitions do, but also needs to include and to make apparent *the cause*. As things stand, the accounts of definitions are just like conclusions. For example: what is squaring? The equality of an oblong rectangle to an equilateral rectangle. But this sort of definition is an account of the conclusion, while the one who states that squaring is finding a mean proportional states the cause of the thing. (*DA* II.1-2, 413a9-20)

[6] Ps.-Simplicius says soul is not a univocal concept because the relevant type of "actuality is meant in a different way" in each case—i.e., the relevant functional capacities are essentially different (cf. Ps.-Simplicius 1995, 143-44 = 106,33-107,35). That soul is homonymous is also strongly stated by Themistius (2013, 67 = 48,24-28), by Philoponus (2005, 58-60 = 255,17-257,25), and by Ibn-Rushd (Averroes) (2009, 121; but cf. also 138-39, where he qualifies this somewhat).

[7] Recall that the chapter divisions within each Book were inserted by later editors.

Aristotle begins characteristically by marking his earlier material as having been preliminary in some important way, and then proceeds to make a new beginning into his topic. He states that what he has previously articulated in II.1 (in particular, it seems, the three general characterizations of the soul quoted above) has only been "sketched in an outline" (τύπῳ…ὑπογεγράφθω). Bolton points out how, in the *Topics*, Aristotle distinguishes an account "in outline" (τύπῳ) from an "accurate account" or, perhaps, "accurate definition" (ἀκριβὴς λόγος) (*Top*. I.1, 101a18-24; Bolton 1978, 259). In that passage Aristotle indicates that an account "in outline" does provide a "general" (καθόλου) understanding of a topic, but one which falls short of giving detailed specifics about individual kinds.[8] In the transition passage, he then goes on to indicate the importance of starting from what is more apparent, but less clear intrinsically, and moving from there to what is clearer and more knowable according to reason (λόγος). This methodology thus distinguishes two epistemic states: our starting point, where we grasp a phenomenon in a preliminary but insufficient way, and a desired endpoint, where we grasp that same phenomenon in a deeper and more penetrating way. The distinction and its methodological import are similar to the one found in the opening of the *Physics*, where he argues we must start with what is "better known to us", i.e., the general and immediate way in which a given phenomenon appears to us, and then go on to clarify, correct, and enhance these initial appearances into a more accurate description of the way things are "by nature" (*Phys*. I.1, 184a16-b14).[9] After drawing this methodological distinction in the

[8] Julian admits that τύπῳ… ὑπογεγράφθω must be interpreted as indicating some inadequacy, even though he wishes to downplay its importance (cf. Julian 2020, 338-41). For Julian, "sketched in outline" merely indicates a "quantitative" inadequacy for the *DA* II.1 account. Even if we accept Julian's interpretation, though, this still leaves open the possibility that this inadequacy has to do with the serial account of soul provided in *DA* II.3: i.e., the quantitative inadequacy is that we have not yet provided the accounts of the specific types of soul (a reading which fits particularly well with the *Topics* I.1 passage Bolton points to regarding the meaning of "in outline"). Again, Julian admits this is a possible way to read "in outline"; yet it is precisely *DA* II.3's stipulations about the serial ordering of soul which tell strongly against his thesis. I briefly discuss the relevance of II.3 for these issues at the conclusion of this paper. My interpretation can stand even on Julian's deflationary reading of "sketched in outline".
[9] Cf. Kirkland 2014 on *Phys*. I.1 and its relationship to Aristotle's methodology.

transition, he then draws a definitional distinction. He distinguishes two kinds of "definitional account" (ὁριστικὸν λόγον): one which states only "what is the case" (τὸ ὅτι), and another which also "includes and makes apparent the cause" (τὴν αἰτίαν). Aristotle expresses a preference for the latter kind of definitional account over the former, complaining that "as things stand" (νῦν δέ) available definitions are "just like conclusions" (ὥσπερ συμπεράσματα). The explanatory γάρ at 413a13 indicates that this definitional distinction maps onto the methodological one. The conventional understanding of a phenomenon (whatever comprises what is "less clear but more apparent" about it to us) is equivalent to (or perhaps serves as the foundation of) the kind of definitional account which only indicates "what is the case". By contrast, the account which is "clearer and more knowable according to reason" is the one which also "includes and makes apparent the cause" of that phenomenon. This parallels the methodological point from *Physics* I.1 nicely, where he specifies that the inquiry from what is less clear to what is more clear and knowable is an inquiry into causes, principles, and elements (*Phys*. I.1, 184a10-16). It is also clear that he views the style of definitional account which only states "what is the case" as being "just like a conclusion": the geometrical example provides two related definitions of squaring, the first of which he says is "an account of the conclusion", while the second states the cause. In brief, Aristotle is suggesting that the preliminary, conventional understanding of a phenomenon has its correlative *conventional definition* (i.e., one which states only "what is the case" and in this way is "just like a conclusion") while the "clearer" and more correct understanding of a phenomenon has its correlative *causal definition* (i.e., one which also states the cause of the phenomenon).

