

Why the View of Intellect in *De Anima* I 4 Isn't Aristotle's Own

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Abstract:

In *De Anima* I 4, Aristotle describes the intellect (*nous*) as a sort of substance, separate and incorruptible. Myles Burnyeat and Lloyd Gerson take this as proof that, for Aristotle, the intellect is a separate eternal entity, not a power belonging to individual humans. Against this reading, I show that this passage does not express Aristotle's own views, but dialectically examines a reputable position (*endoxon*) about the intellect that seems to show that it can be subject to change. The passage's argument for the indestructibility of intellect via an analogy to perception does not fit with Aristotle's own views. Aristotle thinks that perception operates via bodily organs, but denies this of understanding. He also requires separability from the body for indestructibility, something this analogy rules out. However, Aristotle's Platonist interlocutors may well endorse such an argument. My dialectical interpretation best resolves the interpretative difficulties and explains its place in the larger context, Aristotle's discussion of Platonist views on the soul. Aristotle presents a challenge to his insistence that the soul is subject to change, dialectically resolves that challenge, and then ends by reserving the right to give a different account of the intellect.

Keywords: Aristotle, soul, intellect, endoxa, dialectic, separability, Platonism,

Protrepticus, Heraclides of Pontus

1. Introduction

The status of *nous* in Aristotle's *De Anima* (*DA*) has been controversial from antiquity onwards. Is it simply a power of the human soul, albeit one that may be able to function without the body (I will call this the Human Intellect view)? Is it a unitary extra-bodily intelligence, human in species, which individual human beings temporarily participate in (I will call this the Platonist Intellect view)? Is it the first unmoved mover of *Metaphysics* Λ (I will call this the Divine Intellect view)? While discussion usually

focuses on *DA* III 5, several recent commentators, including Myles Burnyeat and Lloyd Gerson, have pointed to a passage from *I* 4 as evidence against the Human Intellect view. In their view, Aristotle claims there that the intellect is a sort of substance, separate from the human being, and is incorruptible in a way that the individual human is not. Such a reading would provide support for these Divine Intellect and Platonist Intellect interpretations and count against the Human Intellect view on which *nous* is a power of the individual human soul.

By closely examining this passage and its context, I will show that we can interpret it much more satisfactorily if we read it not as expressing Aristotle's own views, but as dialectically examining a reputable position about the intellect which seems to show that it can be subject to change. The passage's argument for the indestructibility of intellect via an analogy to perception does not fit with Aristotle's own views. Aristotle thinks that perception operates via bodily organs, but denies this of understanding. He also requires separability from the body for indestructibility, something this analogy rules out. However, Aristotle's Platonist interlocutors may well endorse such an argument.

My dialectical interpretation best resolves the interpretative difficulties of this passage and explains its place within the chapter. Aristotle presents a challenge to his insistence that the soul is not subject to change. He presents his interlocutors' view of the intellect and shows its relevant implications for the question of whether the soul is subject to change. Then, in the final sentence of the passage, he reserves for himself the right to give a different account of the intellect. Thus the passage does not support the Platonist or Divine Intellect view over the Human Intellect one.

2. Our Passage

Let us start by considering the relevant passage in full:

But the intellect (*nous*) seems to come to be within us as a sort of substance (*ousia*), and a substance not subject to destruction (*ou phtheiresthai*). For, if anything could destroy it, it would be the dulling of age. As things are, what happens is doubtless just like what happens to the sense organs. For if an old man could procure an eye of the right sort, he would see just as well as a young man. Hence old age is not due to the soul's being affected in a certain way (*ti peponthenai*), but to the thing [*sc.* the body] in which the soul resides being affected, just as in the case of drunkenness and disease. In like manner, then, understanding (*to noein*) and contemplation (*to theorein*) decline because something else within is destroyed, while in itself it [*sc.* the intellect] is unaffected (*apathes*).

But thinking (*to dianoesthai*) and loving or hating are not affections of that [*sc.* the intellect], but of this thing [*sc.* the body] having that, insofar as it has that. Hence also, when this [*sc.* the body] perishes there is neither remembering nor loving. For these did not belong to that [*sc.* the intellect], but to the common thing [*sc.* the soul-body composite], which has now perished.

