



# The Status of Souls as *Hupokeimena* in Aristotle

RESEARCH

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## ABSTRACT

Many scholars have claimed that a well-known, allegedly ‘Rylean’ passage in *DA* I.4 shows that Aristotle does not think souls are subjects of mental states and activities. However, other scholars have argued against this and invoked other texts to support their rival claim that Aristotle *does* think souls are subjects of mental states and activities. This article articulates and defends an original interpretation of Aristotle’s position vis-à-vis this issue. In particular, this article argues that Aristotle thinks the souls of living corporeal substances are ‘things that underlie’ (i.e., ὑποκείμενα) for various non-substantial features of the substances to which they belong, including whatever mental capacities those substances have. However, this does not entail that he thinks souls literally have the features they underlie, as if they themselves were alive and could engage in the kinds of mental activities (seeing, hearing, desiring, thinking, reasoning, etc.) that animals and humans can. In fact, there is good reason to think Aristotle does not think souls literally engage in such activities, despite his sometimes writing in a loose manner that suggests they do.

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It is well known that Aristotle thinks that plants, animals, and human beings can engage in various activities by virtue of their having souls, indeed not just any sort of souls but souls of the relevant kind as to bestow the particular vital capacities they possess as plants, animals, or human beings (*DA* II.2, 414a12–13; *DA* I.4, 408b13–15; and *DA* I.5, 411a26–b2). For Aristotle, the soul of a living corporeal substance (i.e., a plant, animal, or human being) is a principle, i.e., a cause or ground, not only of that substance’s life but also its characteristic powers, e.g., to nourish and reproduce itself, self-locomote, perceive, desire, think, reason, and/or etc. (see *DA* II.4, 415b12–14 and II.2, 413b11–12). But what about these souls themselves? Does Aristotle think that our souls not only ground the life and psychological powers that we have but also are themselves literally alive and capable of engaging in whatever mental activities that we can?<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars have invoked a well-known passage in *DA* I.4 to argue that Aristotle does *not* think this. The passage is occasioned by Aristotle’s acknowledging the following ‘difficulty’:

Someone might more fairly raise a difficulty concerning how the soul is in motion, by focusing on these sorts of considerations: we say that the soul is pained and pleased, is confident and further that it is angry and also that it perceives and thinks. But all of these seem to be motions. On this basis, one might suppose that the soul is in motion. (408a34–408b4; translation from Shields 2016: 14).

In response to this difficulty, Aristotle first notes that even if these psychological affections do essentially involve motion, it doesn’t follow that the soul is what undergoes the motion; the soul could be what experiences the mental affection (e.g., the pain or pleasure), while the motion involved takes place in the body rather than in the soul.<sup>2</sup> But then Aristotle makes a second point:

In fact, it is probably better not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks but instead that a human being does these things by virtue of his/her soul (τῆ ψυχῆ); and this not insofar as there is motion in the soul, but rather because motion sometimes reaches as far as the soul and sometimes proceeds from it. Perception, for example, is from these motions [i.e., motions in the sense organs], whereas recollection is from the soul to motions or rests in the sense organs. (408b13–18; my translation).<sup>3</sup>

Jonathan Barnes refers to this as Aristotle’s ‘celebrated Rylean passage’ because, Barnes claims, it anticipates Ryle’s famous claim that it is a category mistake to treat one’s mind (or soul) as if it were a thing in its own right, a literal subject of mental states alongside the corporeal substance that oneself is. (I shall refer to anything that literally perceives, thinks, etc. as a ‘literal subject’ of such activities). Indeed, Barnes appeals to this and other passages to argue that Aristotle ‘construe[s] the soul not as a substance (like, say, the heart or the brain) but as an attribute (like, say, life or health)’ (1971: 103). Many other scholars have agreed with Barnes and likewise claimed that the above passage shows that Aristotle’s position is that a thing’s soul is not itself something

1 I say ‘literally’ because we sometimes speak loosely, saying things like ‘my left eye can’t see, but my right one can’ and ‘this ear doesn’t work well, but the other can hear you well enough.’ In speaking this way, we do not mean to imply that our eyes or ears can see or hear in the conscious, experiential way that we do. When we see or hear something, we are *aware* of something; we have a visual or auditory *experience*. Though we may speak loosely of our eyes ‘seeing’ or our ears ‘hearing,’ we don’t think they are having any visual or auditory *experiences*. We are subjects of *mental states*, including those we refer to as ‘seeing’ and ‘hearing,’ but we don’t think our eyes and ears are subjects of any mental states. The question at issue in this article is not whether there is a loose sense in which Aristotle thinks our souls can be said to ‘perceive,’ ‘think,’ etc., analogous to the loose sense in which we say our eyes ‘can see’ and our ears ‘can hear,’ but whether Aristotle thinks our souls perceive, think, etc. in the sense that we would normally say that human beings do but their sense organs and brains do not. (Of course, some people think one *just is* one’s brain and hence that one’s brain does *literally* think, perceive; etc.; in this case, one’s brain isn’t just capable of doing something that facilitates or causes or grounds one’s perceiving and thinking but instead is itself, strictly speaking, capable of thinking, perceiving, etc.). To avoid unnecessarily cumbersome prose, I won’t always add ‘literally’ or ‘strictly speaking’ in what follows, but this point should be understood throughout.

2 For more on this initial response, see §5 below.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Aristotle’s works are mine and are based on the Greek texts in Minio-Paluello (1949), Ross (1924), Ross (1948), and Ross (1956). In the case of Aristotle’s *DA*, all my translations are based loosely on those found in Shields (2016).

which can perceive, think, or engage in any other mental activity but instead only something (viz., a form) by virtue of having which something else (e.g., an animal or human) can engage in such activities.<sup>4</sup>

Those who endorse this view suppose that Aristotle's thought is that the former locution ('the soul pities, learns, thinks, etc.') is better avoided because it incorrectly suggests the soul itself is a thing which pities, learns, thinks, etc. The latter locution ('a human being does these things by virtue of his/her soul') is better because it indicates instead that the soul is only something by virtue of which something else (viz., the human being whose soul it is) does these things. (Compare: one might think it is better not to say that one's eyes see but instead that one sees by virtue of one's eyes, for though one's eyes are certainly involved in seeing, one's eyes are not what literally sees or has any visual experiences; instead, oneself is.)

