

Aristotle's Harmony with Plato on Separable and Immortal Soul¹

W. M. Coombs

Department of Philosophy, University of Pretoria, South Africa

wehancoombs@gmail.com

Abstract

The possibility of a harmony between the psychological doctrine of Aristotle and that of Plato marks a significant issue within the context of the debate surrounding Aristotle's putative opposition to or harmony with Plato's philosophy. The standard interpretation of Aristotle's conception of the soul being purely hylomorphic leaves no room for harmonisation with Plato, nor does a functionalist interpretation that reduces Aristotle's psychological doctrine to physicalist terms. However, these interpretations have serious drawbacks, both in terms of ad-hoc explanations formulated in the developmentalist mode, and the misconstruing of some of the fundamental features of Aristotle's psychological doctrine. A dualist interpretation that accepts Aristotle's doctrine of some part of the soul being properly incorporeal, separable and immortal overcomes these drawbacks and, significantly, opens the door for Platonic harmonisation. Furthermore, it can be shown that the kind of immortality in question is also in line with the Platonic stance, due to a deep similarity between the conceptions of metaphysical and moral personhood held by Plato and his student. However, this Aristotelian dualism is not Platonic dualism simpliciter. Rather, it is best understood in terms of the division of labour between Aristotle and Plato suggested by the Neoplatonic commentators generally, and Simplicius in particular. I argue that though questions surrounding these issues and particularly the issue of reincarnation remain, an account of Aristotle's psychological doctrine as dualist and in harmony with Plato's view of the soul can be shown to be stronger than both standard hylomorphic and functionalist accounts, both exegetically and philosophically.

Introduction

In the context of the debate surrounding the putative harmony between Plato and Aristotle, the issue of whether Aristotle's conception of the soul is harmonious with a Platonic notion of the soul comes down to one key factor: separability (in the sense of the metaphysical possibility of a separable soul, but also regarding separability as a prerequisite for immortality). In modern scholarship, the separable soul in Aristotle has been rejected concomitant with Aristotle's rejection of separable forms, the soul being the form of the body for Aristotle. If however, there is reason to believe that Aristotle does not reject separable forms outright², then what remains is to ascertain to what extent Aristotle believes the soul to be separable from the body, and whether or not Aristotle's position is then harmonious with the Platonic stance.

I will argue that Aristotle's dualism can be shown to be in harmony with Platonic dualism, but should not be reduced to it, and that the immortality of the intellect found in Aristotle stems from a striking similarity in Plato and Aristotle's conceptions of personhood, and as such their conceptions of

¹ This article adapted from excerpts out of Coombs 2016.

² See Coombs 2016: 34-52 and 96-114.

disembodied personhood (some significant caveats notwithstanding). Towards this end I will critically review some salient features of the contemporary debate with focus on the two relevant issues: 1) the debate surrounding hylomorphism and dualism in Aristotle and; 2) the nature and extent of ‘personal immortality’ and the related problem of reincarnation. For the former, I will attempt to show that, as Lloyd Gerson in his 2005 work *Aristotle and Other Platonists* has convincingly argued, a dualist interpretation of Aristotle overcomes the deficiencies of both hylomorphic and functionalist interpretations, though ultimately the dualism that emerges may be something quite different than has been generally associated with Aristotle. For the latter I will aim to show that a Neoplatonic strategy of ‘division of labour’ satisfyingly harmonizes the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of intellectual immortality, and that Aristotle’s apparent rejection of reincarnation is no serious impediment to this harmonization.

Harmonism³

Harmony, or *συμφωνία*, is the term used by the Neoplatonic commentators in asserting the complementary nature of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. In his introduction to *Aristotle and Other Platonists*, Gerson provides a helpful overview of the issue of harmony in the context of its use by the Neoplatonic harmonists⁴. According to Gerson, the case for harmony is partly cumulative and also partly inferential:

“The more one sees harmony in a particular area, the more one is inclined to consider it in another, perhaps hitherto unsuspected. And naturally, the more one views Aristotle’s philosophy as a system, the more one is inclined to view partial harmony as suggesting, if not entailing, complete harmony. Still, from the Neoplatonists’ point of view, resistance to an account of Aristotle’s philosophy as a system is not all that troubling. Platonism itself provided all the systematic structure necessary.

...most of the Neoplatonic material... assumes harmony rather than presenting a brief on its behalf... Most revealingly, we shall see time and again that a text seemingly resistant to any reasonable conclusion regarding its meaning has been rendered so by an antiharmonist assumption. When scholars repeatedly say, “This is what the text appears to mean, though it simply can’t mean that since that would be Platonic,” it is perhaps salutary to re-examine the assumption that leads to this cul-de-sac.”⁵

For the Neoplatonists then, harmony broadly conceived is the consistency of the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical systems, in a complementary way, such that each philosophy can be employed to better or more fully comprehend the other – this of course was the Neoplatonic goal in investigating

³ Adapted from Coombs 2016: 11-12.