Aristotle illustrates the definitional distinction with a geometrical example. The conventional definition of "squaring" is approximately "the construction of an equilateral rectangle equal to a given oblong rectangle". Presumably anyone with a passing familiarity with geometry

would be able to articulate this kind of definition of squaring—in this way it is "more apparent", or more familiar to us. Yet this definition does not state the "cause" of squaring (in this case, *how* and *why* exactly squaring can be carried out) and so does not fully explain the nature of squaring—in this way it is still "unclear". A definition which also included "…by finding the mean proportional of the sides of the oblong rectangle according to such-and-such a method, and using this mean proportional as the side of the newly-constructed equilateral rectangle" would then qualify as a fully causal-explanatory definition of squaring.[10] Only someone who really understood how squaring works—why it is possible and how it can be carried out—would be able to provide this kind of definition. This, Aristotle states, is how we must proceed with our inquiry into the soul. We start with some kind of conventional understanding of the soul and its correlative conventional definition. Then we proceed to clarify this initial understanding so that it is more precise and illuminating of its nature, until we can articulate a new, better definition of the soul: one which is casual-explanatory.

3: Identifying the conventional and causal definitions of the soul

This much is relatively clear and straightforward. However, we still want to know (1) what exactly this distinction between conventional and causal definitions amounts to; (2) in what sense conventional definitions are "just like conclusions"; (3) how the geometrical example illustrates that distinction (1) and analogy (2); (4) how to apply these observations to Aristotle's discussion of the soul—in particular, how to identify the conventional and causal definitions of the soul.

[10] Bolton suggests that the definition of squaring is "finding the mean proportional" (full stop), as this allows Aristotle to "cover numbers as well as plane areas" (Bolton 1978, 269). However, this definition would not even illustrate a "sufficient condition" for squaring, as Bolton suggests it does. Squaring (ὁ τετραγωνισμός) is a geometrical *construction*, so minimally it must state *what* is being constructed. This is, I take it, what Aristotle is stipulating when he poses the conventional definition of squaring as "the equality of an oblong rectangle to an equilateral rectangle". The causal definition then must "include" (ἐνυπάρχειν) the cause, so it will state "…by finding the mean proportional…" etc. *in addition* to what the conventional definition states. Cf. my discussion below, as well as Julian 2020, 334-35 and his fn. 16.

To answer these questions, interpreters of this passage typically rely on a discussion of types of definition found in *Posterior Analytics* II.10. Here Aristotle draws a similar distinction between conventional definitions which are like "conclusions" on the one hand and causal definitions on the other.[11] Aristotle uses the example of thunder, suggesting the following conventional definition: "Further, a definition of thunder is noise in the clouds—this is the conclusion (συμπέρασμα) of the demonstration of what it is" (*Post. An.* II.10, 94a7-9). By contrast, the causal definition of thunder is itself "like a demonstration":

> Another type of definition is the account which makes clear why something exists…for this latter type, it's clear that it will be like a demonstration of what it is, differing in arrangement from a demonstration. For it's different to say *why* it thunders and *what* thunder is: in the first case, one will say "because fire is extinguished in the clouds". But what is thunder? A noise of fire being extinguished in the clouds. So the same account is articulated in another way: in one way as a continuous demonstration, in another way as a definition. (*Post. An.* II.10, 93b38-94a7)

Here Aristotle illustrates how a causal definition "includes and makes apparent the cause". The conventional definition of thunder is "noise in the clouds" (or: the specific, familiar kind of noise in the clouds we typically identify as thunder; cf. Bolton 1978, 276). But this is still "unclear" to the extent that it does not inform us *how* and *why* thunder happens. The causal definition addresses this deficiency: thunder is "a noise of fire extinguished in the clouds". Or, written another way: thunder is "a noise in the clouds *caused* by the extinguishing of fire". Aristotle claims that providing the full causal definition in this way gives us the *essential* definition of thunder: it fully and adequately answers the "what is it?" (*ti esti*) question. This is why Aristotle draws a close connection between answering the question which asks for the essential definition ("What is it?")

[11] Another type identified in the chapter are nominal definitions, i.e., definitions which only specify the signification of a word, without reference to the phenomenon itself. The other two types I have identified, which I label conventional definitions and causal ones, both refer to really existing phenomena rather than merely to words. Cf. Charles 2000, 44-45.

and the question which asks for the cause ("Why is it so?"). Answering each, he says, is simply providing "the same account…articulated in another way".

But what does it mean that the conventional definition is like "the conclusion of the demonstration of what it is", while giving the cause is like the "continuous demonstration" itself? Charles suggests that the conventional definition "rests on a demonstration" (Charles 2000, 43). Here I present Charles' suggested demonstration (which I have rearranged into a standard form categorical syllogism), along with the different definitions of thunder, to show how the terms in the definitions and in the demonstration match up. For the sake of clarity here and in what follows, allow me to mark all premises and terms explicitly, as well as highlight the way these terms function in the different definitions:

Conventional definition of 'thunder':
Thunder is noise in the clouds.
Demonstration of the conventional definition:
Major Premise: Noise (MAJ) belongs to the extinction of fire (MID).
Minor premise: Extinction of fire (MID) belongs to the clouds (MIN).
Conclusion: Noise (MAJ) belongs to the clouds (MIN).
"Why is it so?" question and answer:
Why does noise (MAJ) belong to clouds (MIN)? Explanation: because the extinction of fire (MID) belongs to the clouds (MIN).
Causal definition of 'thunder':
Thunder is the noise of fire being extinguished in the clouds.