However, other authors have disputed this 'Rylean' interpretation of the passage and offered alternative accounts of why Aristotle thinks it is 'better not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks but instead that a human being does these things by virtue of his/her soul' which do not depend on Aristotle's denying that souls are literal subjects of such activities.<sup>5</sup> Some of these authors not only defend alternative interpretations of this particular passage but also offer other alleged evidence in favor of their claim that Aristotle *does* think that our souls are substances which are literal subjects of various properties, states, and activities, including mental activities like perceiving, thinking, and reasoning. Let us call this latter interpretation of Aristotle's position 'the Literal Subject Interpretation.'

Those who defend the Literal Subject Interpretation have offered three main kinds of arguments for it. First, Christopher Shields has argued based on various texts from Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics* that Aristotle thinks the forms of corporeal substances (including souls) underlie non-substantial features (or πάθη) as 'underlying subjects' (ὑποκείμενα) for such features in the same way that the corporeal substances themselves are 'underlying subjects' (ὑποκείμενα) for such features. Since the latter are literal subjects of the non-substantial features they underlie, one might think that Aristotle thinks souls are likewise literal subjects of the capacities, states, and activities they too underlie.<sup>6</sup> Second, Jason Carter has recently argued that a certain passage from *Metaph.* Δ.18 (in which Aristotle refers to life being 'in the soul primarily' (ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ πρώτῃ) and in human beings in virtue of their souls) indicates that Aristotle thinks that at least some properties (e.g., being alive) are attributable to corporeal substances in virtue of their having souls *which themselves have those properties*. Moreover, Carter invokes both this passage and *Cat.* 2, 1a23–b3, where Aristotle refers to knowledge being in the soul and the soul as something that underlies (i.e., a ὑποκείμενον for) knowledge, to argue that Aristotle really does think souls are literal subjects of mental states and activities.<sup>7</sup> Third, there are surprisingly many passages in which Aristotle speaks of souls doing things such as 'discriminating' (κρίνειν), 'knowing' (γνωρίζειν, γινώσκειν), 'understanding' (φρονεῖν), 'reasoning' (διάνοιειν, νοεῖν), 'conceiving' (ὑπολαμβάνειν), and 'perceiving' (αἰσθάνεσθαι).<sup>8</sup> Some authors, including Shields and Carter, contend that these passages – as well as those where Aristotle speaks of various mental capacities and activities as capacities and activities 'of' the soul<sup>9</sup> – indicate that we should take seriously the idea that

4 See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima* 23.18–24 (tr. Caston 2012: 50), Hicks (1965/1907: 275), Sorabji (1974: 73), Modrak (1987: 115), Wedin (1988: 10–11), Lewis (1991: 302–303), Witt (1992: 180), Granger (1996: 77), Wedin (2000: 144), Polansky (2007: 113–117), and Bolton (2014: 168).

5 See Shields (1988), Heinaman (1990: 97 n. 28), Shields (1995: 168–175), Menn (2002: 101), Shields (2007: 155–160), Shields (2009: 288), Shields (2016: 143–145 and 294–295), and Carter (2018).

6 See Shields (1988) and the discussion in Granger (1995a), Granger (1995b), and Shields (1995). See also Shields (2007: 157), Shields (2009: 288), and Shields (2016: 143–145).

7 See Carter (2018: 32 n.14 and 46). See also Morison (2002: 60–61), for a related treatment of *Phys.* IV.3, 210a29–30, where Aristotle suggests that knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) is in the whole, viz., a human being, in virtue of being in a part (μέρος) of the whole, viz., the human being's 'capacity to reason' (τὸ λογιστικόν).

8 See *DA* 427a17–21; 429a10–11; 429a22–23; 429a31–b4; and 429b23–25. See also 427b2, where the soul is said to spend most of its time in error, and 407b13–19. See also *De Sensu* 447b5–8, 447b24–26, and 449a5–10.

9 See, e.g., *DA* 402a7–10; 403a3–12; 403a16–19; 413a33–b1; 414a29; and 415a22–25.

Aristotle thinks our souls are in fact things that discriminate, know, understand, perceive, and so forth, contrary to what a ‘Rylean’ reading of the above *DA* I.4 passage would suggest.<sup>10</sup>

Given these three lines of alleged evidence for the Literal Subject Interpretation, as well as the dispute over how to interpret the aforementioned *DA* I.4 passage, there is a need to examine the question of whether Aristotle thinks our souls are alive and literal subjects of mental states from a more general perspective, one that takes into account relevant texts from not only Aristotle’s *De Anima* but also his *Metaphysics*, *Categories*, and *Posterior Analytics*. This article is designed to do just that.

In what follows, I argue that the evidence favors the view that Aristotle does *not* think our souls are literally alive or literal subjects of any mental capacities, states, or activities. In §2, I offer a *prima facie* case for this position, a case that aligns with and yet also expands upon what other opponents of the Literal Subject Interpretation have argued. Then, in §§3–4, I address the first of the three above arguments for the Literal Subject Interpretation. More specifically, in §3 I argue, in agreement with Shields, that Aristotle *does* think the souls of living corporeal substances are ‘things that underlie’ (i.e., ‘ὑποκείμενα for’) various properties of those substances, including the life and various vital (including mental) capacities of those substances. However, in §4 I carefully review what Aristotle says to clarify what he means by an ‘underlying thing’ (a ‘ὑποκείμενον’) in this context. Based on this clarification, I argue (in contrast to Shields) that the fact that Aristotle thinks souls are ὑποκείμενα which underlie such things does not entail that he thinks they are literal subjects of the features they underlie. Given this, I conclude that Aristotle’s characterizing souls as ὑποκείμενα in this way should not lead us to abandon what I argued in §2 should be our default way of understanding his position; namely, that he does *not* think souls are literal subjects of life or any mental capacities, states, or activities. Building on this discussion, in §§5–6 I proceed to address the other two arguments for the Literal Subject Interpretation mentioned above. In each case, I argue that the texts in question are best understood in a way that does not commit Aristotle to the claim that our souls are literally alive or literal subjects of any mental capacities, states, or activities. Finally, in §7 I summarize the key results of my discussion and briefly comment on their significance for those interested in developing and defending a contemporary version of Aristotle’s account of what we are.