⁴ Gerson 2005: 3-16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

more closely the works of Aristotle in the first place. To understand what the Neoplatonists meant with the harmony of Plato and Aristotle, we may first rule out, as does Gerson (2015: 8-9), the kinds of harmony which they did not mean. For example, the Neoplatonists also employed the term harmony to refer to the self-consistency of a philosopher's own doctrines. Harmony can also refer to simple non-contradiction, as is the case when two philosophical positions are logically unconnected. Or, it can refer to the harmony of philosophical schools of thought that share joint antagonisms to other, competing schools of thought. Nor is harmony meant to entail identity, eclecticism or syncretism. None of these are what the Neoplatonists had in mind when affirming the harmony of Plato and Aristotle.

The key ways of understanding the harmony defended by the Neoplatonists are; 1) as a division of labour between Plato and Aristotle; 2) a framing of Aristotelianism as a kind of Platonism; 3) showing in what ways Aristotle agrees with Plato (even when he appears not to) and; 4) supplementing or correcting a mistaken Aristotelian point with the proper Platonic principle. These approaches form the spectrum of Neoplatonic harmonism⁶. Their full consideration, alongside examples of the application to particular instances of Aristotelian exegesis, I have attempted elsewhere⁷. For the purposes of this current paper, it will be sufficient to show that Aristotle's positions on the soul, in terms of its incorporeality, separability and immortality, are complementary to the corresponding Platonic positions in a way that indicates harmony beyond mere consistency. That is to say that the similarities between these positions seem to indicate a fundamental and substantial compatibility that cannot be reduced to mere non-contradiction, but rather seems to indicate, to some degree, a fundamental harmony, as suggested by the Neoplatonic harmonists.

Separability of the Soul in Aristotle⁸

If the soul for Aristotle is utterly inseparable from the body, any attempt at harmonization with a Platonic notion of soul is summarily defeated. The issue here hinges on the proper conceptualization of Aristotle's conception of soul; is it hylomorphic, functionalist, dualist, or something else? In the following sections I will argue that the evidence weighs in favour of a dualist interpretation of Aristotle, though this dualism is not straightforward. Nevertheless, the position I argue for has benefits over both purely hylomorphic and functionalist interpretations of Aristotle. Firstly, ascribing a kind of dualism to Aristotle takes away the need to explain an apparent internal contradiction through developmentalist means – a strategy that offers more problems than solutions⁹. Secondly, such an account rests on an interpretation of *De Anima* that does not dismiss certain key comments

⁶ For more see Hadot and Chase 2015.

⁷ Coombs 2016: 17-63.

⁸ Adapted from *ibid*, 114-120.

⁹ In order to explain apparent contradictions in the Aristotelian corpus, modern scholars, most notably Werner Jaeger, theorized that Aristotle's early thought was Platonic, but that Aristotle *developed* away from Platonism to a position that was more or less explicitly anti-Platonic. See Jaeger 1948, cf. Case 1925. See also Gerson 2005:12-14 and Coombs 2016: 66-68.

from Aristotle without sufficient justification. Finally, a dualist interpretation sheds light on Aristotle's conception of psyche as a whole, showing that separability is not a provisional or hypothetical consideration for Aristotle, but is essential for Aristotle's account of cognition as such. With these considerations in mind, let us turn first to the two key poles of the debate here: hylomorphism versus dualism.

Hylomorphist versus dualist interpretations of soul in Aristotle

Many of the debates on Aristotle's conception of ψυχή in the modern era have centred on pinpointing whether or not the Philosopher's formulation of the relation of the soul to the body actually commits him to some or other species of dualism, instead of the standard 'hylomorphic' interpretation. This is to say that Aristotle (Aristotle *De An.* B1 412b5-6) claims that the soul is the form (or 'actuality') of the body (a hylomorphic account), but also that the soul is immortal – an account incompatible with hylomorphism. The relevant passage for the latter is found in the somewhat notorious section *Gamma 5* of *De Anima* (Aristotle *De An.*, *Gamma 5*, 430a10-25, emphasis mine):

“Since just as in everything in nature there is something which serves as the matter in each genus (this is that which is all of those things in potency), as well as something else which is the cause and is productive by making all things, as in the case of art in relation to matter, so necessarily there exists these differences in the soul. And intellect is this sort of thing in one sense by becoming all things, and in another by making all things, like a sort of disposition, in the way that light does. For in a certain way light makes potential colours and actual colours. And this intellect is separable and unaffected, and unmixed, being in its essence in actuality. For that which acts is always more honourable than that which is acted upon, and the principle is more honourable than the matter. Actual knowledge is identical with that which is known; potential knowledge is, however, prior in time in the individual, but as a whole it is not prior in time. But [intellect] is not at one time thinking and another time not thinking. *Having been separated, it is just what it is, and this alone is immortal and eternal.* But we do not remember because while this is unaffected, the passive intellect is destructible. And without this, it [i.e., the individual] thinks nothing.”¹⁰

