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Mortality of the Soul and Immortality of the Active Mind (ΝΟΥΣ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΟΣ) in Aristotle. Some hints

Ferber, Rafael

Abstract: The paper gives (I) a short introduction to Aristotle's theory of the soul in distinction to Plato's and tries again (II) to answer the question of whether the individual or the general active mind of human beings is immortal by interpreting "When separated ($\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$)" (de An. III, 5, 430a22) as the decisive argument for the latter view. This strategy of limiting the question has the advantage of avoiding the probably undecidable question of whether this active $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ is human or divine. The paper closes with an outlook (III) on the Christian belief in the resurrection of body and soul in a spiritual body ($\sigma\omicron\mu\alpha$) (1 Corinthians: 15, 44) by accentuating the ethical aspect of the belief in individual immortality as a "need of reason" (Vernunftbedürfnis) (Kant, Critique of Practical Reason, A 256–258).

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MORTALITY OF THE SOUL AND IMMORTALITY OF THE ACTIVE MIND (ΝΟΥΣ ΠΟΙΗΤΙΚΌΣ) IN ARISTOTLE. SOME HINTS

For Aristotle – at least in the dialectical context of the *Sophistici Elenchi* – “most people have no distinct opinion (ἀμφιδοξοῦσιν) whether the soul of animals is destructible or immortal” (*SE* 17.176b16-17; transl. Pickard-Cambridge). In the same vein, we could say that even today many, or perhaps even most, people have no distinct view of whether the soul of human beings, that is, their own soul, is destructible or immortal. Aristotle himself, by contrast, had developed, in the context of *De Anima*, a distinct view, namely that the soul of human beings is destructible, except for the active mind (νοῦς ποιητικός). The paper gives (I) a short introduction to Aristotle’s theory of the soul in distinction to Plato’s and tries again (II) to answer the question of whether the individual or the general active mind of human beings is immortal by interpreting “When separated (χωρισθεῖς)” (*de An.* III, 5, 430a22) as the decisive argument for the latter view. This strategy of limiting the question has the advantage of avoiding the probably undecidable question of whether this active νοῦς is human or divine. The paper closes with an outlook (III) on the Christian belief in the resurrection of body and soul in a spiritual body (σῶμα πνευματικόν) (1 Corinthians: 15, 44) by accentuating the ethical aspect of the belief in individual immortality as a “need of reason” (*Vernunftbedürfnis*) (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, A 256–258).

I

What is rather astonishing in the relation of Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC) to Plato (428/427 BC-348/347 BC) seems to me the following: Aristotle entered the Academy at about the age of seventeen or eighteen (368/367 BC) and “attached himself to Plato and stayed with him (παραβαλεῖν δὲ Πλάτωνι καὶ διατριῆσαι παρ’ αὐτῷ) twenty years” (*D/L*, V, 9, 18-19; l. 105, Dorandi, cf. *Vita Marciana*: 60-64, *FGRHist* 328 F 223). Aristotle “stayed” so with Plato in Athens from 368/367 until Plato’s death in 348/347 BC – if he not “seceded (ἀπέστη) [also in a spatial sense] from Plato when Plato was still alive” (*D/L*, V, 2, 1). We may not *conclude*, but *guess* from the words “attached himself to Plato and stayed with

him” that he “stayed” also as a member of the Academy for circa twenty years.¹ But we do not know anything exact about his membership. It may even be the case that he was not always present at Athens.² Although his writings invite us to form a picture of him,³ his “scientific works are almost silent about his personal affairs.”⁴ In contrast, Plato’s dialogues contain at least three overt allusions (cf. *Ap.* 34a, 38b, *Phd.* 59b) and probably many covert ones (cf. e.g. *Symp.* 217a) about their author.⁵ This silence of Aristotle’s is especially true with regard to the form of his membership in the Academy.