## §2. A PRIMA FACIE CASE AGAINST THE LITERAL SUBJECT INTERPRETATION

A central pillar in Aristotle’s position is his claim that souls are substances in the way that forms can be substances. In explaining his grounds for identifying souls with forms rather than some kind of body, Aristotle gives a crucial clue to understanding just what kind of entity he thinks souls are. In particular, he implies that souls are entities which are *predicated of* the corporeal substances to which they belong. To see this, consider Aristotle’s reasoning in *DA* II.1:

Every natural body having life is a substance and, indeed, a substance as a composite.  
Since it is a body of a certain sort (it has life), *the soul could not be [such] a body, for [such] a body is not among those things which are predicated of an underlying thing...*

It must be, then, that the soul is a substance as the form of a natural body which has life in potentiality. (412a15–18, a19–21; my emphasis).

Aristotle’s inference in this passage depends on the implicit premise that souls, unlike the kind of body Aristotle is arguing a soul cannot be, *are* among those things which are predicated of an ‘underlying thing’ or ‘ὑποκείμενον’.

This idea is implied again when Aristotle revisits his identification of souls with forms in the next chapter, *DA* II.2:

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10 See Shields (1988: 140), Heinaman (1990: 97 n.28), Shields (2007: 158), Shields (2009: 288), Shields (2016: 144 and 294–295), and Carter (2018, 32 n.14 and 46–49).

That by which we live and perceive is spoken of in two ways, just as is that by which we know... the soul is in the first way that by virtue of which we live and perceive and think, so it will be a sort of *λόγος* and form, but not the matter and not the *ὑποκείμενον*. For 'substance' is said in three ways, as we said [in *DA* II.1], of which one is form, another matter, and another what is from both; and of these the matter is potentiality and the form actuality. Since what is from both is an ensouled thing, the body is not the actuality of the soul; rather, the soul is the actuality of the body. For this reason, those to whom it seems that the soul neither is without body nor is some kind of body understand things correctly. Indeed, the soul is not a body but is something predicated of a body and for this reason belongs to a body. (414a4–5, a12–22).

Here Aristotle repeats his core claim that souls are substances in the way that forms can be substances. Moreover, he again indicates that a soul is something which is predicated of and belongs to something else, viz., the body or corporeal substance to which it belongs as a form and actuality. A living corporeal substance (e.g., a plant, animal, or human being) is not an embodied soul but rather an 'ensouled thing,' an ensouled body. In short, both preceding passages indicate that Aristotle thinks souls are entities, forms, which are predicated of something else, viz., the living bodies or corporeal substances to which they belong as forms.<sup>11</sup>

Given this, it is reasonable to infer that Aristotle does not think souls are first-order objects, i.e., things that exist without being predicated of something else (like, e.g., human beings and animals). Instead, for Aristotle a soul is a certain kind of feature or attribute, something that exists by belonging to, by being predicated of, something else.

Several further pieces of evidence support this inference as well. First, it fits the analogies Aristotle uses to explain his view of what a soul is. In *DA* II.1, Aristotle likens a soul, a form and first actuality, to the knowledge of a knower, to the shape of wax, to an axe's power to cut, and to an eye's power of sight (see 412a22–23, 412b6–8, 412b27–413a3 with 412b10–17). These are clearly not first-order objects but rather attributes predicated of such objects. Second, in his more general discussion of the form and first actuality of a substance in *Metaph.* H.2, Aristotle likens the form of a substance to differentiating properties (*διαφορές*) insofar as the former, like the latter, is predicated of something as the cause/ground of its being a thing of a certain kind (see 1042b31–1043a7; see also *Metaph.* Δ.8, 1017b15–17). Finally, the same conclusion is suggested by Aristotle's use of the term 'μορφή' for form, as the shape (the 'μορφή') of a thing is evidently not a first-order object but rather an attribute of such an object.

So, souls for Aristotle are not first-order objects, things that exist without being predicated of something else, but instead exist only as a kind of attribute or feature of the living corporeal substances to which they belong and of which they are predicated. Given this, it is reasonable to conclude further that Aristotle does not think souls are literally alive or capable of thinking, perceiving, or engaging in any other kind of mental activity. Intuitively, something that is predicated of something else is not the right sort of thing to be, strictly speaking, alive or capable of thinking, perceiving, or engaging in any other sort of mental activity.<sup>12</sup> Some properties seem (by experience) to be first-order properties, i.e., properties that are only had by entities that are not themselves predicated of other entities. Being alive, being capable of thinking, being capable of perceiving, and, in general, being capable of engaging in any sort of mental activity each seem to be such properties. This is not to say all properties are like this. Consider, for example, being visible: the shapes and colors of objects seem to be themselves visible, even though they are

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11 For similar arguments, see Ross (1961: 212–213) and Granger (1996: 17–18). Concerning the first of the two passages quoted above, Ross writes, 'In l. 17 he infers that the soul is not a body, and the reason he gives (ll.17–19) is that body is not an attribute, but a subject. The missing but easily supplied part of the proof is 'whereas soul (or besouledness) is, as we have seen, not a substance, but an attribute' (1961: 212–213). Shields understands Ross to be claiming that a soul is not a 'substance' (*οὐσία*) in Aristotle's sense, which leads Shields to object that Aristotle does think that a soul is an *οὐσία*, viz., an *οὐσία* in the way that a substance's form is (see Shields 1988: 142). However, Ross is better understood as claiming that a soul is not a 'substance' in the sense of being a first-order object, something that exists without being predicated of something else. This claim is compatible with thinking souls are 'substances' in the sense in which forms are.