A key modern strategy to try to account for the apparent inconsistency between there being an immortal part of the soul and Aristotle's putative hylomorphism has been to describe it as a facet of

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of *De Anima*, *Gamma 5*, see Gerson 2005: 152-172 and Kal 1988.

the development of Aristotle's thought. Gerson (2005: 132) makes the significance for the harmonist debate clear by referring to Nuyens' thesis¹¹ of development in Aristotle's ideas on soul:

“[Nuyens'] fundamental idea – a development away from Platonic dualism and toward Aristotelian hylomorphism – remains virtually unquestioned. And it is on the basis of this idea that Aristotle's mature psychological doctrine is usually interpreted. The principal focus of the interpretations that assume the anti-Platonism of *De Anima* is the account in Book Γ, chapter 5, of the so-called agent or active intellect. Endless contortions are contrived in order to show that when Aristotle states that intellect is “immortal and eternal” he does not mean that it is immortal and eternal... Perhaps because it is assumed that for Aristotle the soul is in no way immortal – or perhaps despite this assumption – it is also assumed that Aristotle's epistemology is deeply at odds with Plato's. Aristotle the hylomorphist or, more crudely, Aristotle the ‘empiricist’ is diametrically opposed to Plato the ‘dualist’ or ‘rationalist’.”

The Neoplatonist commentators, on the other hand, rather took Aristotle at his word that the intellect is immortal and eternal, and proceeded from this vantage point to construct a conception of Aristotelian psychological doctrine that is in harmony with Platonism, as we shall see¹². For those seeking to construct an anti-Platonic psychological doctrine of Aristotle however, the strategies have been more diverse. Some amount to mere dismissal, as we can see in various scholars' exegesis of what I will call the ‘captain analogy’ (Gerson 2005: 138). The relevant passage is found in *De Anima* (Aristotle *De An.* 413a4-9):

“From this it is clear that the soul is inseparable from its body, or at any rate that certain parts of it are (if it has parts) – for the actuality of some of them is the actuality of the parts themselves. Yet some may be separable because they are not the actualities of any body at all. Further, we have no light on the problem whether the soul may not be the actuality of its body in the sense in which the sailor is the actuality of the ship.”

The Neoplatonic harmonist Pseudo-Simplicius took this analogy to illustrate that the soul was in one respect inseparable and in another separable from the body, as we shall see below.

Modern commentators, on the other hand, have generally responded very differently to the remark. Hicks (1907: 320), for example, takes the developmentalist line, and writes concerning the sailor-ship analogy that:

¹¹ See Nuyens 1948 and Nuyens et al. 1950. For critiques of Nuyens, see Block 1961, Hardie 1964, Lefèvre 1972, Charlton 1987, Wedin 1988, Frede 1992, Cohen 1992 and Dancy 1996.

¹² See also Coombs 2016: 52-62.

“If the conclusion of *Metaph. Z.*, C. II represents [Aristotle’s]... mature judgement, it may be plausibly argued that in our present passage ἔτι δὲ ἄδηλον is a mere phrase of the lecture room, like σκεπτόν ὑστερον, an affectation of uncertainty because the writer is stimulating, without satisfying, curiosity.”¹³

Hamlyn and Shields (1993: 87) go even further in their almost flippant dismissal of the passage:

“In so far as the soul consists merely of potential functions of parts of the body, it cannot have an existence separate from the body; but Aristotle leaves it an open question whether it is entirely like this. There may be certain psychical functions which have no bodily counterpart – although how this could be so is, to say the least, puzzling. It is clear that Aristotle is looking forward here to what he says about the active intellect in III. 5.

The remark about the possible analogy between the soul and a sailor in a ship (with which cf. Descartes, *Meditation VI*) is also puzzling, since the argument up to this point has tended completely in the opposite direction. It can be set down only as a lecturer’s aside.”

Hamlyn and Shields indicate that the riddle of how the soul may in some way be separate from the body is left off for later discussion, specifically in *De Anima, Gamma 5*. What is truly puzzling is that Hamlyn and Shields fail to notice how significant the captain analogy is for what is said in that very passage; the nature of the soul’s separability (and as such the nature of the soul’s immortality), which the captain analogy puts into focus, is exactly the issue at hand in *Gamma 5*. Passing it off as a ‘lecturer’s aside’ is far from satisfactory.

Gerson (2005:139-140) takes the opposing line, arguing that Aristotle’s psychological doctrine is inescapably attached to the doctrine of some part of the soul being truly separable (which in turn leaves Aristotle open to Platonic harmonization, as we shall see below)¹⁴. Does this make a dualist of Aristotle? Those who wish to avoid this conclusion have another viable option apart from mere dismissal; the functionalist interpretation of Aristotle’s psychological doctrine.