Nevertheless, during, or rather shortly after, his supposed “membership” in the Academy from 368/367 until 348/347 BC,⁶ Aristotle criticized Plato’s ontology – the theory of transcendent ideas, as e.g. developed in the *Phaedo*: “Further, of the more accurate arguments, some lead to Ideas of relations, of which we say there is no independent class...” (*Metaph.* A9.990b16; transl. Ross/Barnes). This implies a critique of the *Phaedo*, where an idea of a relation – the idea of the equal – is introduced for the first time (*Phd.* 74a, c, e, 75b, 78d).⁷ Aristotle developed – despite his well-documented acquaintance with Plato’s *Phaedo* (*Metaph.* A 9, 991b3-7; *GC.* B 6, 335b10-14) – his own psychology, which negates the immortality of the soul.

In contrast, “the Socrates in the *Phaedo*” (ὁ ἐν τῷ Φαίδωνι Σωκράτης) (*GC.* B9.335b10-14; cf. *Pol.* B 2, 1261a6) developed four proofs for the immortality of the soul (*Phd.* 69e-72d; 72e-77d: 80b-80c; 105c-e; 105c-107a), but even the “final proof,” which consists of two parts – a first sub-proof that the soul, since it is the cause of life in the body, is immortal (*Phd.* 105c-e) and a second sub-proof that the soul, since it is immortal, is indestructible (*Phd.* 105e-107a) – did not convince him completely (*Phd.* 107b).⁸ In any

¹ Cf. O. Gigon (ed.), *Vita Aristotelis Marciana* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962): “Daraus ergibt sich u.a. klar, dass Philochoros zwei feste Data besessen hat: das Lebensalter des Aristoteles mit 63 und die Dauer seiner Zugehörigkeit zur Akademie mit 20 Jahren. Über diese Grunddata wird der Historiker (gest. um 260) als jüngerer Zeitgenosse Theophrasts (gest. 286) zuverlässig Bescheid gewusst haben.”

² Cf. *ibid.*, 43, ad l. 37-40: “Freilich ist auch so vor der Überschätzung der Angabe zu warnen. Sie bedeutet zunächst keineswegs, dass Aristoteles von 367 bis 347 ununterbrochen in Athen weilte, sondern nur, dass er von 367 an ‚eingeschriebenes Mitglied‘ der Akademie war...”

³ Cf. A.-H. Chroust, “Aristotle’s ‘Self-Portrayal,’” in *id.*, *Aristotle, New Light on His Life and Some of His Lost Works*, I (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 232-248; C. Natali, *Aristotle: His Life and School*, ed. D.S. Hutchinson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 120-144.

⁴ C. Natali, *Aristotle: His Life and School*, op. cit., 20. For a portrayal, cf. A.-H. Chroust, “Aristotle’s ‘Self-Portrayal,’” op. cit., 232-248.

⁵ Cf. R. Ferber, “Panta praeitein. Socrate e il bene nella Repubblica,” *Méthexis* 23 (2010), 91-92.

⁶ Cf. W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles. Grundlegung einer Geschichte seiner Entwicklung* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1923), 177: “Voraussetzung der Ideenkritik in ihrer ursprünglichen Gestalt ist also ein Kreis platonischer Philosophen, vor dem Aristoteles nach dem Tode des Meisters noch einmal alle Einwände gegen dessen Lehre in schnellem Überblick zusammenfasst, die im Lauf der Jahre die Akademie beschäftigt hatten (...). Einen solchen Platonikerkreis hat Aristoteles nach Platons Tod ausser in Athen, das er bald verliess, nur einmal in Assos um sich gehabt und dann niemals wieder.”

⁷ Cf. W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle’s Metaphysics*. A revised text with introduction and commentary by D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 194, ad loc.