12 For similar arguments, see Barnes (1971: 103) and Granger (1996: 20–21).

entities predicated of other things. At least, this is how things seem to us in experience. By contrast, we have no experience of there being something predicated of ourselves or any other living substance that itself is alive or can perceive, think, or engage in any other mental activity. For this reason, unless there is strong evidence elsewhere to the contrary, we should presume Aristotle's classification of souls as predicated entities implies that he doesn't think they are literally alive or capable of engaging in mental activities.<sup>13</sup>

To further support the preceding point, consider a different but analogous case: it is not the *weight* of an object that, strictly speaking, falls when the object is dropped; rather, it is the object that falls, though it does so (in part) because of its weight (a certain attribute it has). Likewise, given Aristotle's claim that souls are forms, forms because of which the things they are predicated of are alive and can engage in certain kinds of activities, it is natural to conclude that he does not think souls themselves are, strictly speaking, alive or capable of engaging in those activities. Rather, the thing which has the soul is what is alive and can engage in those activities, though it is alive and capable of engaging in those activities only because it has a soul (in fact, a soul of the right kind, e.g., it can reason not because it has any sort of soul but rather because it has a rational soul in particular). In fact, this seems to be just the sort of clarification Aristotle has in mind in the *DA* I.4 passage when he describes what it would be 'better to say.'

This conclusion is further bolstered by considering the 'too many thinkers' problem that would otherwise result from Aristotle's position. Aristotle repeatedly claims that our souls are that by which we (*human beings*) live and perceive and think (see *DA* II.2, 413b11–12; I.2, 403b23–26; I.4, 407b34–408a1; and I.5, 411a26–b2). At the same time, Aristotle denies that we are our souls; we (*human beings*) are not forms but compounds of form and matter (see, e.g., *Metaph.* Z.11, 1037a5–10, and Λ.3, 1070a9–13). Given these two claims, Aristotle could have thought that our souls themselves perceive, think, etc. only if he thought that, for each human being, there were two things that perceive, think, and so on: the human being and their soul.

Now, various philosophers hold and defend views of this sort, i.e., views that face an alleged 'too many thinkers' problem of one sort or another.<sup>14</sup> My goal here is not to argue that such views are philosophically untenable or too counterintuitive to be taken seriously as the right interpretation of what a historical philosopher like Aristotle thought. Rather, my point is simply that this is the counterintuitive sort of view one must attribute to Aristotle if one insists that he thinks that our souls themselves – the souls that he clearly identifies as forms and distinguishes from ourselves (who are compounds of form and matter) – are literally capable of engaging in the kinds of mental activities that we are capable of engaging in. In effect, one is attributing to him the view that, for every human being (and animal) there are two literal subjects of mental states where pretheoretically we would have said there was just one.

In general, we should not attribute to a philosopher a counterintuitive thesis, a thesis that conflicts with beliefs we can presume were part of their pre-theoretical picture of the world, in the absence of good evidence for doing so. So, given the above points, we should not attribute to Aristotle the view that our souls are literal subjects of mental states unless there is good evidence for doing so. Hence, the question now before us is whether there is any good evidence for doing so. Proponents of the Literal Subject Interpretation claim there is. In the following §§3–6, I shall discuss the

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13 For any readers skeptical of this point, consider this: can one name any intuitive or familiar examples of entities that are both predicated of something else and also themselves literally alive or literally capable of perceiving, thinking, or engaging in any other mental activity? I doubt one can. (Again, contrast this with a property like being visible, where one *can* name intuitive, familiar examples of entities that are predicated of something else and yet also seem to have the property in question). To further reinforce this, consider also that something's having a conscious mental life like that of an animal or human being would mean it could suffer and flourish in many of the ways that animals or human beings can. And yet, while many of us have at least some concern for the well-being (the suffering and flourishing) of other animals and human beings, I don't know of any person who has concern for the well-being (the suffering and flourishing) of an entity predicated of animals or human beings. (To be clear, the point I'm making here is not that such a view is untenable or incoherent but only that it is deeply counterintuitive and thus a view which, in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, we should presume Aristotle did not hold).

14 The 'too many thinkers' problem raised here is very similar to 'the thinking-soul problem' that Eric Olson raises against compound dualist views like that of Richard Swinburne. See Olson (2001), Olson (2007: 169), and Zimmerman (2007: 20). For Swinburne's attempt to defend this sort of view from this alleged problem, see Swinburne (2012: 236). For criticism of Swinburne's response, see Hauser (2022: 254–257).



### §3. ARISTOTLE DOES THINK SOULS ARE HUPOKEIMENA

Let us begin by considering the claim that Aristotle thinks souls are 'ὑποκείμενα,' i.e., 'things that underlie' other entities. It is well known that Aristotle thinks the matter and form of corporeal substances are, along with those corporeal substances, also 'substances' in some sense. Shields argues that Aristotle doesn't just think all three – matter, form, and compound – are 'substances' in some sense; Aristotle also thinks that all three are in some sense ὑποκείμενα for other entities. More specifically, Shields argues, there is strong evidence that Aristotle thinks that both corporeal substances (compounds of matter and form) and their forms are ὑποκείμενα that underlie non-substantial features (or πάθη), whereas the matter of a substance is a ὑποκείμενον that underlies the substance's form. Moreover, Shields argues, while Aristotle doesn't explicitly state that souls are ὑποκείμενα for mental capacities, states, and activities, there are many texts in which Aristotle attributes such capacities, states, and activities to souls. Given all of this, Shields concludes that Aristotle *does* think souls are 'proper' or literal subjects of mental states and that there is no reason to read the allegedly 'Rylean' *DA* I.4 passage as denying this.<sup>15</sup>

In this section, I review Shields's argument and discuss some objections that have been raised against it. I argue that even granting the points made in these objections, there remains strong textual evidence that Aristotle thinks souls are in fact ὑποκείμενα that underlie various non-substantial features (or πάθη). However, as I make clear in the following §4, it needn't follow from this that souls are literal subjects of the non-substantial features they underlie.

The first stage of Shields's argument rests on two premises: (1) Aristotle thinks that anything which is a substance is a ὑποκείμενον, and (2) Aristotle thinks that souls are substances. It follows from (1) and (2) that Aristotle thinks souls are ὑποκείμενα. That Aristotle thinks souls are substances is uncontroversial; in both his *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*, Aristotle clearly identifies souls as substances in the way forms can be substances.<sup>16</sup> However, the claim that Aristotle thinks anything which is a substance is a ὑποκείμενον is much more controversial.