A functionalist interpretation of soul in Aristotle

Heinaman (1990: 100-102) provides a concise explanation of the functionalist interpretation, along with his own critique of it. On Heinaman’s account the theory that Aristotle is a materialistic functionalist, i.e. that Aristotle holds that a mental event is only a functional (causal) characteristic of a material change, is untenable. This is due to the fact that Aristotle rejects some of the core assumptions of functionalism. Chief amongst these are; 1) Aristotle rejects that the same

¹³ See Hicks 1907: 319-321 for Hicks’ full discussion of the passage.

¹⁴ Also see Olschewsky 1976 for an involved discussion of the differences and similarities in the conceptions of the relationship between soul and body in Plato and Aristotle.

psychological state can have different physical realizations, or be realized in different types of matter or event; 2) Aristotle asserts that the body can be in the same state it was when a given psychological event occurred without necessarily again being in that psychological state and; 3) Aristotle's understanding of psychological states as mental events is ontologically incommensurable with the functionalist understanding of psychological states as functional characteristics.

The functionalist interpretation of Aristotle's conception of cognition fails on several fronts, as Heinaman points out. Moreover, a functionalist account may ultimately not be able to account for the self-reflexivity that is required for Aristotle's understanding of cognition (as we shall see below). In the final analysis, it would seem that attempts at committing Aristotle to a purely physicalist conception of soul in the mode of a functionalist interpretation cannot account for the nuances of Aristotelian psychological doctrine. If both this and the rejection of Aristotle as a straightforward hylomorphist are accepted, what is left is to elucidate the nature and scope of Aristotle's putative commitment to some form of psychological dualism.

A dualist interpretation of soul in Aristotle

On the side of those who resist both the dismissal of Aristotle's dualism as well as the arguments for functionalism, we find some who in addition believe that Aristotle's psychological doctrine indeed commits him to a form of dualism. One example is the 'supervenient dualism' proposed by Shields (1988: 106). Robinson (1983) also argues for dualism in Aristotle. Gerson (2005: 139) notes that Robinson's "account of 'Aristotelian dualism' would... do equally well as an account of Platonic dualism of the embodied person". Heinaman (1990: 90-92), on the other hand, assigns to Aristotle a version of dualism known as 'emergent dualism' – though he himself admits that this assignment is not entirely straightforward.

Gerson (2005: 139-140) instead argues that Aristotle's dualism is essentially akin to Platonic dualism, and so, contrary to the position argued by Heinaman, *unproblematically* endorses a conception of (part of the) soul as properly incorporeal, defeating the traditional straightforwardly hylomorphic account of Aristotle's psychological doctrine (as well as any straightforward functionalist account), and leaving Aristotle's doctrine readily reconcilable with the Platonic account. According to Gerson (2005: 139-140) separable and incorporeal intellect are *essential* for the Aristotelian account of human cognition; without separable and incorporeal intellect self-reflexivity in the psyche would not be possible, and without self-reflexivity in the psyche human cognition proper, as Aristotle wants to maintain it, would not be possible. This assertion, alongside the contentions that the active and passive intellect produce intellection in concert, and that without self-reflexivity internal psychic conflict could not occur (when in fact it evidently does), establishes the necessity of incorporeality for Aristotle's conception of psyche. If we further posit that a separated and incorporeal intellect would

also be immortal, then this makes the possibility of harmony with Platonic psychological doctrine immediately apparent.

I maintain that the significance of self-reflexivity being required for cognition, and the claim that self-reflexivity requires incorporeality, overcomes the apparent tentativeness of Aristotle's initial remarks in *De Anima* (403a3-12) that if there is a part of the soul that is separable, then it is likely the intellect. Rather, Aristotle's understanding of cognition arguably commits him to the position that for cognition to be possible, the intellect must be incorporeal and separable. This is because, as Gerson (2005: 139-140) argues, cognition for Aristotle is not simply the presence of some cognizable form in the intellect, but also the awareness of the presence of said form in itself, i.e. within the intellect. This self-reflexivity (the intellect thinking itself) *requires* incorporeality for Aristotle; if any of the parts of the self-reflexive process of cognition were material, cognition would involve *some material entity related to another* (instead of *to itself*), that is, it would fail to be self-reflexive, which is what Aristotle requires it to be¹⁵. If this were all that were required for cognition, then a body representing its state to any other body would qualify as cognition – Aristotle explicitly denies this view by stating that “actual knowledge is the same as that which is known” (*De Anima* 431a1). As such, for Aristotle, the self-reflexivity of cognition, which consists in not only having thought present, but being aware of the presence of that thought within the self-same intellect, requires incorporeality; as the objects of thought are incorporeal, thinking itself (the intellect) must also be. A further argument for the incorporeality of intellect in Aristotle involves the contention that the intellect must be ‘wholly unmixed’ with body¹⁶. Moreover, and significantly for the harmonists’ position, it can be convincingly shown that Plato holds a fundamentally similar view¹⁷.