⁸ Cf. R. Ferber, “*Deuteros Plous*, the Immortality of the Soul and the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God,” in *Proceedings of the XI Symposium Platonicum, Plato’s Phaedo, Brasilia, 6th to 8th July 2016, International Plato Studies* (Baden-Baden: Academia Verlag, 2018), 221-230, esp. 229-230. Russian translation: “*Deuteros Plous*: The Immortality of the Soul and the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God” (tr. A. Garadja) = “*Deuteros plous*: бессмертие души и онтологический аргумент существования Бога” (пер. А. Гараджи), *Платоновские исследования*, VIII (2018), 11-33.

case, the author of the *Phaedo*, Plato, did not return to the proofs in the *Phaedo* but did develop three other proofs (cf. *R.* 610e-611a, *Phdr.* 245b-246a, *Lg.* 894e-895c, 896a-b). Aristotle seems not convinced by any of them, *inter alia* because arguments in *Phdr.* 245b-246a and *Lg.* 894e-895c, 896a-b, rely on the self-motion of the soul,⁹ a contradictory concept (cf. *Phys.* VIII.5.57b26-258a5).

It is true that Aristotle wrote a Platonizing dialogue, *Eudemus*, “in 353 or shortly thereafter,”¹⁰ from which only fragments survive.¹¹ But here he may be expressing, in the face of Eudemus’ early death in 353 in the form of a *consolatio mortis*, his solidarity with his “classmate” Eudemus of Cyprus and his teacher Plato rather than developing his own theory. This is indicated by the fact, that – if not – he would in the year 353 “adhere *doctrinally* to the philosophic doctrines on the soul advanced in the *Phaedo* – doctrines which by 353 were obviously ‘antiquated’ even for Plato.”¹²

But it is evident from *De Anima*, written probably “after Aristotle’s return to Athens in 325-4,”¹³ that Aristotle is not convinced by the arguments of the *Phaedo* for the immortality of the individual soul nor by later arguments: “All, however, that these thinkers do is to describe the specific characteristics of the [individual] soul; they do not try to determine anything about the body which is to contain it, as if it were possible, as in the Pythagorean myths, that any soul could be clothed in any body – an absurd view, for each body seems to have a form and shape of its own” (*de An.* 407b20-24; transl. Barnes).

Aristotle denies especially one presupposition of the Platonic psychology: the existence of the individual soul as a substance that is independent from the body, of which substance predicates can be predicated as e.g. ἀσύνθετον (cf. *Phd.* 78C3), ἀθάνατον τε καὶ ἀνώλεθρον (*Phd.* 88b5-6, cf. *Phd.* 95b9-c1.106d2-9).

For Aristotle, whereas in the *Eudemus* the soul seems to be an εἶδος τι (frg. 46, 52, 29 Rose¹⁴), it is in *De Anima* an εἶδος τινος, namely the *something* of a body (σώματος δέ τι), without which it cannot exist (cf. *de An.* II.2.414a20-23).

For Plato, on the other hand, there is a hierarchical ordering of reality in the following sense: The individual ideas can exist without sense phenomena, but sense phenomena cannot exist without the individual ideas. In the same way: The individual soul can exist without a (living) body and surely without this or that human body, but this or that human body cannot exist without the individual soul. This ontological

⁹ Cf. for a formal reconstruction of the argument in the *Phaedrus*, R. Ferber, *Philosophische Grundbegriffe 2, Mensch, Bewusstsein, Leib und Seele, Willensfreiheit, Tod* (München: C. H. Beck, 2003), 129. Translation into Polish by T.L. Kusak, A. Węgrzecki, *Podstawowe Pojęcia Filozoficzne 2* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2008), 123.

¹⁰ A.-H. Chroust, “Eudemus or on the Soul: A Lost Dialogue of Aristotle on the Immortality of the Soul,” *Mnemosyne: Bibliotheca Classica Batava*, vol. 19 (1966), 17-30, here 20, repr. in id., *Aristotle, New Light on His Life and Some of His Lost Works*, II (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 43-54.

¹¹ Cf. O. Gigon (ed.), *Aristotelis opera*, III, *Libroum deperditorum fragmenta* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1967), 287-296.

¹² Chroust, *ibid.*, 29, n. 2.

¹³ W. D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle. De anima*, edited, with introduction and commentary by D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 11.