Shields defends this claim by appeal to Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics* Z.3.<sup>17</sup> In the former, Aristotle draws a tight connection between being a substance and being something that 'underlies' other things: 'primary substances are most properly called substances,' Aristotle writes, 'because they are the entities which underlie (ὑποκεισθαι) everything else, and everything else is either said of them or in them' (2b15–17).<sup>18</sup> While secondary substances differ from primary substances in being 'said of' other substances (e.g., their instances), they are nonetheless like primary substances in being *things that underlie* (i.e., ὑποκείμενα for) various non-substantial features (see 3a1–4). Shields argues that Aristotle draws a similar connection between being a substance and being a ὑποκείμενον in *Metaphysics* Z.3 as well, for there Aristotle writes,

**T1** Now a ὑποκείμενον is that of which the other things are said, while it is itself is not [said] of the others. And so we must first determine the nature of this; for the primary ὑποκείμενον is held to be substance most of all. (1028b36–1029a2).

Moreover, in the lines that follow, Aristotle appears to explicitly endorse the claim that the form of a substance is in one way a ὑποκείμενον:

**T2** And in one way the matter is said to be of this sort [i.e., a ὑποκείμενον], and in another way the form, and in a third way the compound of these things. (1029a2–4).

15 See n.6 for references to where Shields makes this argument.

16 See *DA* II.1, 412a6–21; II.2, 414a14–19; *Metaph.* Δ.8, 1017b14–16, 25–26; and *Metaph.* Η.3, 1043a35–36.

17 See Shields (1988: 141) and Shields (2016: 144).

18 Similar claims, Shields (1988: 141) notes, are made at 2a34–5 and 2b36–3a1.

Shields concludes that these texts provide strong evidence that Aristotle thinks that anything which is a substance, even a substance in the way a form is, is in some way a ὑποκείμενον.

Others, however, have disputed this. It is controversial whether the ideas about substance proposed in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* are consistent with those proposed in his *Categories*. In particular, some scholars have questioned whether Aristotle retains the so-called 'subject-criterion' of substancehood found in his *Categories*, i.e., the claim, put forward in *Cat* 2b15–17 and related passages, that a substance in the primary sense is that which underlies everything else and is such that nothing else underlies it. Some argue that Aristotle abandons this criterion in his *Metaphysics*, since there Aristotle says that the forms of substances are primary substances (see *Metaph.* Z.7, 1032b1, and Z.11, 1037a5) yet also claims that matter underlies form and that form is predicated of matter.<sup>19</sup> As for **T1** and **T2**, some have argued (against Shields) that the ideas discussed in these texts may not be ones Aristotle himself endorses, since he says only that the primary ὑποκείμενον 'is held' to be substance most of all (1029a1–2) and that the matter, form, and compound 'are said' to be of this sort (1029a2ff). These critics question whether Aristotle himself accepts what 'is held' and 'is said,' especially since the subsequent discussion of *Metaph.* Z.3 appears to show that accepting these claims leads to the conclusion that matter is substance most of all, and yet this a conclusion Aristotle subsequently rejects (see 1029a26–30).<sup>20</sup>

However, these disputes can be sidestepped because even if one interprets the above passages in such a way that they don't commit Aristotle to the claim that the forms of substances are ὑποκείμενα, a later passage in *Metaph.* H.1 does so commit him. There Aristotle writes,

**T3** What underlies (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) is a substance: in one way, [this is] the matter, and by matter I mean that which, not being a *this something* (τόδε τι) actually, is potentially a *this something*; and in another way, [this is] the λόγος or form, which, being a *this something*, is separate in account; and in a third way, [this is] the compound, which alone is generated and destroyed and separate without qualification. (1042a26–31).

Here Aristotle endorses in his own voice what he noted 'is said' in **T2**, namely, that, in one way, what underlies (τὸ ὑποκείμενον) is the matter; in another way, what underlies is the form; and in a third way, what underlies is the substance composed of these. So, Aristotle evidently *does* think that the forms of composite substances are in some way ὑποκείμενα.<sup>21</sup>

But in what way? What exactly does Aristotle have in mind in affirming that the forms of corporeal substances are in some way ὑποκείμενα? Shields tries to answer this question by appeal to what Aristotle says in *Metaph.* Z.13. There Aristotle draws a distinction between two ways in which something can be said to 'underlie' something else, viz., 'either by being a *this something* (τόδε τι) – which is the way in which an animal underlies affections (πάθη) – or as the matter [of a substance] underlies the actuality [of that substance]' (1038b5–6; see also *Metaph.* θ.7,

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19 See *Metaph.* Z.13, 1038b2–7; θ.7, 1049a18–1049b3; Z.17, 1041b4–9; H.2, 1043a6–8; H.3, 1043b30–32; and B.3, 995b35. This is one way in which Granger challenges Shields's argument in Granger (1995a, 1995b, and 1996).

20 For an argument along these lines, see Bolton (2014: 163). See also Granger (1995a and 1995b).

21 Not all scholars accept this. Robert Bolton argues,

In H 1, 1042a26–31, Aristotle need not be saying that there are three kinds of (substances as) subjects [i.e., three kinds of ὑποκείμενα]... [but only] that a genuine subject [or ὑποκείμενον] is a substance and that there are three types of substances, without saying exactly which of the three types of substances count as a subject, or in what way or ways. It is consistent with what he says there that there are just two different types of genuine subjects, of different sorts, for him, matter and the composite, so that a substantial form (or soul) is not for him a substance in the sense of being a genuine subject of any type that he distinguishes. (Bolton 2014: 175 n.82).