But maybe the intellect is something more divine (*theioteron*) and unaffected.

That the soul is not such as to be subject to change (*kineisthai*) is therefore clear from these things. (*DA* I 4, 408b18-31, my translation)

3. Context

How should we interpret Aristotle's reasoning here? For proponents of the Divine Intellect or Platonic Intellect interpretations, the passage is a statement of Aristotle's own views on the intellect. For example, Myles Burnyeat claims that this entire passage straightforwardly offers support for a number of the key claims of the Divine Intellect interpretation:

[This passage] implies a) that *nous*, unlike ordinary thought, is divine and immortal, (b) that it can come to reside *in* a human being as itself an extra kind of substance, distinct from the mortal substance it resides in, and (c) that it remains completely unaffected by the death of its temporary human vehicle. (Burnyeat 2008, 30-32; cf. Gerson 2004)

However, the opening sentence of the passage merely claims that the intellect seems (*eoike*) to be a sort of substance within us. Throughout book one Aristotle repeatedly uses *eoike* plus an infinitive or similar verbal constructions to introduce an opinion of dialectical significance.¹ *DA* I 1, 403a16-17 offers a clear example of

¹ Aristotle does use *estin* at other points in this passage, but on my interpretation the entire passage is working out a dialectical opinion, so that these positive assertions are still implicitly

Aristotle introducing a plausible opinion that he does not commit himself to. Aristotle states that “it seems that all the affections of the soul are with body,” a claim that offers no room for exceptions. This is a plausible opinion about the soul and Aristotle goes on to work from it. However, Aristotle has just discussed the case of understanding and questioned whether it is, in fact, done with the body or is, rather, proper to the soul. Thus in presenting this claim as plausible Aristotle has obviously not committed himself to its truth, given that he has just explicitly left room for a possible exception to it. Similarly, we should not immediately take the opening claim in our passage to be Aristotle’s own view. The opinions Aristotle introduces in this way are plausible claims about the soul, claims that are commonly held, held by the wise, or, as in this case, held by Aristotle’s interlocutors: they are *endoxa*.² We cannot, however, assume that whenever Aristotle says that something seems to be the case he is decisively committing himself to that claim.

Indeed, evidence from Aristotle’s *Protrepticus* suggests that he was familiar with this view of the intellect, but that it was not his own. Iamblichus quotes a fragment in which the speaker states that:

nothing divine (*theion*) or happy (*makarion*) belongs to humans apart from just that one thing worth taking seriously, as much insight (*phronêsis*) and intellect (*nous*) as is in us for, of what’s ours, this alone seems to be immortal (*athanaton*), and this alone divine. And by being able to share in such a capacity, our way of life, although by nature unfortunate and difficult, is yet so gracefully managed that, in comparison with the other animals, a human seems to be a god. For ‘intellect is the god in us’ – whether it was Hermetimus or Anaxagoras who said so – and ‘the mortal phase has a part of some god.’ (Iamblichus, *Protrepticus*, VIII 48.9-21, trans. Hutchinson and Johnson 2017, with slight modifications)

This view of intellect is strikingly similar to I 4’s. We get the idea that *nous* alone is the immortal and divine part of us and *nous* is present in us in a special way, as the divine

qualified.

² For discussion of the role of *endoxa* for Aristotle see Owen 1961; 1968; Irwin 1988; Bolton 1990; Smith 1997; Dorothea Frede 2012.

within the animal and mortal. This fits well with I 4's talk of *nous* entering into us and not being subject to destruction (which is, of course, a way of being *athanaton*, deathless or immortal).