¹⁴ Cf. W. Jaeger, *Aristoteles*, *op. cit.*, 44, n. 3

“Hysteron-Proteron-Structure” (cf. *Met.* V11.1019a2-4), the “fundamental formula of Platonism,” can be understood also as the “fundamental formula” of Plato and his so-called objective idealism.¹⁵

Unlike Plato, Aristotle does not regard the εἶδος as an independent entity, but only as a dependent predicate: “For it seems impossible that any universal term should be the name of a substance” (*Metaph.* Z13.1038b8-9; transl. Ross). Since I have provided an extended discussion of Aristotle’s theory of substance elsewhere,¹⁶ I will summarize here only some essentials: The first, or concrete, substance is something particular, and only the so-called second, or abstract, substance is something universal (cf. *Cat.* 2a14-16). The universal which is said of the particular has no independent existence, but is only a quality of that particular. For example, when we say “Socrates is a human being,” we refer to a quality of a particular individual, namely the quality of being human or the fact of being a member of the human species. But being human, or a member of the human species, does not mean a particular individual, say, the visible flesh-and-blood Socrates. Rather, it is a quality which distinguishes the human species from others. The Aristotelian substance is – to use an expression of Donald C. Williams (1899-1983) – the “occurrence of an essence” in a particular individual.¹⁷ We can mentally perceive this universal quality in a similar way as we remember or “see” the Platonic ideas. Thus, by a *kind* of induction, we see in Socrates something universal, namely a human being: “Thus it is clear that it is necessary for us to become familiar with the primitives (τὰ πρῶτα) by induction; for perception too instils the universal in this way” (*An. post.* B 19, 100b4-5). In the same vein, we could say that the soul is the “occurrence of an essence” in an individual body, or – to recall the Aristotelian definition of the soul, which became famous under the heading of *anima forma corporis* – “Hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it. But substance is actuality, and thus soul is the actuality of a body as above characterized” (*de An.* 412a19-22). Therefore: As soon as the individual body dies, also the form of the body dissolves with the body. We have not an ontological priority of the soul over the body in the sense of the above-mentioned Platonic “Hysteron-Proteron-Structure,” but a coexistence with the body: This or that soul cannot exist without this or that particular living body and this or that living body cannot exist without this or that soul.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Krämer, “Die Idee des Guten. Sonnen- und Liniengleichnis (Buch VI 504a-511e)” in Platon, *Politeia*, ed. O. Höffe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1996), 179-203, here 200: “Man kann sie geradezu als Grundformel des Platonismus verstehen.” Quoted in R. Ferber, “Auf diese Weise nun gebe ich selbst meine Stimme ab” – Einige Bemerkungen zu Platons später Ideenlehre unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des ‘Timaios’,” *Gymnasium. Zeitschrift für Kultur der Antike und Humanistische Bildung*, vol. 105 (1998), 419-444, here 436, n. 39. Cf. R. Ferber, *Philosophische Grundbegriffe 2*, op. cit., 129-131 (Polish translation: *Podstawowe Pojęcia Filozoficzne 2*, op. cit., 122-125).

¹⁶ R. Ferber, “Die ‘metaphysische Perle’ im ‘Sumpf der Tropen’: Einige Bemerkungen zur aristotelischen Metaphysik, Z 17, 1041b 4-9,” in *Metamorphosen der Vernunft: Festschrift für Karen Gloy*, ed. A. Lazzari (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2003), 63-82, esp. 70.

¹⁷ D.C. Williams, “The Elements of Being,” *Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 7 (1953), 3-18, here 7: “Santayana, however, used ‘trope’ to stand for the *essence of an occurrence* and I shall divert the word, which is almost useless in either his or its dictionary sense, to stand for, so to speak, the *occurrence of an essence*.” Quoted in Ferber, “Die ‘metaphysische Perle’ im ‘Sumpf der Tropen,’” op. cit., 74.