The conventional definition of thunder appears here as the conclusion of the demonstration, while the cause of thunder (the extinction of fire) appears throughout the premises as the middle term. The demonstration illustrates the *reason* why the major term is predicated of the minor term in the conclusion (and so in the conventional definition), viz., the major and minor terms' connections to the middle term. In particular, the minor premise identifies the cause: it is the answer to the "Why is it so?" question. Why is there noise in the clouds? Because fire is being extinguished in the clouds. It is that "same account…articulated in a different way" that provides the essential (i.e.,

causal) definition of thunder: thunder is the noise of fire being extinguished in the clouds. In this way, the essential definition is like the "continuous demonstration" itself, just "differing in arrangement from a demonstration", for it includes and connects all three terms (major, minor, and middle) from the demonstration. Note that the conventional definition of thunder does state some *part* of the essence of the phenomenon: thunder is, in fact, essentially some kind of noise in the clouds. But by leaving out the cause, it fails to state the *whole* essence of thunder insofar as it fails to state *the reason why* the terms of the definition are connected (why the major term is predicated of the minor term). The causal definition of thunder rectifies this by "including and making apparent the cause", just as the transition passage from *DA* stipulates.

In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle spells out more concretely why such definitions qualify as *essential* definitions. They do so because they articulate the formal cause of the phenomenon, i.e., the cause of their being. For example, in *Meta*. H.4 he poses the question "what is the cause of an eclipse?" We might answer that question in terms of any of the four causes, but the answer which states the *reason* the eclipse occurs states the formal cause:

> The account [of the eclipse] is the cause as form, but the account is unclear if it does not include the cause. For example, what is an eclipse? A privation of light. But if one added "…by the earth coming in between [the moon and sun]", this would be the account including the cause. (*Meta*. H.4, 1044b12-15)

Here Aristotle suggests the same definitional distinction we saw at work in the transition passage. Stating that an eclipse is a certain absence of light (in this case, belonging to the moon) certainly states something apparent about the phenomenon, and would certainly qualify as a conventional or common-sense definition of that phenomenon. And yet this account is still "unclear" (ἄδηλος) insofar as it neglects to include the cause of that phenomenon. Including an explanation of *why* the absence of light occurs gives its formal cause. This leads to the slightly odd formulation Aristotle provides: the account of the eclipse is the *formal* cause when that account provides *the* cause. This

is odd because Aristotle is in the middle of explaining the various different causal explanations we can (and cannot) give for an eclipse (yes, in terms of material, formal, and moving cause; no, in terms of final cause). But the context of his remarks here is clearly his conclusions from *Meta*. Z.17, where he also uses the same thunder example from *Post. An.* II.10 to illustrate how the question of cause and of essence are connected (*Meta*. Z.17, 1041a24-26). In Z.17, Aristotle argues for a conception of *ousia* as the cause explaining why some collection of matter *is* some particular kind of thing (e.g., why these bricks and stones are a house). In such cases, articulating the form belonging to that matter explains why the matter constitutes the particular being that it does. That gives form a particularly good claim on being the *ousia* of the house, insofar as it is the "primary cause of its being" (1041b28). Now, in instances like thunder or an eclipse, we are accounting for natural phenomena rather than for concrete individuals. But the principle, Aristotle suggests, is the same: in providing an essential definition of thunder or an eclipse, we need to pick out the right formal element by virtue of which a certain "matter" (the clouds; the moon) manifest the phenomenon in question (noise; absence of light). Because that formal element (the extinguishing of fire; the relative position of the earth) explains why the phenomenon occurs at all, it has the best claim on qualifying as the *essence* of the phenomenon in question. This is why an essential definition of the phenomenon in question must include this kind of cause, and why any definition which omits it will be "unclear" at best.

These reflections on essence and definition from *Post. An.* and *Meta*. help answer some of our lingering questions about the transition passage. With respect to (1), the distinction between conventional and causal definitions has been filled out significantly. The conventional definition is one that is "more apparent" to us and does in fact state some part of the essence of the phenomenon, yet omits the cause of the phenomenon and so fails to state any necessary connection

between the terms in the definition. The causal definition, by contrast, explains why these terms are connected by providing the cause, and so articulates a full answer to the "what is it?" question, thus qualifying as an essential definition of the phenomenon. Further, it is clear now in what sense the conventional definition is "just like a conclusion": it can be formulated as the conclusion of a syllogism in which a necessary connection between its terms is demonstrated.

How then does *Post. An.* II.10 illuminate the geometrical example from the transition passage? Most interpreters agree on the basics of the geometrical example which I have already provided above. Surprisingly, though, few (if any) have explicitly brought the *Post. An.* material to bear on the specifics of that example and shown that it can be articulated in a similar demonstration.[12] Doing so, however, can help confirm our reading of the example and thus our interpretation of the transition passage as a whole, as well as reinforce the parameters for applying these distinctions to the soul. Indeed, the geometrical example *can* be similarly articulated, although the fact that Aristotle is discussing a geometrical *construction* makes it important to parse the specifics of the demonstration correctly. A geometrical construction is not suitable to be a conclusion of a syllogism, but a clear statement of the geometrical property established *is* suitable. This is exactly why Aristotle poses his conventional definition of squaring as "The equality of an oblong rectangle to an equilateral rectangle" rather than explicitly mentioning anything about construction—so that it will serve as the right kind of conclusion for the demonstration he envisages. If the conventional definition of squaring is "constructing an equilateral rectangle equal in area to a given oblong rectangle", then a suitable conclusion for a demonstration will be

[12] Julian, for example, doesn't give an analogous demonstration for the geometrical example, despite observing that other interpreters have not provided the right kind of demonstrations for soul, or have only applied the *Post. An.* material loosely to the case of soul (Julian 2020, 336). This is perhaps because Julian interprets the equality of the two rectangles as the "conclusion" of the *process* of squaring, rather than as the conclusion of a demonstration (334). But doing so requires him to introduce a disanalogy with the thunder example which my interpretation can avoid.

"Equality belongs to the constructed equilateral rectangle *S* and the given oblong rectangle *R*."