I would like to add that harmonizing Aristotle's psychological doctrine with the Platonic account in this way does not reduce the former to the latter. I agree with Gerson that Aristotle's dualism, as far as the intellect is concerned, is deeply Platonic. However, and as the Neoplatonists often appreciated, Aristotle completes the Platonic metaphysical foundation by supplementing it with the view from nature – their perspectives are *complementary*. From this vantage point, and taking into account the metaphysical priority of the intelligible to the material in Aristotle¹⁸, the soul in its hylomorphic capacity as ‘actuality of the body’ is in fact causally dependent upon the intelligible realm.

Bringing these positions together, I think it would not be entirely inaccurate to ascribe to Aristotle a position we could call “emergent hylomorphism” – the synthetic unity of the composite that is soul and body is an effect that is causally dependant on the immortal and separable nature of the intellect –

¹⁵ Gerson 2005: 139.

¹⁶ See Gerson 2005: 148-151 and Coombs 2016: 57-61.

¹⁷ See Coombs 2016: 61-62.

¹⁸ See *ibid*, 109-110.

in this case particularly the divine intellect of the Demiurge/Unmoved Mover¹⁹, who, in its role as creator, imposes a reflected (and imperfect) version of the order of absolute intelligible reality upon the non-absolute receptacle called matter, which in the case of the individual soul involves its connection to a material body, and the possibility of cognition through its connection to its ‘personal’ immortal intellect²⁰. This particular formulation of Aristotle’s psychological doctrine²¹ would be, to the best of my knowledge, fairly novel, and further scrutiny of its merits would certainly be warranted.

Immortality of the Soul in Aristotle²²

If soul is both incorporeal and separable in Aristotle, as the above arguments have attempted to show it to be, then what remains for the issue of harmonization is to show that Aristotle is committed not only to separability, but also to the kind of immortality that Plato argues for. In this section then, I will aim to show that the argument for harmonism here is sound, first by illustrating that Plato and Aristotle are in agreement that only part of the soul is immortal, and then by proceeding to show how Plato and Aristotle’s conceptions of human personhood allow fertile ground for a coherent harmonization of their conceptions of the human soul’s immortality.

Immortality of only part of the soul in Plato and Aristotle

We have already seen in the above that in *De Anima, Gamma 5*, Aristotle holds that only the so-called ‘active intellect’ is immortal and eternal. Plato’s most salient remarks on the soul, those that the Neoplatonic commentators took to be authoritative, and amenable to Platonic-Aristotelian harmony (and therefore most relevant to this article), can be found in the *Phaedo* and *Timaeus*²³. The Platonic definition of soul, though at times somewhat nebulous, can be usefully summarized for the purposes of this article as: that immortal part of a human being which exists before birth and after death, animates the body (and as such, uses the body as a kind of vehicle), and consists of both an immortal (*rational*) and mortal (*appetitive* and *vegetative*²⁴) part, the former of which is superior to the latter, and both of which are superior to (and rule over) the corporeal body²⁵.

¹⁹ Ibid, 48-52.

²⁰ This intellect is distinguished from the divine intellect of the Demiurge by virtue of its not being, like the Demiurge, *essentially* identical with its objects, but only *partially* identical. See Coombs 2016: 95-96.

²¹ I am not here making any claims along developmentalist lines concerning the development of Aristotelian psychological doctrine ‘towards’ the position described. The claim is simply that, when taken as a whole and with a harmonic picture of Aristotelian-Platonic metaphysics also in mind, Aristotelian psychological doctrine can be usefully described as a kind of synthetic hylomorphism which *emerges* from the causal primacy of the intelligible to the sensible, applied to the relationship between the human body and soul.

²² Adapted from Coombs 2016: 52-57.

²³ See Plato *Phd.* 70c-73a, 79c-80b, 105c-d, and *Tim.* 61c, 69c-e.

²⁴ The *vegetative* aspect of the soul is introduced in Plato’s *Republic*, 439d5-7. For the purposes of this article, the *vegetative* soul may be safely subsumed together with the *appetitive* under the rubric of the ‘mortal soul’.

²⁵ This summary, though perhaps imprecise due to the difficult nature of Plato’s dialogic style, captures the essence of Plato’s position on the nature of the soul across several dialogues. For the purposes of this article, questions concerning the development of an early ‘Socratic’ Plato into a later fully ‘Platonic’ Plato are moot; as far as harmony is concerned, the only

Aristotle's famous (and apparently anti-Platonic) definition of the soul as "actuality of a natural body with organs", combined with Aristotle's (more obliquely anti-Platonic) remark in *De Anima* that the (separable) intellect seems to belong to "a kind (γένος) different from soul"²⁶, poses an interesting quandary for the Neoplatonic harmonists (Gerson 2005: 134). The solution is best illustrated by a passage of Aristotelian exegesis from Pseudo-Simplicius, as quoted by Gerson (2005: 137):

"The words "the actuality of some [living things] are of the parts themselves" apply to the inseparable life of all bodies. The words "nothing prevents some actualities from being separate, because they are not actualities of any body" apply to the life that is separate in every way. By means of these [expressions] he observes the duality... of soul. For the actuality that uses [the body] is in a way inseparable by its completely... using the body and in a way separate by its transcendentally... using the body as an instrument that is serving it. If it uses the body in one way and in one way does not use it at all, as the example of the sailor makes clear, that which does not use it is separate in every way."²⁷