II

But there is an exception to this coexistence: If the soul is mortal, the whole genus νοῦς is not. Concerning the genus νοῦς, Aristotle makes a new and interesting distinction, namely the distinction between two species: the passive (νοῦς παθητικός) and the active mind (νοῦς ποιητικός). Although Aristotle does not use the expression (νοῦς ποιητικός), but speaks only of another “thought (νοῦς),” “which is what it is by virtue of making (ποιεῖν) all things,” I use it just for convenience and in respect of a long tradition. I quote here from the decisive passage:

And in fact thought (νοῦς), as we have described it, is what it is by virtue of becoming (γίνεσθαι) all things, while there is another which is what it is by virtue of making (ποιεῖν) all things: this is a sort of positive state like the light; for in a sense light makes (ποιεῖ) potential colours into actual colours. Thought in this sense of it is separated (χωριστός), impassible (ἀπαθής), unmixed (ἀμιγής), since it is in its essential nature activity (for always the active is superior to the passive factor, the originating force to the matter). Actual knowledge is identical with its object: in the individual, potential knowledge is in time prior to actual knowledge, but absolutely it is not prior even in time. It does not sometimes think (νοεῖ) and sometimes not think (οὐ νοεῖ). When separated (χωρισθεῖς) it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal (ἀθάνατον) and eternal (ἄδιον) (we do not remember because, while this is impassible (ἀπαθές), passive thought (παθητικός νοῦς) is perishable); and without this nothing thinks (νοεῖ). (*de An.* III.5.430a14-26; transl. Smith/Barnes with modifications by R.F.).

The passage has a long history of interpretation: The decisive documents from Theophrastus (c. 371-c. 287 BC) to Stephanus from Alexandria (7th century) have recently been collected by H. Busche and M. Perkams.¹⁸ In the Middle Ages, Averroes (1126-1198) and Aquinas (1224-1274), especially, commented on the chapter but, as W.D. Ross remarks rightly, “neither of these confined himself to a strict interpretation of the chapter; they incorporated into their theories elements which belong to Moslem or to Christian theology rather than to Aristotle.”¹⁹ We find a useful survey of ancient and medieval and nineteenth-century accounts of the agent intellect in Brentano’s “Habilitationsschrift” “Die Psychologie des Aristoteles insbesondere seine Lehre vom Νοῦς ποιητικός.”²⁰ The interpretation of F. Brentano is nevertheless biased in favour of Aquinas and its interpretation of the νοῦς ποιητικός as created by God has been sharply criticized by H. Busche.²¹ The present *status*

¹⁸ H. Busche and M. Perkams (eds.), *Antike Interpretationen zur aristotelischen Lehre vom Geist* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2018).

¹⁹ W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle. De anima*, 44.

²⁰ F. Brentano, *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom Νοῦς ποιητικός* (Mainz: Verlag von Franz Kirchheim, 1867), 5-36.

²¹ Cf. *ibid.*, 226: “Fragen wir aber, welcher von den früheren Erklärungsversuchen am Meisten der Wahrheit nahe gekommen, so ist es unläugbar, dass wir dem heil. Thomas von Aquin diese Ehre zuerkennen müssen. Ja, ich weiss nicht, ob ich nicht sagen soll, das er die ganze Lehre des Aristoteles richtig erfasst habe.” Cf. for a critique: H. Busche, *Die Seele als System, Aristoteles Wissenschaft von der Seele* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2001), 67-96,

quaestionis may be consulted in the corresponding chapter of C. Shields on *De Anima* and a summary of it in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

I cannot give here again a survey on the long history of interpretation, “a substantial field in its own right,”²² but rely on C. Shields. He distinguishes correctly, in a typological manner, between a human and a divine interpretation, and enumerates the pros and cons of these two interpretations. In addition to the divine and human interpretation, I distinguish between a general and an individual interpretation and I enumerate in a simplified chart the following essential options:

Divine Interpretation	Human Interpretation
General Interpretation	Individual Interpretation

Roughly stated: Whereas Theophrastus defends the human and individual interpretation, Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. c. 200), e.g., seems to defend the divine and general interpretation. Thomas Aquinas defends the human and individual interpretation, Averroes the general and divine. But since the text is too underdetermined to rule out either the divine or the human interpretation, intersubjective agreement is difficult, if not impossible, to reach, as more than two thousand years of interpretation confirm.²³

So, I limit myself, first, to the question: Is the active mind (νοῦς ποιητικός) individual or general? I leave the question open as to whether this νοῦς is divine or human.