Hence we will have the following definitions and demonstration:

Conventional definition of 'squaring':

Squaring is constructing an equilateral rectangle equal in area to a given oblong rectangle.

Conventional definition stated as a 'conclusion':

Equality belongs to the constructed equilateral rectangle *S* and the given oblong rectangle *R*.

Demonstration of the conventional definition:

Major Premise: Equality (MAJ) belongs to a constructed equilateral rectangle and a given oblong rectangle if and only if they have the following property *x* in relation to one another (MID): the side of the constructed equilateral rectangle is the mean proportional of the sides of the given oblong rectangle.[13]

Minor premise: The property *x* (MID) belongs to the two rectangles, *S* and *R* (MIN).

Conclusion: Equality (MAJ) belongs to the two rectangles, *S* and *R* (MIN).

"Why is it so?" question:

Why does equality (MAJ) belong to the two rectangles, *S* and *R* (MIN)? Explanation: because the property *x* (MID) belongs to the two rectangles, *S* and *R* (MIN).

Causal definition of 'squaring':

Squaring is constructing an equilateral rectangle equal in area to a given oblong rectangle by finding the mean proportional of the sides of the oblong rectangle and then using this mean proportional as the side of the constructed equilateral rectangle.

Here the definitions and demonstration take the same form and exhibit the same relations as in the thunder example. Granted, we have had to restate the conventional definition in a form suitable to serve as a conclusion (as Aristotle himself does). But doing so highlights how Aristotle's observations about thunder apply in exactly the same way to squaring. Again, it is the middle term of the demonstration which identifies the cause, explaining why the major term is predicated of the minor term in the conclusion (and hence in the conventional definition). Again, the terms can be posed in the form of a "Why is it so?" question, with the minor premise of the demonstration serving as the correct answer to that question. And again, it is that "same account…articulated in

[13] The relevant propositions from Euclid are Book II, Proposition 14 and Book VI, Proposition 13. In II.14, Euclid shows *that* when the two sides of a given oblong rectangle are lined up and arranged to form the diameter of a circle, the square formed on the perpendicular which is dropped from the circumference to the point where the two sides connect is equal in area to the given rectangle. But II.14 does not reveal *why* this perpendicular from the circumference is just the right length. It is only in VI.14 that we learn the cause: that this perpendicular is a mean proportional of the two sides of the given oblong rectangle. In this way, the difference between the two proposition illustrates nicely Aristotle's distinction between making clear only *that* something is the case (τὸ ὅτι), versus making clear the cause.

a different way" that provides the essential (i.e., causal) definition of squaring. That refined definition is also like a "continuous demonstration", for it includes and connects all three terms (major, minor, and middle) from the demonstration. And similarly to the thunder example, while the conventional definition does state some part of the essence of squaring (squaring *is* in fact a construction of just that sort), it is only the causal definition which includes the explanation of how and why the terms of the definition are connected, i.e., why equality must belong to the constructed equilateral rectangle and the given oblong rectangle. By doing so, it counts as an essential definition of the phenomenon in question.

The fact that the geometrical example can be analyzed in the same terms as the thunder example from *Post. An.* II.10 is a strong indication that Aristotle envisages a similar analysis for the soul. As we've seen in both examples, we must correctly identify the conventional definition of soul (which isolates only a *part*, not the whole, of the essence, and is formulated as the conclusion of a demonstration of what it is) as well as the causal definition of soul (which articulates the *whole* essence by identifying the cause and is formulated like a continuous demonstration). It is here, however, that much of the available literature falls short. Many commentators suggest that Aristotle believes the "most general account" of the soul found in *DA* II.1 (posed in the three variations above) is what Aristotle views as "like a conclusion", i.e., as the conventional definition of soul.[14] Bolton, for example, argues that the conventional definition of soul (Bolton's "nominal definition") is precisely the kind of "generic first actuality" picked out in those three variations.[15] But this is highly unlikely. As Johansen and Julian both point out, those three variations on the "most general account" of soul are all posed in terms of Aristotle's own

[14] Julian lists the following commentators who hold this position: Aquinas 1999, 119; Bolton 1978, 259; Diamond 2015, 51; Ibn-Rushd (Averroes) 2009, 121-122; Johnston 2011, 194-195; Menn 2002, 103-4; Owens 1981, 114; Philoponus 2005, 27 (225,34-226,6); Shields 2016, 182-83; Sprague 1996, 104 (all found in Julian 2020, 337 fn. 22).
[15] Keeping in mind that Bolton also identifies a fourth "definition" (Bolton 1978, 260).

theoretical apparatus (Johansen 2012, 36; Julian 2020, 337-38). In these variations, Aristotle deploys concepts such as form, matter, fulfillment, and potentiality, even going so far as to introduce new technical distinctions within these theoretical categories (such as "first" fulfillment). But that makes it extremely unlikely, if not impossible, for such accounts of the soul to serve as conventional (or "nominal") definitions of the soul, which are supposed to be "more apparent", or more familiar to us, independent of the particularities of Aristotle's own theory.[16] Johansen argues persuasively that the conventional definition (which he also refers to as a "nominal" definition) is more likely to be one expressing some suitably general sentiment about the soul held by Aristotle's predecessors (Johansen 2012, 36-37). This is especially likely to be true given it is Aristotle's typical strategy to begin his investigations with the "received opinions" (*endoxa*) about a topic, and given the already-noted parallel between the transition passage and *Phys.* I.1's methodological recommendations.[17]