There is, however, good reason to think this speech is not meant to express Aristotle's own views. Hutchinson and Johnson have argued that in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* there are two characters, Heraclides of Pontus and Aristotle himself, who each respond to Isocrates' criticisms of theoretical philosophy (2017). Heraclides was a member of the Platonic Academy with an enthusiasm for Pythagorean philosophy and a gloomy view of embodied life, one which this speech expresses. There is good internal evidence for thinking that this speech does not express Aristotle's own views (cf. Hutchinson and Johnson 2017, 43). For example, the speech begins by insisting that

It is right to say that the human creature is nothing and that nothing is stable in human affairs...What is long-lasting in human affairs, what is of long standing? It is actually owing to our weakness, I think, and the shortness of our lifetime, that these appear to be much of anything. (Iamblichus, *Protrepticus*, ch. VIII 47.8; 47.18-21, trans. Hutchinson and Johnson)

Aristotle himself does not express these pessimistic themes anywhere else and they are inconsistent with the real positive value he attributes to human political activities and external goods. The speaker's view actively denigrates anything that is not divine. While such a position is not Aristotle's, it fits well with the Pythagorean and Platonic perspectives of someone like Heraclides. If Aristotle presented such a view in the *Protrepticus* (without endorsing it), he might well bring it up as an *endoxon* in the *DA*. On my reading, Aristotle is arguing that even for Pythagoreans or Platonists who emphasize the divine and external character of *nous*, the soul itself need not be moved.

The broader context of this passage supports my endoxic reading. Aristotle is in the midst of an extended series of arguments against the idea that the soul is subject to change. The larger section within which our passage is embedded, 408a34-b31,

begins by bringing forward new, more plausible reasons one might have for thinking that the soul is subject to change. Aristotle's interlocutors (Heraclides or other Platonists and Pythagoreans) appeal to the fact that emotions, perceptions, and thoughts are often attributed to the soul. All these things, on their view, are motions. Since the soul seems to be the subject of these activities and affections and these are motions, we should think that the soul is subject to change. Aristotle argues against this conclusion but does so while still accepting almost all of his interlocutors' premises. He allows, for the sake of argument, that being glad and thinking and all the other activities attributed to soul are motions, that each of them involves being moved, and that in each case being moved will be due to the soul. Aristotle explicitly concedes that to be angry, then, will be a certain movement of the heart and thinking will likewise be a certain movement of the heart or some other organ.

Aristotle here concedes two things that his own theory of the soul denies: that all these activities are motions and that there is some bodily organ for every activity (*DA*, I 4, 408a34-b11 Cf. *DA* II 5; III 4). Even with these concessions Aristotle thinks he can show the falsity of the claim that the soul is moved. Aristotle claims that the movements the Platonists posit do not take place in the soul. Instead, sometimes they terminate in the soul after coming from the body, as in perception, where motions in the sense-organs terminate in the soul. Sometimes they originate from the soul but occur in the body, as memory begins from the soul and issues in movements in the sense-organs. The soul will be a source and terminus of motion, but the movements in question will always take place in the body. Thus the entire activity should be ascribed, not to the soul, but to the composite human being, working through both body and soul. Here Aristotle famously claims that saying that the soul is angry is like saying that the soul weaves or builds; it is not entirely wrong, but it is better and more

accurate to say that the human being pities, learns, or thinks in virtue of the soul.³

On my reading, the *de* introducing our passage is best read as adversative. Aristotle is signaling that he is now going to consider a rejoinder: the idea that the intellect exists as a separate substance.⁴ Aristotle is aware that this reputable opinion might undermine his contention that the soul is not subject to change. The problematic nature of this claim for Aristotle can be seen if we consider what I take to be the implicit train of reasoning. Since, the Platonist or Pythagorean says, the intellect is acknowledged to be a separate substance, it must also be the sort of thing that is the subject of activities and affections. Common usage regularly attributes psychological activities such as thinking and loving to the soul (or the intellect, if the intellect and soul are not distinct), so there is good reason to think that these activities properly belong to the intellect or soul. Thus, we should take the intellect or soul to be the proper subject of all these psychological activities. This, then, means that the motions or changes that are proper to these activities will also belong to it. Thus the intellect or soul would be subject to change.

4. Intellect and Old Age

The rest of this passage shows Aristotle working to resist this chain of reasoning while conceding the reputable opinion that is its starting point. The next sentence is introduced by *gar*, suggesting that we are about to get an explanation for the claim of the preceding sentence, some reason to think that it is true. The argument begins by assuming that if anything could destroy the intellect, it would be the feebleness of old age. But the relation of old age to the intellect is the same as in the

³ *DA*, I 4, 408b11-18. I do not take *tēi psuchēi* in 408b15 to be an instrumental dative, but something more like a dative of agency or dative of first cause. In this I agree with Polansky 2007, 113.