In this way Pseudo-Simplicius illustrates in what way the soul is both separable and inseparable from the body; "the soul uses the body "completely" when we digest food and breathe; it uses the body transcendentally when we consciously desire something and move to obtain it" (Gerson 2005: 138). In other words, as the actuality of the function of the body as organism, that part of the soul is inseparable, but as the actuality of the functions of cognition, that part of the soul is entirely separate – a position that does not contradict the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato's doctrine, and can therefore be said to be in line with harmony. Yet, even with this harmony in terms of separability and immortality of part of the soul established, it remains to be shown whether Aristotle endorses a similar *kind* of immortality to Plato, and of course, we must take into account Aristotle's apparent rejection of the doctrine of reincarnation.

Intellectual versus personal immortality and the problem of reincarnation

As shown above, both Plato and Aristotle seem to hold to the immortality of only part of the soul, and this provides solid ground for asserting the possibility of harmony between the Platonic and Aristotelian conceptions of ψυχή. However, as Gerson (2005: 55) points out, a significant question remains despite this evidence:

"There is, however, perhaps a deeper reason for insisting that Aristotle's view of immortality must be different from Plato's. It is supposed that even if Aristotle does acknowledge the immortality of intellect, he is not affirming personal immortality. By

requirement is to show that both Plato and Aristotle subscribe to a view of at least part of the soul as incorporeal, separable, and immortal, in similar and complimentary fashion. For these requirements, Plato is consistent across dialogues, and as such questions concerning Plato's putative development can be put aside. See also Gerson 2014.

²⁶ See Aristotle *De An.* 413b26.

²⁷ See Aristotle *De An.* 413a2-9. See also Coombs 2016: 80-84.

contrast, Plato's commitment to immortality is apparently inseparable from his commitment to disembodied punishments and rewards and at least the possibility of reincarnation. In short, Plato believes in personal immortality or the immortality and continuity of the embodied person whereas Aristotle does not. Therefore, it is misleading in the extreme to say that Aristotle is in harmony with Plato on this point. Either Plato believed in the immortality of the tripartite soul, or if he did not, then his view of the intellect must be fundamentally at odds with Aristotle's such that it makes sense to assign personal properties to the former but not the latter."

Gerson (2005: 55), following the Neoplatonic harmonists, opposes this objection of personal immortality in Plato versus nonpersonal immortality in Aristotle on several fronts, instead arguing that "a deep similarity in the Platonic and Aristotelian conception of intellect produced a high degree of harmony in their views about the moral psychology of embodied persons". Gerson's argument proceeds systematically, starting with the immortality of intellect *alone* in Plato and Aristotle. With this in mind, I proceed below to a discussion of the possible distinction that can be made between intellectual and personal immortality, and the related problem of reincarnation.

In assessing whether intellectual immortality may amount to personal immortality for Aristotle, as it putatively does for Plato²⁸, we must head into the sometimes murky waters of their respective conceptions of personhood. Note here as initial evidence the accord of Plato's *Timaeus* with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* on the issue of how human beings may achieve immortality and a degree of divinity, viz. by identifying as much as possible with their intellectual faculty, and thereby achieving wisdom and happiness²⁹ (more on this point below). A fragment from Aristotle's lost exoteric work, *Protrepticus* (as preserved by Iamblichus), makes the relevance of this doctrine for his conception of personhood clear (Iamblichus Prot. 78, 12-79, 2 Des Places (= Ross 1970, frag. 10C, Düring 1961, frags. B108-110)):

"There exists nothing divine or blessed among men except that which alone is worthy of attention, whatever there is of intellect or wisdom in us. For this alone seems to be immortal and the only divine things of ours. And in virtue of being able to share in this power, however wretched and hard life is by nature, still things have been favourably arranged so that in comparison with other things man would seem to be a god. "Our intellect is god," says either Hermodotus or Anaxagoras, and that "the mortal always has a portion of god". We ought to philosophize, therefore, or say farewell to life and depart from it since everything else seems to be much foolishness and folly."

²⁸ See Gerson 2005: 55.

²⁹ See Coombs 2016: 17-19.

Gerson (2005: 57) notes that this passage indicates that "...Aristotle no more than Plato thinks that the immortality of intellect alone diminishes *our* immortality" and that the "exhortation to philosophize is [in both Plato and Aristotle]... an exhortation to identify oneself in some sense with intellect". Gerson (2005: 57) adds that this identification "amounts to an appropriation or construction of selfhood", but that "in the Aristotelian (and Platonic) context, it is an appropriation of what one really or ideally is". In this sense, it seems more appropriate to call this appropriation of selfhood an 'unveiling' of Selfhood, in the very Platonic and rather mystical sense – a sense that it must be admitted, given the clear harmony even to the point of phraseology that we see here with Aristotle, is shared closely by Plato's *protégé*. I agree wholeheartedly with Gerson (2005: 57) that the "claim by Jaeger and others that the immortality of intellect alone would make a mockery of personal aspirations indicates nothing more than Jaeger's own conception of the personal".