What conception of the soul, then, would be an appropriate antecedent? Pointing to the close connection between soul and life in Plato and Homer especially, Johansen suggests that the antecedent conventional conception of soul is: the cause of life in natural bodies (Johansen 2012, 37-38).[18] This interpretation is well-supported by the text. In the opening lines of *DA*, Aristotle began by positing that the soul was in some way a principle (ἀρχή) of living things (*DA* I.1, 402a4-

[16] Unlike Bolton and Johansen, I avoid the term "nominal" to describe these sorts of definitions. This is because Aristotle clearly distinguishes definitions that are "like conclusions" from mere nominal definitions in *Post. An.* II.10. As Charles suggests, the two types of definitions have different referents: nominal definitions refer exclusively to the signification of particular words, while definitions that are "like conclusions" refers to the phenomena themselves (Charles 2000, 45). There is no evidence Aristotle is concerned with nominal definitions in this part of the *DA*. As Johansen himself argues, Aristotle believes the soul exists and that the conventional definition of soul is some part of its essence or a necessary consequence of it (Johansen 2012, 35). The referent of the conventional definition is the soul itself, not the meaning of the word.

[17] Cf. again Kirkland 2014 on the relationship between studying *endoxa* and the *Phys.* I.1 methodological material.

[18] Aquinas (1999, 136-37) and Julian (2020, 341-42) also take the conventional definition this way. Johansen forestalls a possible objection to this proposal, namely, that on this account the conventional definition is already causal (where this was supposed to be reserved for the causal definition). After all, it is perfectly likely that some conventional definitions will identify something as a cause. The point is that this conventional definition still does not show *how* and *why* soul causes life, which (I will show) Aristotle's causal definitions do. Cf. Johansen 2012, 39-40).

7). In *DA* I.2, Aristotle observes that his predecessors saw motion and perception as the most salient markers for the presence of soul and claimed that the soul is what causes such activities (403b25-31).[19] Which motions or activities they associated with soul depended on what they saw as the "distinctive mark of life" (τοῦ ζῆν ὅρον; 404a9), as, e.g., breathing was for Democritus and Leucippus. So "the cause of life in natural bodies" broadly captures how those predecessors approached the soul.[20]

But the strongest evidence for what Aristotle considers to be the common and causal definitions of soul can be found in what immediately follows the transition passage, where Aristotle's remarks on the homonymy of life and draws its implications for understanding the soul.

> Taking up a principle for the inquiry, we say that the ensouled is distinguished from the soulless by living. But life is spoken of in many ways, and if any one of these alone is present, we say it lives: intellect, perception, motion and rest with respect to place, and further the motion with respect to nutrition, i.e., both diminution and growth. Therefore, also all plants seem to live, for it is apparent that they have in themselves such a capacity and principle, on account of which they take their growth and diminution in opposite directions…This [capacity for nutrition] is capable of being separate from the others, but the others are incapable of being separate from this one in mortal beings. This is clear in the case of plants, for no other capacity of soul belongs to them. Life then belongs to living things on account of this principle [i.e., nutritive soul], but the animal [lives] primarily on account of perception, for there are also those [animals] that neither move nor change place, but do have perception; these we call "animals", not just "alive". (*DA* II.2, 413a20-b4)

Aristotle begins by saying that he will take the idea that "the ensouled is distinguished from the soulless by living" as a principle for his inquiry. The principle harkens back to his argument in *DA* II.1 regarding the soul as substance and form, and thus as cause of life in the living body. "Of natural bodies, some have life, while some do not": it is the presence of soul which accounts for this difference. What is being taken as a principle is thus the idea that soul is the cause of life. But

[19] I thank Ron Polansky for reminding me about Aristotle's discussion of these topics in *DA* I.2.
[20] Aristotle himself occasionally describes the function of the soul in this broad way, too: e.g., *DA* II.4, 415b12-14; *EE* II.1, 1219a23-25. Julian shows how this conception of the soul also plays an important role in Aristotle's own argumentation in *DA* II.1 (Julian 2020, 331-32).

he then goes on to make a series of crucial moves which reveal how and why exactly the soul can serve as such a cause.

The basis of this argument is Aristotle's observation regarding the homonymous meanings of "life". Similar to other central philosophical concepts such as "being", "life" is "spoken of in many ways" (πλεοναχῶς...λεγομένου). As he argues in an important passage from the *Topics*, "life seems not to be spoken of according to one form, but rather belongs to animals and to plants in different ways" (*Top*. VI.10, 148a23-31).[21] In the *DA* II.2 passage, he distinguishes plants and animals according to the different features by virtue of which we ascribe life to each: for plants, by virtue of nutrition alone; for animals, by virtue "primarily" of perception. He then traces these different forms of life to their different causes (and note throughout the causal use of the preposition διά with the genitive and accusative). He begins with plants, stating that the *reason* plants are alive (διὸ at 413a25; γὰρ at a26) is that they have in themselves the "power and principle" (δύναμιν καὶ ἀρχήν) of nutritive activity, *on account of which* (δι' ἧς) they grow, diminish, and are continuously nourished, i.e., live a nutritive life (*DA* II.2, 413a25-28). The capacity for nutrition is thus a sufficient cause to explain the kind of life that plants live. In the previous chapter Aristotle had identified nutrition as the feature which distinguishes living from non-living natural bodies (*DA* II.1, 412a11-15), and here in II.2 he now alludes to the reason why nutrition is fundamental: this capacity is a precondition for all other life capacities, which are "incapable of being separate" from nutrition (*DA* II.2, 413a31-32). Being the precondition for any other capacity (and thus any other kind of mortal life), Aristotle concludes that "life then belongs to living things *on account of* this principle" (δὶα τὴν ἀρχὴν ταύτην) (413b1-2). But he immediately complicates the picture by insisting that the principle of *animal* life is in fact different: "Life then