To answer this limited question, I limit myself, second, to another limited question: What is the subject of “When separated (χωρισθεις) it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal (ἀθάνατον) and eternal (αἰδιον)” (*de An.* III, 5, 430a22-23)?

This small question can, in my opinion, be unanimously answered: It is the νοῦς ποιητικός which is separated, because the expression “When separated (χωρισθεις)...” (430a22) reassumes: “Thought in this sense of it is separated (χωριστός)” (430a17).²⁴

This is the hypothesis I start from. From this hypothesis, it follows, first, that the νοῦς ποιητικός is separated (χωριστός). We do not remember it because before our birth, we did not have a νοῦς παθητικός and therefore the νοῦς ποιητικός did not find before

esp. 147 and 91, n. 177. I agree especially with Busche’s critique of Brentano’s thesis that we find in Aristotle an immortal individual soul, cf. F. Brentano, *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles*, op. cit., 122, n. 45: “Dass die Seele, wenn sie nach der Trennung vom Leibe fortbesteht, etwas Individuelles bleibt, ist unzweifelhaft, den das Allgemeine besteht nach Aristoteles ausserhalb des Denkens nicht anders als in Individuen (vgl. *Anal. Post.* I, 11. Princ.) Ebenso ist offenbar, dass sie noch dasselbe Individuum sein muss (...).” This coincides with the interpretation of Thomas Aquinas, “that a distinct agent intellect belongs to each human being, *severing* at death to exist on its own immortally” (V. Caston, “Aristotle’s Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,” *Phronesis*, 54 (1999), 199-227, here 207).

²² V. Caston, “Aristotle’s Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,” op. cit., 209-211 and 200, n. 11.

²³ Cf. Ch. Shields (ed.), *Aristotle De Anima* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 312-313, 328-329.

²⁴ To quote paradigmatically here only two clear testimonies from the last century: W.D. Ross (ed.), *Aristotle. De anima*, 47, writes: “The unnamed subject of the present sentence is plainly the active reason (cf. χωρισθεις, l. 22, with χωριστός, l. 17).” L. Robin, *Aristote* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1944), 203, has written: “Ainsi, l’intellect ‘en acte’ paraît être à la fois quelque chose *en dehors* de nous, et quelque chose *en nous*. Par suite, à la fois, il est ‘séparé’, χωριστός, et il se ‘sépare’, χωρισθεις; et c’est quand il s’est de la sorte séparé de nous qu’il a sa véritable ‘quiddité.’”

our birth any εἶδος or immanent form from sensible things, which we could remember from the time before our birth. The last sentence, “and without this (ἄνευ τούτου) nothing thinks” (*de An.* III, 5, 430a25), can now have two interpretations: Either without the νοῦς ποιητικός nothing thinks or without the νοῦς παθητικός nothing thinks. Since the νοῦς ποιητικός, as separated νοῦς, thinks anyway and incessantly, and the “this” in “without this” (ἄνευ τούτου) refers therefore to the νοῦς παθητικός, we can conclude: Without the νοῦς παθητικός, nothing thinks. The νοῦς παθητικός is thus the necessary but not sufficient condition of our thinking. This is also implied by the thesis that our soul “never [thinks] without mental images” (*de An.* III.7 431a.16-17). But the νοῦς παθητικός which receives images of sensible things is a personal one.

The question now remains: Is this νοῦς ποιητικός also individual, or is it general and impersonal? When it is mixed with the νοῦς παθητικός, the νοῦς ποιητικός is also individualized or personalized because it finds the mental images which the individual παθητικός νοῦς receives through our sensory organs. After the death of the body and its παθητικός νοῦς, the ποιητικός νοῦς survives only as “impassible” (ἀπαθές) and is, therefore, immortal only in a depersonalized or deindividualized form, because it now has no personal mental images to work on.