⁴ Divine and Platonic Intellect interpreters take the *de* in this opening sentence to signal a contrast between what is true of the intellect and what is true of the soul e.g. Burnyeat's translation: "It would seem the *intellect*, on the other hand, comes to reside in us as a kind of substance, and one not subject to destruction." (2008, 31)

case of the sense-organs. If an old man had an eye of the right sort, he could see just like a young man. His psychic power of sight is unimpaired, it is only his bodily tool that is impaired. Aging and decline come about not by the soul being affected, but by the body that contains the soul being affected, just as drunkenness and sickness affect one's activities not by harming the soul, but by affecting the body. Thus understanding and contemplation pass away because something else within is destroyed. Intellect in itself is unaffected. Since old age was the most plausible candidate for destroying the intellect and it does not destroy the intellect, the intellect is indestructible in itself (*DA*, I 4, 408b18-25. Cf. *Republic* X 610a-611e).

Several features of this passage suggest that Aristotle is putting forward dialectical considerations of some kind, not trying to put forward his own thesis about the intellect supported by an argument in his own person. The argument that is supposed to support the claim that the intellect is indestructible gives us no greater reason to think that the intellect is indestructible than to think that the sense powers are indestructible, as commentators have repeatedly noticed.⁵ Aristotle clearly thinks that the sensitive soul of an animal ceases to be with the destruction of its body and thus considerations in favor of the indestructibility of the intellect that rely on a comparison to the senses cannot, for him, be decisive.⁶

⁵ E.g. Hicks and the commentators he cites (Hicks 1907, 277-8), Hamlyn 1993. Christopher Shields also notes this and tentatively suggests an ad hominem interpretation along the lines of the one I am presenting (2016, 145-146)

⁶ Further, if this passage is simply presenting Aristotle's own positive views on the intellect the passage would not fit into the immediate context, Aristotle's discussion of whether the soul is subject to change, or, more generally, into the dialectical examination of views on the soul that Aristotle is engaged in in *DA* I 2-5. It is also worth noting that there are no other passages in the *DA* in which Aristotle describes intellect as some sort of substance which enters into us, casting further doubt on whether this is a position which he himself holds. Although Burnyeat claims that this is part of the substance of III 4-5, he would concede that no similar phrase occurs there (at most, only one of the two intellects described in III 5 could be said to come in from the outside). Aristotle says in the *Generation of Animals* that "intellect alone comes in from outside and is divine," (II 3, 736b27-9) but despite this superficial similarity in wording, the embryological issues which prompt this claim are different from the issues of the *DA* and thus the passage is not relevant for this debate, as Burnyeat, W.D. Ross, and Victor Caston agree (Burnyeat 2008, 49, fn. 31).

On my interpretation, Aristotle is responding to a reputable opinion that he himself does not fully endorse. He gives some evidence in favor of this position, by dealing with one significant objection to it, the idea that the intellect may be destroyed by old age since its activities decline in old age. Aristotle offers a response by making an analogy to perception. Just as we think that the activities of the sense-powers are affected by the condition of the body, but the sense-powers themselves are not, so we should think that the activities of the intellect can be affected by the condition of the body, but the intellect itself is not. On my reading, the decay in intellectual activity is to be explained by the decay of the relevant bodily part, not by the decay of the intellect itself. When the body is drunk or diseased, the activities of the soul are impaired, but the soul is not harmed. Understanding and contemplation fade away when something else within, i.e. whatever serves as the bodily organ of thought, is destroyed, but the intellect itself is not destroyed. Any case of an observed decline or impairment of intellectual activity can be explained by the impairment of the relevant bodily part, leaving the intellect untouched.