But given the parallel between this passage (**T3**) and the earlier *Metaph.* Z.3 passage (**T2**), it's much more plausible to conclude that in H.1 Aristotle endorses in his own voice what he claims 'is said' in Z.3, viz., that in one way the matter is what underlies (τὸ ὑποκείμενον), in other way the form is what underlies (τὸ ὑποκείμενον), and in third way the composite is what underlies (τὸ ὑποκείμενον). For other scholars who agree, see Ross (1948: 164), Lewis (1991, 301), Bostock (1994: 250–251); and Granger (1995a, 1995b, and 1996: 66–76). Additionally, the discussion in §4 below will provide further support for this reading. That discussion will illustrate why, once we clarify what Aristotle has in mind by a 'ὑποκείμενον' here, it makes sense for him to think that forms are indeed ὑποκείμενα.



1049a18–1049b3). Though Aristotle’s example of something which underlies in the former way is a compound substance (an animal) rather than its form (an animal’s soul), Shields argues that this needn’t preclude Aristotle from thinking the same is true of the form as well, since Aristotle holds that a substance’s form is also a *this something* (τόδε τι) and, as we have seen, in some way a ὑποκείμενον. Given this, Shields concludes that the forms of composite substances (including souls) are like composite substances in being things that underlie (i.e., ὑποκείμενα for) various ‘affections’ or non-substantial features.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, while Aristotle doesn’t explicitly state that souls underlie mental capacities, states, and activities in particular, there are many texts in which Aristotle attributes such capacities, states, and activities to animal and human souls (see, e.g., DA 402a7–10, 403a3–12, 403a16–19, 413a33–413b1, 414a29, and 415a22–25).<sup>23</sup> Given this, Shields concludes that there is good reason to think Aristotle does think animal and human souls are ὑποκείμενα that underlie such capacities, states, and activities.

For now, I shall grant Shields this last step in the argument, i.e., the move from claiming that Aristotle thinks souls are in some way ὑποκείμενα to the more specific claim that Aristotle thinks souls underlie various kinds of non-substantial features, including mental capacities, states, and activities in the case of animal and human souls. (The evidence just presented could be challenged, but what I say in the following section will show why in the end we should agree that souls do ‘underlie’ such things in the relevant sense of ‘underlying’). Instead, I want to focus on clarifying what Aristotle has in mind when he calls something a ‘thing that underlies’ or ‘ὑποκείμενον for’ other things. The term ‘ὑποκείμενον’ is often translated as ‘underlying subject,’ but such a translation, I shall presently argue, is misleading. It is misleading because it can suggest that anything that is said to underlie something else, anything that is said to be a ‘ὑποκείμενον,’ is a literal subject of what it underlies when in fact no such implication holds given how Aristotle explains his use of this terminology in this context.

#### §4. SOULS CAN BE HUPOKEIMENA WITHOUT BEING LITERAL SUBJECTS OF WHAT THEY UNDERLIE

Some opponents of the Literal Subject Interpretation claim that Aristotle would deny that the forms of substances, including souls, are ὑποκείμενα.<sup>24</sup> However, I have just argued that such an interpretation is ruled out by the fact that in **T3** Aristotle claims in his own voice that the form of a substance is in one way a ὑποκείμενον. Other opponents of the Literal Subject Interpretation accept this but decline to take a stand on what Aristotle means by this.<sup>25</sup> Ideally, however, one would like such an account, an account which makes clear whether and why Aristotle’s saying this either does or doesn’t imply that he thinks the forms of substances are literal subjects of the non-substantial features they underlie. In this section, I develop and defend just such an account.

I begin with the only definition of a ὑποκείμενον that Aristotle gives in the *Metaph.* ZH context. In *Metaph.* Z.3, the *Metaph.* ZH chapter where Aristotle first begins to discuss the idea that all substances (including forms) are ὑποκείμενα, Aristotle explains that ‘a ὑποκείμενον is that of which the other things are said, while it is itself is not [said] of the others’ (1028b36–1029a1). This is

22 See Shields (1988: 143). For evidence that Aristotle treats the form of a substance as a ‘this something’ (a ‘τόδε τι’), see *Metaph.* H.1, 1042a26–31; Δ.8, 1017b23–25; Z.3, 1029a27–30; Θ.7, 1049a35; and Λ.3, 1070a11–15.

23 See also the passages cited in n.8 above.

24 See Bolton (2014) and n.21 above.

25 Granger, for example, concedes that **T3** provides evidence that Aristotle thinks substantial forms are ὑποκείμενα in some sense (see Granger 1996: 66–76). However, Granger doesn’t attempt to specify in what way these forms are ὑποκείμενα. This is because Granger thinks Aristotle’s claim that such forms are in one way ὑποκείμενα ‘is nothing more than a hangover from the heyday of subjecthood in the *Categories*, which in his more mature reflections plays no significant role in his thought about the ontological nature of form’ (1996: 81).

Ross suggests that ‘Aristotle’s meaning is that the form or essence, instead of the concrete individual, may be thought to be what underlies properties and accidents; cf. the description of the soul as the ὑποκείμενον of life, Δ 1022a32’ (1948: 164). However, Ross never develops this thought, and in fact there is no evidence (in *Metaph.* Z.3, H.1, or Δ.18) that Aristotle thinks the form underlies properties and accidents *instead of* the ‘concrete individual’ (i.e., the animal or human being). I’ll discuss the *Metaph.* Δ.18 passage Ross mentions in §5 below.

something Aristotle affirms in his own voice, not something he reports as merely something that ‘is said’ or ‘is held.’ Now, some authors have found it deeply puzzling that Aristotle could have thought forms are ὑποκείμενα in this sense because they have interpreted this definition as implying that anything that is a ὑποκείμενον cannot be predicated or said of anything else.<sup>26</sup> However, the above definition does not in fact have this implication. In the following lines, Aristotle clarifies that the ‘the others’ (τὰ ἄλλα) he has in mind are (or at least include) the various kinds of non-substances, e.g., affections (πάθη), activities (ποιήματα), capacities (δυνάμεις), etc. (see 1029a13ff). Given this, something can be a ὑποκείμενον by being something both (1) of which non-substances are said and (2) which is not said of any non-substance. Forms can thus be ὑποκείμενα insofar as (1) non-substances are said of them and yet (2) they are not said of any non-substance. This can be true even though the forms themselves are said of some underlying thing (e.g., the matter or even the whole compound), as long as what they are said of is a substance rather than a non-substance.<sup>27</sup>