So, the answer to our limited question is: The active mind is immortal only in a deindividualized general form; but when it is mixed with the passive mind and its mental images, it also exists in a “mixed” form and it is mortal only in this “mixed” form, as the passive mind. To spell the decisive sentence out: “When separated (χωρισθείς) it is alone just what it is, and this alone is immortal (ἀθάνατον) and eternal (ἄϊδιον)” (*de An.* III.5 430a22-23): When the νοῦς ποιητικός is separated (χωρισθείς), it is solely just what it “essentially”²⁵ is and, therefore, is not individualized by images, and this deindividualized νοῦς ποιητικός alone is immortal (ἀθάνατον) and eternal (ἄϊδιον).

Although we have no ontological priority of the soul over the body, in the sense of the above-mentioned Platonic “Hysteron-Proteron-Structure,” but a coexistence with the body, we have nevertheless a modified and weakened Platonic “Hysteron-Proteron-Structure” concerning the νοῦς ποιητικός and the νοῦς παθητικός: The νοῦς ποιητικός can exist without the νοῦς παθητικός, but the νοῦς παθητικός *may exist in the embryo, but cannot fulfil its function to see “all things” (πάντα) (430a15) without the “light” of the νοῦς ποιητικός.*

The decisive conclusion is, therefore, that there is, in Aristotle, no personal immortality of the individual, but only of the depersonalized νοῦς ποιητικός on the one hand and the eternal species on the other hand. The νοῦς ποιητικός exists as a general νοῦς, be it divine or not; the eternal species exist by reproduction of the individuals: “an animal producing an animal, a plant a plant, in order that, as far as its nature allows, it may partake in the eternal and divine” (*de An.* II.415.28-415b1). The survival of one individual soul, with its images, we have only in the shadowy memory of its progeny. Although the textual evidence for this interpretation is small, the complete mortality of human beings and their souls is in accordance with the picture, in Aristotle, of a soul as *forma corporis*.

²⁵ I owe “essentially” to Caston, “Aristotle’s Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,” op. cit., 211.

III

So, the immortality of the personal soul remained for Aristotle, in *De Anima*, and in distinction to Plato – as it was for his Socrates in the *Meno* (81a10-b7) – *not* “an old and holy saying” (παλαιῶς τε καὶ ἱεροῦς λόγοις) (*Ep.* VII, 335a3) to be obeyed. Nevertheless, the Platonic Love (cf. *Smp.* 207d-208d) in the sense of a “*désir de l'éternité*”²⁶ did not die in Aristotle:

But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can (ἐφ' ὅσον ἐνδέχεται), make ourselves immortal (ἀθανατίζειν), and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk (τῷ ὄγκῳ σμικρόν), much more does it in power and worth surpass everything (δυνάμει καὶ τιμότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει). This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason (κατὰ τὸν νοῦν) is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest (*EN*, X10, 1177b30-1178a8; transl. Smith).

This desire for immortality by assimilation of ourselves to the νοῦς, echoes not only the follow-up of the Platonic formula ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, namely πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος (*R.* 509b9-10), since the νοῦς “in power and worth surpasses everything” (δυνάμει καὶ τιμότητι πολὺ μᾶλλον πάντων ὑπερέχει). It echoes also the phrase “becoming as like God as possible” (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν) (*Th.* 176b1-3, cf. *Ti.* 90d4-9) in the sense of a ὁμοίωσις νῶϊ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν.

But this “*désir de l'éternité*” nevertheless leaves open the question of post-mortem justice regarding our moral or immoral behaviour as long as we are alive. This is unsatisfactory because even if the just are *simpliciter* happy and the unjust unhappy (*Grg.* 470c-471d, *R.* 618e-619b, *Lg.* 662b-e) in this life,²⁷ the just may nevertheless have in a qualified sense a miserable life and may, like Socrates – “the best of that generation we've ever encountered, the wisest, too, and the most just” (*Phd.* 118a; transl. Rowe) – be condemned to death, whereas the most unjust may survive. But then a “need of reason” (*Vernunftbedürfnis*) (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, A 256-258) remains unfulfilled, namely that the just also have on earth a happy life or that virtue also pays in the end

²⁶ L. Robin, *La théorie platonicienne de l'amour, nouvelle édition avec préface de P.-M. Schuhl* (Paris: s.n., 1964), 188: “L'amour n'est pas seulement (...) l'amour de la possession éternelle du bon; il est l'amour de l'éternité même, parce qu'elle est un bien et même notre bien.”