However, showing that 1) Plato and Aristotle agree that only part of the soul, viz. the intellect, is immortal and that 2) on this basis of this accord and other evidence, they share a similar view of personhood (both moral and metaphysical), does not entirely dispel the objection that their views on the post-mortem life of the immortal soul are still of a radically different character, as Bussanich (2016) argues in a pointed critique of Gerson. Briefly, Bussanich (2016) argues that 1) Aristotle says nothing about disembodied persons, whilst Platonists make certain details of the post-mortem experience explicit and 2) that Aristotle's refutation of reincarnation means that the goals of the Aristotelian and Platonic good life are incommensurable; the former can be achieved in the context of a single lifetime, the latter cannot.

I don't believe the first objection can be taken as a serious impediment to harmony, which is not to be understood as the *identity* of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle (Gerson 2005: 8). If Platonists have more to say about disembodied life than Aristotle, this is no impediment to harmony, and it being the case would have not have surprised or deterred any of the Neoplatonic harmonists, given their commitment to the idea of a 'division of labour' between Aristotle and Plato, as described by Simplicius (*In Cat.* 6, 27-30):

"In every case he [Aristotle] did not want to depart from nature but to consider the things above nature according to their relation to nature, just as the divine Plato, for his part, and in the manner of the Pythagoreans, examined even natural things according as they partake of those things above nature."

Some further exploration of this idea is warranted here³⁰. Although in modern times it has ironically come to represent the exact opposite, Gerson (2005: 4) notes how Raphael's *School of Athens*, with Aristotle holding his *Ethics* and gesturing with his palm down towards the Earth, and Plato pointing to

³⁰ Adapted from Coombs 2016: 17-19.

the heavens and holding his *Timaeus*, is more than likely a depiction of this division of labour, since Raphael was a student of (amongst others) the Renaissance harmonist Picco della Mirandola. In essence, what harmonists are suggesting, and what Raphael was likely expressing, is that, far from being *contradictory*, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle are in fact *complementary*. Gerson (2005: 4) further makes the claim that “Raphael and his audience must have known that Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* ends with an exhortation to ‘divinization’ corresponding exactly to what Plato says at the end of *Timaeus*”. Indeed, the penultimate section to Book X of Aristotle’s *Ethics* (*EN* 1179a23-32) and the relevant passage near the end of Plato’s *Timaeus* (Plato *Tim.* 90b6-c6.) seem in almost perfect agreement in stating that the contemplative life is both the happiest and the most divine - one would be hard-pressed to not admit the similitude that Gerson pinpoints. These considerations highlight the possibility of a substantial harmony of Platonic and Aristotelian ethics, based on the mode of a division of labour as the Neoplatonic commentators suggested. However, I am not here suggesting that Aristotle’s remarks concerning the divinization of the soul commit him to the view that the soul is separable and immortal. Rather, having shown in the previous sections that Aristotle can be shown to be committed to the metaphysical position that some part of the soul is both separable and immortal, a reading of Aristotelian ethics qua intellectual divinization premised on such a metaphysical position proves more plausible than a reading of Aristotelian ethics premised on a hylomorphic and as such anti-Platonic Aristotelian metaphysics.

Taking the above into account, I find Bussanich’s (2016) contention that the “character of their respective goals” cannot be construed as “even very similar” due to a “fundamental difference” unconvincing. Taking into account the division of labour again, and acknowledging the deep similarity of how both Plato and Aristotle articulate the moral goals of the embodied person, it is only a lack of imagination that impedes one from taking the further step of seeing the goals of Aristotle’s moral doctrine (whether limited to a single lifetime or not), as harmonious with the goals of Plato’s moral doctrine – it could even be argued that Aristotle illustrates the way in which Platonic divinization is achieved in the context of a single lifetime – all that Platonism adds, is the reminder that this work can only in fact be fully accomplished over the course of many such lifetimes – which in no way detracts from the importance of striving towards this goal as far as is possible within the context of a single lifetime³¹. Though a more thorough investigation of this thesis cannot be accommodated here, there is at least enough reason, I believe, to resist Bussanich’s inference that harmony is here defeated by a “fundamental difference”³².

³¹ See also Sedley 1999 and Armstrong 2004 for a dispelling of the notion that Platonic ethics is merely eschatological and as such cannot be achieved within the confines of a single lifetime.

³² The harmony Gerson suggests in 2005, Ch. 8, between Platonic and Aristotelian ethics further blunts the edge of this objection. See also Gerson 2005: 60-70, on Plato and Aristotle’s accord concerning the superiority of the contemplative life, and Sedley 1997. For similarities in Plato and Aristotle’s conception of Virtue, see Broadie 2005 and Sparshott 1970. For remarks on the similarity of their eudemonic approach see Yu 2001. See also Mackay 2005 and Gerson 2016. For a well-argued critique of some of Gerson’s remarks on the harmony of Plato and Aristotle’s ethics see Kraut 2006: 87.