To further understand what Aristotle has in mind, we must also consider what it means for one entity to be ‘said of’ (λέγεται + κατά) another in this context. To begin, we should note that there is good reason to *not* identify this ‘said of’ relation with the distinctive ‘said of’ relation introduced and discussed in the *Categories*: the latter relation is one that cannot hold between a non-substance and a substance, but the ‘said of’ relation at issue here is one that evidently can hold between non-substances and substances. Thus, we should not understand Aristotle to have in mind here the *Categories* ‘said of’ relation. Instead, we should understand Aristotle to have in mind a generic notion of ‘belonging to’ or ‘being predicated of’ that he regularly employs throughout his works, including in his *Analytics*. When speaking this way, Aristotle often switches without comment between talking of things being ‘said of’ another, ‘belonging to’ another, or being ‘predicated of’ another. In fact, Aristotle switches his language in just this way in *Metaph.* Z.3, too (see 1029a8–9, a15–16, a21–25).

We have now reached a place where we can raise the question crucial to the argument of this section: in general, does a thing’s being ‘said of’ another in the sense at issue entail that the latter is a literal subject of the former? It does not. To see this, I want to turn our attention to Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, a work referenced several times in the *Metaph.* ZH context.<sup>28</sup> It is a familiar point from Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* that the cause/ground, B, in virtue of which some feature, C, holds of some subject, A, can be represented as a middle term in a chain of predications (i.e., C belongs to A because C belongs to B and B belongs to A, or C is said of A because C is said of B and B is said of A). What is crucial here is that Aristotle speaks this way even when it is clear that he would deny that the B in question is a literal subject of the C ‘said of’ it. Let us consider two examples of this.

First, in *APo* II.17 (see 99a25–28), Aristotle gives an example where a certain class of plants, viz., broad-leaved plants (= A) shed their leaves (= C) due to the solidification of the sap in their stems (= B) and suggests this causal relationship can be represented as follows: C is said of A because C is said of B and B is said of A. Though Aristotle represents the causal relationship between B and C by saying that ‘C is said of B,’ it makes no sense to suppose that this B (the solidification of the sap in the stems) is a literal subject of this C (leaf-shedding). What sheds their leaves are the broad-leaved plants, not the solidification of the sap in their stems; the solidification of the sap in their

26 See, e.g., Bostock (1994: 75).

27 In addition to fitting with what Aristotle says here in *Metaph.* Z.3, this clarification also fits with how Aristotle uses the term ‘ὑποκείμενον’ in his *Categories*. There Aristotle classifies secondary substances as ‘ὑποκείμενα’ even though they are predicated of primary substances, which of course implies that something’s being predicated of something else doesn’t preclude it from being a ὑποκείμενον.

28 Some readers might worry that we should not use ideas from Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics* to help us understand what is going on here in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*. Such a worry, however, is misguided in this case. The thing we are trying to clarify in this case is the ‘said of’ relation Aristotle has in mind in this context, the relation he uses to explain what he means by a ‘ὑποκείμενον’ in this context. This ‘said of’ relation is not something specific to the discussion of *Metaphysics* ZH (or the science of substance under discussion there) but instead is something Aristotle thinks can be used to relate terms (and the entities signified by those terms) in any science, as his use of it in his *Posterior Analytics* (his treatise on science in general) indicates. Hence, it is not at all unreasonable to look to what Aristotle says in his *Posterior Analytics* to clarify what is and isn’t entailed by this relation’s holding between two items, even when it is invoked outside his *Posterior Analytics* in a context like the *Metaph.* ZH one at issue here.

stems is the cause of the leaf-shedding but not itself something that sheds its leaves (in fact, it's not even the right kind of entity for this). Crucially, what this example illustrates is that Aristotle is happy to represent the causal dependence of one feature of a subject on a more basic feature of that subject in terms of the former's being 'said of' or 'belonging to' the latter even though the latter is not a literal subject of the former.

Second, consider the well-known eclipse example Aristotle discusses in *APo* II.8 (see 93a29–93b14; see also the reference to this example in *Metaph.* H.4, 1044b8–14). Here Aristotle notes that the moon (= A) becomes eclipsed, i.e., loses its illumination (= C), due to the earth being interposed between the moon and the sun (= B). He then represents this causal relationship in the following way: C is said of A because C is said of B and B is said of A. Once again, though C is 'said of' B, it makes no sense to think of the entity represented by B as a literal subject of that represented by C. The thing that undergoes a loss of illumination is the moon, not the event of the earth being interposed between the moon and the sun; the latter is the cause of the loss of illumination but not itself something that loses its illumination. Just like the leaf-shedding example, this example shows that Aristotle's talk of something 'belonging to' or being 'said of' something else should not always be understood to imply that he thinks the latter is a literal subject of the former. On the contrary, the latter's being the cause of the former suffices for Aristotle to speak this way even when the latter is not a literal subject of the former.

In general, what these examples illustrate is that when some feature C belongs to a subject A in virtue of some B's belonging to A, this suffices for Aristotle to describe C as something 'belonging to' or 'said of' B even when B is not something Aristotle thinks is a literal subject of C. Now before proceeding to apply this point to what Aristotle says in *Metaph.* ZH, it's important to see that the point I am making here is not based on a few idiosyncratic examples but instead reflects a general consequence of Aristotle's canonical way of representing causal relationships in science. It is Aristotle's general practice (one that he explains in his *Analytics*) to represent the cause, B, in virtue of which some feature C is predicated of some subject A as a middle term in a chain of predications linking C and A. In other words, Aristotle's canonical way of representing this sort of causal relationship is as follows: C is said of A because C is said of B and B is said of A (see, e.g., *APo* II.2 and II.8). A consequence of this is that the explained feature, C, is predicated of its cause simply in virtue of the causal relationship between them; the cause need not also be a literal subject of the former feature for Aristotle to engage in such predication. For this reason, when Aristotle speaks of something being 'said of,' 'predicated of,' or 'belonging to' another, we should not generally take this to imply that he thinks the latter is a literal subject of the former; the latter may just be the cause of the former.