This reading implies that understanding and contemplation properly belong to the human being composed of body and soul, not the soul alone, fitting with claims that Aristotle offers in the next paragraph. They are activities that are dependent on both the body and the soul and thus, like seeing, are affections of the composite, not of the intellect alone. Therefore, even on this conception of the intellect, it is not the proper subject of psychological activities and is not subject to change. Now this argument for the indestructibility of the intellect is one that Aristotle himself would not accept, since it relies on a parallel between the senses and the intellect that Aristotle rejects in *DA* III 4.⁷

⁷ For the argument of III 4 see Cohoe 2013; cf. Thomas Aquinas *Sentencia Libri De Anima* 1,

For his interlocutors, this reading employs may be less problematic. The Platonists may hold that it is the same indestructible soul that is the proper subject of both sensation and intellectual activities. *Theaetetus* 184-186, for example, presents the sense organs as instruments used by the soul in its own activity of perceiving. If the same indestructible soul is the subject of both intellectual and perceptual activities then the argument would not be in danger of proving too much. Similarly, on the view of the *Timaeus*, everything that has a share of soul shares in what is indestructible, given that scholars such as Amber Carpenter have argued that even plant souls possess intelligence, the part of soul that persists apart from the body (2010).

The fact that the intellect would fail Aristotle's separability criterion from *DA* I 1 (being the proper subject of an affection or activity) may also be unproblematic. The Platonists need not be committed to Aristotle's criterion. Instead, they may think that some sort of distinguishability criterion, like the one employed in this argument to distinguish between the power of sight and the organ of sight, is sufficient to guarantee separate existence and being. As long as the intellect and its conditions of existence can be conceived separately from those of the body, it can exist separately. Again, since all soul is separable and indestructible for the Platonists, this type of argument does not extend too far.

Lectio 10, 18-22; Pasnau 2002, ch. 9. In his own account, Aristotle seems to suggest that the use of images may be required for exercising some activities of understanding (*DA* III 3, 428a16-18 (cf. III 3, 427a17-427b26); III 7 431a14-20, III 8, 432a3-14); see Cohoe 2016 for discussion. Thus the activity of understanding might be indirectly dependent on the power of imagination, which does have a bodily organ.

Given this, one might think that he could accept this version of the argument. This is not the case. Since the argument is premised on the similarity between the intellect and the senses it clearly proves too much. According to the argument, wherever there is a distinction between body and soul and the decline in activity can be attributed to body, the soul in question will not be subject to destruction. This is a difficulty that commentators who take this passage to be expressing Aristotle's own opinions have struggled with (cf. Hicks, 277-8). The analogy also seems to essentially rely on intellect's dependence on the body in a problematic way. For Aristotle, an argument for separation can only come from the soul or an aspect of it having a proper activity that is not in any way a bodily activity (*DA* I 1, 403a10-15). One cannot move from a combination of dependence and distinction to independence.

The broader context suggests that Aristotle takes his interlocutors to hold that intellectual activities have something like a bodily organ. In Aristotle's opening discussion of whether the soul as the subject of psychological affections is liable to change he dialectically concedes that thinking, *dianoesthai*, like being angry, is some movement of the heart or another similar organ (presumably the brain). This suggests that, on the view Aristotle is discussing, intellectual activities such as thinking are bodily in just the same way as getting angry or fearing. All of these activities essentially rely on the movements of a bodily organ. This view may not be the most common Platonist position, but it is a view that is decisively opposed to Aristotle's own position that the soul is not subject to change. The idea that the brain is the seat of the intellect and may also be something like the organ of thought was already present in Greek thought, being found in Alcmaeon and in the Hippocratic corpus (Alcmaeon, DK, B1a, A5, A8, A10; *On the Sacred Disease*. Cf. Philolaus, DK, B13). The *Timaeus* gives a bodily location to the intellectual part of the soul and suggests that a number of the physical features of the brain are necessary for it to receive intellectual soul, although it does not go so far as to claim that the brain is the organ of thought.⁸ Even if some Platonists would deny that intellectual activities involve actual physical movements, Aristotle may be focusing on the version of their view that is most decisively opposed to his own contention that the soul is not subject to change.