²⁷ Cf. R. Ferber, “Was und wie hat Sokrates gewusst?,” *Elenchos* 28, 2007, 38: “Sokrates' ‘semantischer Monismus’, dagegen würde darauf insistieren, daß die Ausdrücke ‘glücklich,’ ‘gerecht’ und ‘gut’ nur auf *eine* Art und Weise korrekt verwendet werden oder nur *eine* korrekte Bedeutung haben und alle anderen Verwendungsweisen inkorrekt sind: Der Gerechte ist *simpliciter* glücklich, der Ungerechte dagegen *simpliciter* unglücklich, (...) und das Angenehme ist *simpliciter* nicht das Gute.”

in terms of (conventional) happiness in this life. In Kantian terminology, it is a “need of reason” that the good will or *bonum supremum* is supplemented by the *bonum consummatum*, that is, that the good will is supplemented by happiness (cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, A 198-203).

It is the Christian belief in the resurrection of a “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν) (1 Corinthians: 15, 44) – to be judged for one’s good and bad deeds in life (cf. 2 Corinthians: 5, 10) – after the *complete* annihilation of body and soul²⁸ which has the advantage of giving substance to this “need of reason” in a new form. But with this “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν), we would leave the limits of philosophy, since this resurrection of my “psychic body” (σῶμα ψυχικόν), which will be buried, in a post-resurrectional “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν) (cf. 1 Corinthians: 15, 44-45) – which is nevertheless numerically identical with my “psychic body” – cannot be proved by reason any more than its presupposition – the resurrection of Christ – can be proved by direct evidence (cf. 1 Corinthians: 15, 12-14). It remains a testimony-based “knowledge,” in Platonic terms, a belief without knowledge (ἄνευ ἐπιστήμης δόξα (c.f. *R.* 506c6) – that is, a belief (δόξα) transformed by St. Paul into a *faith* (πίστις) on the same scale as hope (ἐλπὶς) and love (ἀγάπη) (cf. 1 Corinthians: 13, 13).

But even if the testimony is false, the resurrection in a “spiritual body” remains – like Plato’s myths of the beyond (*Gr.* 523a-527a, *Phd.* 107d-114c, *Plt.* 614b-621b; cf. also *Lg.* 903d-903e) – a reasonable myth, whose reasonable core, in the sense of a “need of reason”, transformed into a firm hope, had long before Kant already been formulated by “the Socrates in the *Phaedo*”: “that there is something in store for those who have died, and – as we have been told since antiquity – something much better for the good than for the bad” (*Phd.* 63c5-7; transl. Rowe with small alterations by R. F.). Perhaps this reasonable hope of a post-mortem justice, effected by a post-mortem tribunal, consisting – in a secularized form – of the judgments of future generations of children “asking to be born” (Leonard Cohen), will enhance justice here and now in this life, at least for the part of mankind who believe in future generations of children. But, in distinction to a belief in a post-resurrectional “spiritual body” (σῶμα πνευματικόν), a belief in future children is true of (almost) everybody.

To vary the motto of Goethe’s *Farbenlehre* (“*Post fata nostra pueri qui nunc ludunt nostri iudices erunt.*”): “*Post fata nostra infantes nondum nati nostri iudices erunt.*”; or, translated freely: “After our fortunes, the children not yet born will be our judges, regarding our fortunes and deeds.”²⁹

²⁸ Cf. O. Cullmann, *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witnesses of the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1958).

²⁹ An earlier version of the paper was given at the National Research University “Higher School of Economics,” Moscow, April 2017. I thank very much Olga Alieva for her invitation, two commentators and Hubertus Busche for their helpful comments.