I would agree with Bussanich though that Gerson is misguided to say that reincarnation is not an essential feature of Platonism. It may not be an essential feature of what Gerson (2013: 9-10) calls ‘Ur-Platonism’ (the matrix of interconnected theses from which the various forms of Platonism arise), but it certainly is an entrenched feature of Plato’s Platonism – the Platonism of the dialogues (at least as the Neoplatonists conceived of it, in any case). If then, Aristotle does deny the possibility of reincarnation, as he seems to in *De Anima* (*De An.* 407b13-25), can we still hold to the harmony of Plato and Aristotle’s account of ψυχή *in genera*?

How are we to reconcile Aristotle’s commitment to the immortality of the intellect with his apparent rejection of the transmigration of soul? I believe the answer is that we do not have to. Firstly, it is not immediately clear whether, holding that the intellectual part of the soul *alone* is immortal, Aristotle *could* endorse a view of the transmigration of *intellect alone*. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not explicitly address this issue. A simple Neoplatonic strategy³³ here would be to either say that we have here again an example of the division of labour between Plato and Aristotle; since the possibility of transmigration of intellect is not necessarily directly contradicted by Aristotle, the Platonic position completes and clarifies the picture (taking into account, of course, Aristotle’s commitment to the immortality of intellect).

If, however, we find reason to believe that Aristotle does deny even the *possibility* of transmigration of intellect, then perhaps a Neoplatonist would venture that this is one of those issues that Aristotle simply got wrong. In this way, the harmonist project of including Aristotle amongst the ranks of those who contributed to Platonism is a versatile project indeed. Alternatively, it may be that the Neoplatonists at large were wrong to embrace reincarnation as a core facet of Plato’s Platonism³⁴. Unfortunately, an investigation of this latter issue would take us too far beyond the scope of this article.

Conclusion

Identifying separability and immortality as key features of Aristotle’s psychological doctrine is no doubt a position that is far removed from the contemporary hegemony of Aristotelian exegesis. Nevertheless, when properly investigated, the dualism espoused by Aristotle not only makes the entire Aristotelian psychological doctrine more internally coherent, but leaves it readily open to harmonization with the Platonic account. If, as I have argued elsewhere³⁵, there is a fundamental harmony between Platonic and Aristotelian metaphysics, then this harmony in terms of psychological doctrine should not be so surprising. Taking the textual evidence into account, and seriously considering the arguments of the Neoplatonists, the picture of Aristotle that emerges may be

³³ See Coombs 2016: 17-24.

³⁴ This seems unlikely though, if we take passages like *Phd.* 70c-73a into account. Moreover, more needs be said about the possibility that Platonists espouse an immortality of more than intellect alone.

³⁵ See Coombs 2016: 24-52 and 92-114.

unfamiliar, but is far more philosophically and exegetically tenable than its hylomorphic and functionalist counterparts.

Taking Aristotle's psychological doctrine as an expression of hylomorphism *simpliciter* has several significant drawbacks – most importantly, it cannot account for Aristotle's argument for the immortal soul outside of the seriously problematic confines of an ad-hoc developmentalism. A functionalist interpretation, on the other hand, cannot account for the necessity of intellect being properly incorporeal for cognition as Aristotle understands it to be possible. A dualist account solves these problems. Moreover, given that this dualism is not strictly reducible to Platonic dualism (but might rather be described as a kind of “emergent hylomorphism”), the position highlights both the harmony and difference between the Aristotelian and Platonic psychological doctrines, resulting in a clearer understanding of both – which was exactly the goal the Neoplatonic commentators had in mind, after all.

That this dualism involves a separable, incorporeal, and, by Aristotle's own account, immortal soul, makes the possible harmony of these two thinkers on this issue clear. Not only that, but it draws attention to a deep similarity between the conceptions of both embodied and disembodied personhood in Plato and Aristotle. When the characterization of the good life as the life of contemplation (a characterization that is shared between The Philosopher and his teacher) is taken into account, objections pointing to some fundamental difference in their conceptions of metaphysical and moral personhood evaporate. Though some questions surrounding the harmony described here remain without definitive answer (such as the issue of reincarnation), there is at least enough evidence to warrant serious re-evaluation of long-standing assumptions about Aristotle's categorical opposition to the psychological doctrines of Plato. It would seem that if indeed Aristotle could be described as a hylomorphist, then it must also be admitted that he was in truth a kind of *Platonic hylomorphist*. Investigating the merits of this position would, I believe, offer much insight into the thought of these two giants of Western philosophy, and do proper justice to the nuanced arguments for their harmony put forward by the Neoplatonic commentators³⁶.

³⁶ See also Coombs 2016: 134-136.

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