The Divine Intellect interpretation of this passage does not give us a good explanation for why Aristotle puts forward the considerations in favor of the intellect's separateness that he does. If the intellect under discussion is the divine

⁸ *Timaeus*, on the brain, 73b-d, 75a-76d; on the relation of soul and body, 41c-44c; 87e-88b; cf. Brodie 2011, chapter 4. The *Theaetetus*, in speaking of the soul as considering the objects of thought "alone and through itself," seems to go against such a conception, but the dialogue still presents this as a significant and controversial philosophical thesis, suggesting that the question of the role the body plays in psychic activities was a live issue in Academic circles.

intellect of *Metaphysics* Λ or some other separate being, arguing for its indestructibility by comparing it to the power of sight is one of the least convincing routes one could take. On the Divine Intellect interpretation, the indestructibility of the intellect is obvious, the question is how such a substance can come to be in us. This passage, however, offers only debatable considerations for indestructibility and no account of how such an intellect could come to be in us. This paragraph gives us little reason to think that the intellect under discussion is the divine substance of *Metaphysics* Λ.

The Platonist Intellect view has a different problem. On the Platonist Intellect view, we need to establish the indestructibility and separate existence of intellect via texts such as this. But the fact that Aristotle's argument for indestructibility relies on an analogy to the senses and is either simply a response to an objection or rules out the intellect having a proper affection creates special difficulties. Unless Platonist Intellect interpreters want to hold that the sense powers are also separate indestructible substances, the reasons this passage adduces for the indestructible nature of the intellect will not be helpful. Aristotle looks to be denying the very condition he elsewhere gives for the separability of the intellect: that there is some activity or affection proper to it.

5. Affections and the Intellect

In the next paragraph, Aristotle argues that thinking, loving, hating and other affections do not belong to the intellect itself, but to the composite human being who possesses intellect. Thus the intellect or soul is not a subject of change. Burnyeat claims that Aristotle is here suggesting that the affections of loving, hating, and thinking belong to some human power of thought, not the intellect itself, but there is no evidence for a distinction between two sorts of thinking or intellects in the text

itself. Aristotle here attributes affections such as loving, hating, and thinking to humans *precisely insofar as they have intellect*, thus showing that the intellect is the power of the soul responsible.⁹ Although this section does emphasize that thinking, loving, and hating do not properly belong to the intellect, it does not suggest that understanding and contemplation do. In fact, the implication of the passage as a whole is that all these affections, including understanding and contemplation, belong to the composite human being insofar as it possesses intellect. They are affections that belong to the soul-body composite.

The striking claim that we can only love or hate or think insofar as we have intellect is simply ignored by Burnyeat. It should, however, cast doubt on whether Aristotle is expressing his own views here. On Aristotle's own developed view of the intellect given in book three, the intellect is not primarily responsible for loving or hating.¹⁰ Indeed, Aristotle uses loving and hating in *DA I 1* as examples of affections

⁹ One could claim, as Hicks does (Hicks, 276-278), that *ekeino* here in lines 26-28 refers to soul, not intellect, although this requires ignoring the gender of *ekeino*, as soul is feminine while *ekeino* is neuter. Even if we accept this suggestion, however, we are left with the question of how the soul and the intellect are related in this passage and what this paragraph contributes to the argument. On this reading the first paragraph is meant to preserve the indestructibility of the intellect, the second paragraph argues that some affections do not belong to the soul, and the conclusion is about the divinity and impassivity of the intellect. If we take the second paragraph to be discussing a claim entirely unrelated to that of the first, we cannot make sense of the *de* which introduces the claim that thinking, loving, and hating do not properly belong to the soul. We also cannot make sense of this *de* by supposing that this second paragraph contrasts the affections of thinking, loving, and hating with understanding and contemplation, since the argument of the first paragraph required that activities of understanding and contemplation can be affected by what happens to the body just like thinking, loving, and hating. Even if we do pursue this approach, it requires a contrast between some activities, such as understanding, which properly belong to the soul and some which do not, such as loving. Thus the intellect and the soul are still practically synonymous in this passage, since belonging properly to the intellect means belonging properly to the soul and not belonging properly to the soul means not belonging properly to the intellect. If we take the soul and the intellect as entirely separate we lose the contrast.