[21] For fuller discussion of the homonymy of life, cf. Shields 1999, Ch. 7.

belongs to living things *on account of* this principle [i.e., nutritive soul] (διὰ τὴν ἀρχὴν ταύτην), but the animal [lives] *primarily on account of* perception (διὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν πρώτως)…" (*DA* II.2, 413b1-2). While nutrition is the precondition of all mortal life, and plant life is defined by reference to nutrition alone, animal life is defined particularly by reference to perception.[22] Because living an animal life essentially involves perception, not just nutrition, the principle which is primarily responsible for this specifically *animal* form of life is the perceptive capacity, not the nutritive. If the various kinds of life differ essentially from one another, then the kinds of principles giving rise to those different forms of life must also differ accordingly.

This passage strongly suggests how Aristotle conceives both the conventional and the causal definitions of the soul. The conventional definition articulates the soul as the cause of life, while the causal definition must explain *how* and *why* the soul causes life. It does so by picking out the right kind of functional capacity by virtue of which something lives its specific way of life. But this is different for different kinds of ensouled beings. The causal analysis which works for the life of plants doesn't adequately capture the life of animals. For plants, life is just nutritive activity; the cause of nutritive life is the nutritive capacity; therefore, the cause of life for plants is the nutritive capacity. For animals, life is also (and primarily) perceptive activity; the cause of a perceptive life is the perceptive capacity; therefore, the cause of life for animals is the perceptive capacity. On account of the essential difference between plant and animal life, a different causal principle is needed to ground the different form of life for each. But this entails that the definition of soul will be different for plants and for animals. In other words, while there is one conventional

[22] This essential difference between plants and animals is constantly reiterated throughout the corpus; cf. *inter alia De sensu* 1, 436a10-12; *PN* 467b23-25; *GA* I.23, 731b4-5; II.1, 732a11-13; II.3, 736a30-31; II.5, 741a9-13; V.1, 778b32-779a2. For this reason, "'animal' is defined by perception" (*PA* III.4, 666a34; cp. *DA* III.13, 435b15-17, *PN* 469b3-6, *De somno* 454b24-27).

definition of the soul, we need *multiple* causal definitions to account for essentially different forms of life.

Aristotle confirms this directly after the passage quoted above. First, he specifies that the primary form of perception is touch, which can exist independently of the other senses (as it does in sessile animals), just as nutrition can exist independently of perception (as it does in plants) (*DA* II.2, 413b4-10). Then he concludes that the essential differences he has sketched between forms of life directly entail that the soul must be defined by reference to each of the *specific* capacities:

> For now let just this much be said: that the soul is the principle of those things mentioned [i.e., the different forms of life] *and is defined by the following* (καὶ τούτοις ὥρισται): by nutrition, by perception, by thought, and by motion. (*DA* II.2, 413b11-13; my emphasis).[23]

Johansen (2012, 53 fn. 14) is right to emphasize that ὥρισται in ln. 12 means "defined" rather than merely "determined" or "delimited", as, e.g., Shields and Bolton respectively translate the term (Shields 2016 *ad loc.*; Bolton 1978, 267). As Aristotle has already claimed (413b1-4), the reason why we call certain sessile living things "animals" rather than "plants" (and, by extension, why we define them as such) is that they lead different forms of life and thus require essentially different life capacities than plants. Despite some *prima facie* similarities, barnacles live a fundamentally different kind of life than pondweeds do. But this requires that the kinds of soul which are the principles of these distinct forms of life must themselves vary accordingly, and thus must be *defined* by reference to the specific capacities which differentiate those forms. And similarly for the essential differences which obtain between different forms of animal life: as he remarks shortly after the passage above, "Further, some of the animals possess all of these [capacities], others

[23] I follow Johansen in identifying two distinct referents for τούτων and for τούτοις in ln. 12 (cf. Johansen 2012, 53 fn. 15). However, I locate a slightly different referent for τῶν εἰρημένων τούτων than Johansen does. Johansen thinks it refers to the different *living things*. But given that the conventional and causal definitions concern the soul as a cause of life, it makes more sense for τῶν εἰρημένων τούτων to refer to the different *forms of life* being picked out at 413b1-2. Julian likewise identifies these as the appropriate referent (Julian 2020, 342).

possess some of them, and yet others possess only one of them (and this is what makes a specific difference among animals)" (*DA* II.2, 413b32-414a1). Animals differ precisely according to their differing capacities: these differences in capacity establish the essential differences (*diaphora*) between the genera and species of animals.

In other words, what "soul" means, and hence how soul is defined, is specific to the form of life which belongs to the specific ensouled being under consideration. The homonymous meanings of life require correspondingly homonymous meanings for soul. For plants, soul is the simply the nutritive capacity. For animals, soul is (primarily) the perceptive capacity, over and above the bare nutritive capacity. For human beings, it seems, the soul is the intellective capacity over and above the perceptive and nutritive capacities.[24] In each case, displaying the relevant functional capacity or capacities which are necessary for each specific form of life fills out the conventional definition of soul. The soul is the cause of life—but how? Plants lead a nutritive life, so the cause of life for plants is the nutritive capacity. Animals lead a perceptive life, so the cause of life for animals is (primarily) the perceptive capacity. Human beings lead an intellective life, so the cause of life for human beings is the intellective capacity. In each instance, we fill out the idea that the soul causes life by picking out the right functional capacity necessary for each specific form of life, thus showing *how* the soul can operate as the cause of life for each specific form.