¹⁰ Aristotle claims that the part of the soul that he will call intellect and that he will discuss in *DA III 4-8* is that part in virtue of which the soul thinks (*dianoeitai*) and supposes (*hupolambanei*), which he also describes as the part of the soul in virtue of which it knows (*ginoskei*) and judges (*phronei*). In both passages it is clear that the intellect is conceived of as the aspect of the soul responsible for intellectual activities, not for any other kind. It is also worth noting that Aristotle, contra Burnyeat, does not seem to be drawing any strong distinction between different sorts of intellectual activity.

The intellect, and its grasp of good and evil, virtue and vice, plays a role in many cases of loving or hating but these activities depend more crucially and more constitutively on desire and on the body. The friendship of the virtuous, for instance, depends on their knowledge of virtue and each

that obviously involve the body (*DA* I 1, 403a16-19). Why would he insist in this passage that loving and hating belong to us just insofar as we have intellect?¹¹

On my interpretation, the wide range of psychological activities that are attributed to a human being insofar as he has intellect do not present an interpretative problem, because Aristotle is not giving his own position on the intellect. For his present dialectical purposes, Aristotle need not specify the proper range of the activities and affections that belong to us insofar as we have intellect. Assuming the dependence of the intellect on the body, whatever affections these interlocutors attribute to intellect will, properly speaking, belong to the composite and their movements will belong to the body.¹²

other's virtue, and thus on the intellect, but friendship is not a quality of the intellect itself. For the connection between intellect and desire in cases of movement or action (among which are loving and hating) cf. *DA* III 10, 433a13-25.

¹¹ This issue is of special concern for proponents of the Divine Intellect interpretation who think this passage is about the divine intellect. According to these proponents, the divine intellect is supposed to be responsible for our intellectual activity in some way, but this is the only human activity for which it is required. No proponent of this view thinks that our ability to love or hate is dependent on the presence of the divine intellect in us, but this is precisely what the Divine Intellect reading of this passage commits us to.

DA III 10, 433a9-13 does offer an extended use of *nous* according to which *nous* can be responsible for local movement and thus perhaps can also be responsible for love and hate. However, this sense of *nous* encompasses imagination as well as understanding and the responsibility of intellect for movement is quickly restricted to practical intellect. No proponent of the Divine Intellect view thinks that when Aristotle speaks of *nous* in this extended sense he is speaking of the divine intellect. Even if there is an extended conception of intellect according to which it would be properly responsible for loving and hating, this broader conception is not the one at issue in III 4-8 and so this passage in I 4 would lose much of its relevance for understanding these later chapters

¹² Similarly, my interpretation does not require that Aristotle is, in *propria persona*, committing himself to denying that the soul or intellect has an activity or affection proper to it and thus to thinking that the soul fails the criterion for separability which Aristotle discusses in I 1. That may be the view he develops in book three (and perhaps he is even foreshadowing it here), but his discussion in this passage does not commit him to such a view. Aristotle is just attempting to give a plausible account of why the intellect is not subject to change. The key to his account is the claim that the intellect depends on the body in some way for its activity, a claim put forward in the context of giving evidence for the indestructibility of intellect. Aristotle does not fully examine this claim or its implications, as would be required for him to offer his definitive answer to the question. Instead, he uses this claim for his own dialectical ends. As I noted above, it is not clear whether this claim is put forward by him on behalf of his interlocutors or whether they themselves are advancing it. In either case, Aristotle does not say enough about the intellect and its activity in this passage to make his own views clear. For his own answer to the question of whether understanding is proper to the soul we need to turn to his discussion of intellect in book three, a discussion in *propria persona*, not to this brief dialectical passage.

6. Conclusion

My interpretation explains how this section relates to the larger argumentative context in which Aristotle aims to show that the soul is not moved. This section completes Aristotle's arguments against the Platonic idea that the soul is moved. Even assuming that the intellectual activities in question are movements and require movements, these activities belong to the composite, not to the soul or the intellect, and the movements they require belong to the body, not the soul.

Aristotle concludes the passage by saying: "But maybe the intellect is something more divine and is unaffected." I think the *de* here is best understood as signaling a contrast between Aristotle's own view of the intellect and the view of the intellect that has just been expressed in this passage.¹³ I take the *isōs* to qualify or soften Aristotle's claim, translating it as "maybe." Most other translators take it to have strong positive force. Burnyeat, for instance, translates it as "doubtless." (2008, 31) Aristotle uses *isōs* in both senses, but in context the qualifying use of *isōs* is more plausible. Up to this point in the *DA*, Aristotle has not yet made any decisive arguments for the divinity and impassibility of the intellect. On Aristotle's own view, the considerations put forward in this passage do not decisively establish the divinity and unaffectedness of the intellect either. In *DA* I 1, the previous passage where Aristotle discussed intellectual soul and its separability, he was careful to speak tentatively. On my interpretation, Aristotle is indicating that he has not yet given his own account of the intellect and suggesting that on his account the intellect will be, in some significant sense, divine and unaffected.¹⁴

¹³ Burnyeat and other advocates of the Divine Intellect or Platonic Intellect interpretations take the *de* as adversative, but interpret it as offering at contrast between the intellect and the composite human being, which perishes.

¹⁴ Whether by being more divine and unaffected than the composite or by being divine and unaffected in some more absolute sense. It is also worth noting that *theoteron* need not have a comparative sense, it could also be understood as "rather divine," but the import would be similar:

Aristotle then ends the preceding discussion and opens his next discussion by saying that it is clear from these things that the soul is not subject to change. My interpretation allows us to explain why this discussion of the intellect and its activities occurs in the midst of the larger discussion about whether the soul is moved. On the Divine and Platonic Intellect interpretations of this passage, Aristotle is simply interjecting a brief section about his own views on the intellect for some reason. We are left with an oddly placed digression into a discussion about whether the soul is moved.¹⁵

In fact, this passage is best read as a dialectical examination of a reputable Platonist position about the intellect, not as expressing Aristotle's own views on the intellect. The passage's argument for the indestructibility of intellect via an analogy to perception does not fit with Aristotle's own views. Aristotle thinks that perception operates via bodily organs, but denies this of understanding. He also requires separability from the body for indestructibility, something this analogy rules out. However, Aristotle's interlocutors may well endorse such an argument. Aristotle lays out their view, shows that it does not imply psychic motion, and then, in the final sentence of the passage, reserves for himself the right to give a different account of the intellect, pointing forward to his own discussion of the intellect in III 4-5.

Now the dialectical character of this passage means that it does not settle questions about Aristotle's own position on *nous*. After all, proponents of the Divine Intellect or Platonist Intellect interpretation need not hold that I 4 expresses Aristotle's own views. Perhaps it is only in *DA* III 4-5 that Aristotle himself brings in

Aristotle is suggesting that in some important way he thinks the intellect is divine.

¹⁵ Proponents of these views may argue that Aristotle is stepping in to point out the difference between his conception of the soul and the Platonists. If this is so, why would Aristotle focus on the intellect instead of talking about his different conception of the psychological activities in question, such as whether they really are motions? Why is Aristotle's discussion of the intellect here in tension with his statements about it elsewhere?

an extra-human intellect. If, however, going into III 4-5, we have no reason to expect Aristotle to introduce and endorse a power that is outside the human soul, the burden of proof shifts towards those who want to find such a power there.¹⁶ Thus while the dialectical reading of the passage does not establish the Human Intellect view, it does undercut a potentially significant source of support for the Platonist or Divine Intellect readings.¹⁷

¹⁶ Before giving an overall determination about the status of *nous*, we would also need to consider two other passages, *DA* II 2, 413b24-29 and II 3, 415a7-13, that Divine and Platonist Intellect interpreters appeal to as evidence that *nous* is distinct from the human soul. For an overview of the issues concerning *nous* in the *DA* see Cohoe 2014.

¹⁷ I received helpful feedback on earlier versions of this material from Hendrik Lorenz and John Cooper and from the Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy audience at the 2017 Society for Classical Studies Meeting in Toronto, where Stephen A White, in particular, provided several valuable suggestions.

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