4: Conclusion – The causal definitions of the soul

Now we are in the position to correctly identify both the conventional and the causal definitions of soul, and to confirm this interpretation by providing the same logical analysis for soul as we did for thunder and squaring. For soul, however, we must keep in mind that the driving assumption behind the demonstration is the homonymy of life: its multiple, essentially different

[24] In most contexts Aristotle identifies intellect as the distinguishing feature of human life, in contrast to plant and animal life (e.g., *NE* X.7 1178a2-8).

meanings. As such, the analysis will be more complex, as here multiple different causal middle terms are involved (cf. Johansen 2012, 40-41).[25] Nevertheless, exactly the same structural relations hold between the different terms in the definitions and demonstration:

Conventional definition of 'soul':

Soul is the cause of life in natural bodies.

Demonstration of the conventional definition:

Major premise: For all plants, the capacity for nutrition (MID) is the cause of life (MAJ); for all animals, the capacity for perception (MID) is the cause of life (MAJ); for all human beings, the capacity for thinking (MID) is the cause of life (MAJ).

Minor Premise: For all plants, soul (MIN) is the capacity for nutrition (MID); for all animals, soul (MIN) is the capacity for perception (MID); for all human beings, soul (MIN) is the capacity for thinking (MID).

Conclusion: soul (MIN) is the cause of life (MAJ) for each of these kinds of natural bodies.

Or, to simplify the presentation slightly:

Major premise: The various capacities (MID) are the causes of life (MAJ) in each kind of living body.

Minor premise: The soul (MIN) just is these various capacities (MID).

Conclusion: Soul (MIN) is the cause of life (MAJ) in each kind of living body.

"Why is it so?" question:

Why is soul (MIN) the cause of life in natural bodies (MAJ)? Explanation: because the soul (MIN) is the various life capacities (MID).

Causal definition(s) of 'soul':

In plants, soul is the cause of life by virtue of being the nutritive capacity; in animals, soul is the cause of life by virtue of being the perceptive capacity; in human beings, soul is the cause of life by virtue of being the intellective capacity.

Or, to simplify the presentation slightly:

In plants, soul is the nutritive capacity; in animals, soul is the perceptive capacity; in human beings, soul is the intellective capacity.

Or, to give the simplest gloss possible:

Soul just is the various life capacities in natural bodies.

In exactly the same way as the thunder and squaring examples, we see here how the middle term of the demonstration operates as the link between the major term and the minor term in the conclusion, and so explains why the conventional definition correctly stipulates the soul as the

[25] Julian simply asserts this cannot possibly be correct, given the disanalogy with thunder and squaring that it introduces (Julian 2020, 337). But why not? Aristotle nowhere legislates against this possibility. As I've shown, Aristotle argues in II.2 that multiple causal factors are involved, and Aristotle confirms this in II.3 when he says that explaining the multiple different capacities provides the "most appropriate" account of the soul (*DA* II.3, 415a12-13). Different middle terms for each type of soul are exactly what we should expect if (as I've argued) "life" and "soul" are homonyms.

cause of life. However, unlike the thunder and squaring example, that middle term is in fact multiple, for the middle term explaining how the soul is the cause of life must be specific to the specific form of life, which differs between different living beings. Just as with thunder and squaring, it is the minor premise of the demonstration that serves as the correct answer to the "Why is it so?" question. And finally, it is that "same account…articulated in a different way" that now provides us with the *multiple* causal definitions of soul: for plants, soul is the nutritive capacity; for animals, soul is (primarily) the perceptive capacity; for human beings, soul is the intellective capacity. In their fullest and most complete articulation, these definitions explicitly include all three terms from the demonstration, and so are like the "continuous demonstration" itself, just as we saw with thunder and squaring. While those causal definitions are somewhat cumbersome, they can be boiled down to the following basic idea: the soul just is whatever functional capacity or capacities are necessary for living the specific form of life proper to a given living body.[26] In this way, the conventional definition does state some part of the essence of soul (soul is in fact the cause of life for any given living body), but it is only the causal definitions which fully explain how and why the terms of that definition are correctly linked in each case. As such, it provides three distinct essential (i.e., causal) definitions of the soul, articulated in terms of the individual life capacities (as we saw Aristotle stipulate they must at *DA* II.2, 413b11-13). Further, my way of analyzing the demonstration improves significantly upon Johansen's presentation. Johansen neglects to provide the relevant syllogisms showing the soul as the cause of life, and the syllogisms he uses as models for understanding the soul lack the right form, insofar as they fail to state a

[26] I am setting aside several important problems here concerning the unity of these different capacities within a single soul or a single type of soul. Johnston 2011 argues persuasively that Aristotle's metaphysical commitments concerning the unity of form preclude the soul from being just a collection of capacities. Johansen 2012, Ch. 3 suggests that the key to understanding the soul's "internal unity" is the figure-soul analogy in *DA* II.3 and the notion that the lower capacities are "potentially present" within the higher (414b20-32). Frey 2015 argues along similar lines that Aristotle's notion of "potential presence" explains the unity of the soul. My position that the soul is nothing over and above the different capacities is compatible with these interpretations of the soul's unity.

conventional definition as their conclusion (cf. Johansen 2012, 40-46).[27] My presentation spells out the demonstration explicitly and shows how the conventional definition of soul can appear as the conclusion, as Aristotle asserts it must.

Finally, my interpretation best fits the requirements set by the *Post. An.* and *Meta*. material that form the background of Aristotle's claims about the definition of soul in *DA* II.2. In *Post. An*. II.10, we saw Aristotle argue that an essential definition makes clear "why something exists", and so must articulate the cause. In *Meta*. Z.17 and H.4, Aristotle echoes that point, now explaining what kind of cause a definition must articulate and why it must do so. The formal cause is the cause of *x* being what it is, and so articulating this cause is the only way to fully express what *x* is. It is clear from *Meta*. Z.17 that Aristotle intends this style of causal explanation to apply to living things such as human beings (1041a20-21; a32-b2; b6-7). And it is also abundantly clear from *DA* II that Aristotle envisages the soul as the form of living things, and thus as the cause of their being (cf. e.g. *DA* II.4, 415b8-14). When Aristotle searches for an appropriate definition for the soul, one which includes *how* and *why* the soul causes life, *a fortiori* he is also searching for the definition which will explain how the soul causes *being*, i.e., one that expresses the formal cause. But this strongly indicates that the correct level of causal explanation for the definition of soul should be found at the level of the individual kinds of life and being that are caused, i.e., at the level of plant

[27] Instead of providing the demonstrations which would show the conventional definition as the conclusion, Johansen shifts focus significantly by discussing how Aristotle expands his account from *Post An.* II.10 to incorporate the other kinds of causation (beyond formal causation) in II.11. In II.11, Aristotle shows how demonstrations similar to his thunder example in II.10 may be provided in instances of efficient, final, and material causation, and how in each case the middle term likewise identifies the cause. Now, Aristotle does ultimately identify formal, final, and efficient causation in natural objects (*Phys*. II.7) and emphasizes later in *DA* that the soul operates as all these causes on different registers (*DA* II.4, 415b8-14). But it is far from clear that Aristotle has these other kinds of causation in mind when distinguishing conventional and causal definitions of the soul in *DA* II.2. The analogy with squaring in *DA* II.2 brings this out clearly: here Aristotle insists on including a certain kind of cause *in the definition* (ὁριστικὸν λόγον) which states, e.g., what squaring is (i.e., the essence). The relevant cause to include is a formal cause; it would be otiose to include information about the *purpose* or the *mechanics* of squaring to this end. The clearest indication that Johansen's proposal steers us off course is the simple fact that the other demonstrations he provides as models have nothing to do with definitions, and so lack a conventional definition as their conclusion.

life, animal life, and human life. An account which failed to express how exactly the soul causes life and being *for a plant specifically* would fail to qualify as causal-explanatory in the way that *Post. An.* and *Meta*. stipulate. Given that the transition from *DA* II.1 to II.2 calls for a definition of soul that includes the cause, the background discussions of essence, cause, and definition in *Post. An.* and *Meta*. tell us that we should expect to find the right kind of causal definitions at *this* level. And, as I have shown, that is exactly what Aristotle goes on to argue for immediately thereafter. Understanding the soul as the cause of life, and thus being, of ensouled things should naturally lead us to seek for the appropriate kind of causal definitions of the soul at the level of the individual kinds themselves. Given that these individual kinds differ essentially, so too will the causal definitions of the soul.

So far I've shown how Aristotle argues for this position in *DA* II.1-2. While space will not allow a full treatment of *DA* II.3, allow me to conclude by briefly noting how this chapter strongly confirms my reading. Here Aristotle argues that the various types of soul (plant soul, animal soul, human soul) are ordered in a series according to the implications of existence between the different capacities of soul (the nutritive capacity, the perceptive capacity, the intellective capacity). He likens the succession of the types of soul to the succession of plane rectilinear figures (*DA* II.3, 414b20-33), claiming that "neither…is there 'figure' apart from the triangle and those following it, nor…is there 'soul' apart from those mentioned". As scholars have noted, this claim about serial ordering rules out the possibility that the various types of soul are members of a single logical genus: for Aristotle, items which are ordered in a series in this way do not comprise a genus.[28] While the reasons for this are outside the scope of this paper, the implication is clear: "soul" is not a genus of which the nutritive soul, perceptive soul, and intellective soul are species. That fact

[28] Cf. Ward 1996 and Lloyd 1962, in particular.

directly precludes any univocal definition of the soul whatsoever, and so confirms my claim that soul is a homonymous concept.[29] While a single "common account" (λόγος κοινός) of the soul *is* possible (414b22-25, and here Aristotle is likely thinking of those three variations on the "most common account" from *DA* II.1), such an account cannot qualify as a *definition* of the soul. This is why he says it would be "ridiculous" (γελοῖον) to content ourselves with that common account while neglecting the accounts proper to each kind of soul (414b25-28). Aristotle drives the point home forcefully at the end of the chapter, where he writes: "It is clear, then, that the account of each of these [specific capacities] is also the most appropriate [account] of the soul" (*DA* II.3, 415a12-13). The "most appropriate" (οἰκειότατος) answer to the question "what is soul?" will not provide a single common account (note the plural τούτων at 415a12). Rather, the "most appropriate" answer will need to articulate the multiple different functional capacities which are the various principles of each form of life—exactly as Aristotle proceeds to do throughout the rest of the *DA*. As we've seen, without this level of specificity, the account of the soul will fail to make clear how exactly the soul causes life in each case, and so will fail to articulate an essential definition.[30]

[29] I leave aside here the important question of whether "soul" might enjoy a different type of conceptual unity than univocity (*pros hen*, analogical, or otherwise). Ward 1996 and Diamond 2015, Ch. 1 discuss various ways that question has been approached.

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