We now have what we need to understand why Aristotle would characterize the forms/souls of living corporeal substances as *ὑποκείμενα* in *Metaph.* ZH. For Aristotle, the form/soul of a living corporeal substance is the cause/principle of both its life and all of its vital capacities, including any mental capacities it may have; put differently, a living corporeal substance is alive and can engage in whatever vital (including mental) activities it can engage in, e.g., perceive, think, etc., only because it has a soul (*DA* II.2, 414a12–13; II.2, 413b11–12; and II.4, 415b12–14). If we represent this causal relationship in Aristotle's canonical way, then the cause, the soul/form, should be represented as a middle term in a chain of predications linking life and such vital capacities to living corporeal substances. In other words, on Aristotle's way of thinking, life and such vital capacities are said of a living corporeal substance because they are said of its form/soul and that form/soul is said of it. By contrast, the converse is not true: it's not true that the form/soul is said of the living corporeal substance in virtue of life or such vital capacities being said of it; the substance's form/soul is the principle/cause of its life and vital capacities, not vice-versa. Thus, the form/soul is indeed a substance of which such things are said and which itself is not said of such things. In other words, given the definition of a *ὑποκείμενον* given in *Metaph.* Z.3, the form/soul is indeed something that underlies, a *ὑποκείμενον* for, such things.

Having clarified why Aristotle would characterize souls as not just as *ὑποκείμενα* but as *ὑποκείμενα* that underlie the life and vital capacities of the substances to which they belong, we can now see both that and why this characterization fails to provide strong evidence in support of the

Literal Subject Interpretation. Aristotle's view that a thing's soul is the cause/principle of its life and vital (including mental) capacities suffices to explain why he would characterize it as something that underlies (i.e., a ὑποκείμενον for) such things. Given this, there is no reason to infer from this characterization that he *also* thinks our souls are literal subjects of such things, that they themselves (in addition to or instead of we ourselves) are alive and can engage in the kinds of mental activities (seeing, hearing, thinking, etc.) that we can. In short then, contrary to what Shields claims, Aristotle's characterizing souls in this way should not be taken as a reason to abandon what I argued in §2 should be our default way of understanding Aristotle's position, namely, that souls are *not* literal subjects of such things but instead merely forms by virtue of having which *the substances to which they belong* are alive and have such capacities.

To be clear, I'm not suggesting that the discussion of this section alone shows that Aristotle doesn't think our souls are literal subjects of life or any mental capacities, states, or activities. In §2, I gave my reasons as to why, in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, we should not attribute to Aristotle the view that our souls are literal subjects of such things. The goal of this section was not to repeat those reasons but instead to address one of the main arguments given by those who think there *is* strong evidence to the contrary, viz., Shields's argument. Contrary to what Shields claims, I have argued that Aristotle's claim that souls are ὑποκείμενα for such things provides no evidence that he thinks they are literal subjects of them.

## §5. A RESPONSE TO CARTER'S DEFENSE OF THE LITERAL SUBJECT INTERPRETATION

Let us turn now to consider Carter's arguments in defense of the Literal Subject Interpretation. Carter's discussion is focused on the following large passage from *DA* I.4, a passage that includes the allegedly 'Rylean' passage mentioned in §1:

More reasonably, someone might puzzle over the soul's being in motion having paid attention to the following sorts of considerations; for (i) we say that the soul is pained, or rejoices, or takes courage, or grows afraid, and also that the soul grows angry and perceives and reasons. However, (ii) all of these seem to be movements (κινήσεις). (iii) From these observations, someone might infer that the soul itself is moved (κινεῖσθαι).

But (iv) this inference is not necessary. (v) For even if one grants that to be pained or to rejoice or to reason are motions (κινήσεις), (vi) and each of these motions is some kind of being-moved (κινεῖσθαί τι), and (vii) the being-moved is done by the soul (ὑπὸ τῆς ψυχῆς), for example, growing angry or becoming afraid is the heart being moved (κινεῖσθαι) in a certain way, and reasoning is a motion of this sort, or perhaps a different sort of motion, some of these motions being motions in respect of place, others motions in respect of alteration (of what parts and how they move, is a different account) – then (viii) to say that the soul grows angry is like if someone were to say that the soul weaves or builds.

(ix) For (γάρ) it is better perhaps (ἴσως) not to say that the soul hopes or learns or reasons, but to say a man [does these things] with his soul (τῆ ψυχῆ); but (x) not in the sense of there being motion (κινήσεως) in the soul (ἐν ἐκείνῃ), but in the sense that in some cases motion reaches (μέχρι) it [i.e., the soul], but in other cases it originates from (ἀπὸ) it; for example perception originates from particular objects (ἀπὸ τῶνδὲ), whilst recollection originates from the soul (ἀπ' ἐκείνης) to the motions or their remnants (μονάς) in the sense-organs. (408a34–408b18; translation from Carter 2018).<sup>29</sup>

Carter and I agree that the puzzle under discussion here is based on (i) the fact that Aristotle is willing to speak of (and indeed has spoken of) the soul as something that can be pained, rejoice,

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29 The Roman numerals used to divide up the passage are mine, not Carter's.

and, in general, engage in various kinds of mental activities and (ii) Aristotle's affirmation that at least some of the activities in question are, or at least essentially involve, 'motions' (κινήσεις). We also agree that Aristotle initially responds not by qualifying either (i) or (ii) but instead by arguing that it needn't follow from (i) and (ii) that (iii) the soul itself is moved (κινεῖσθαι). This is because, as Aristotle explains in parts (iv)–(viii), the thing that is moved when such mental activities occur need not be the same as the thing that performs the activity. When the soul is angered, for example, the thing that is angered (the soul) need not be the same as the thing moved by that activity, which could instead be a part of the body (e.g., the heart).

But what about (viii), i.e., Aristotle's claim that it follows from the above considerations that 'to say that the soul grows angry is like if someone were to say that the soul weaves or builds'? Some authors take Aristotle to be implying here that of course the soul doesn't weave or build and so, likewise, we should not say that the soul grows angry (or rejoices or etc.).<sup>30</sup> However, Carter rightly challenges this claim. As he points out, it is a basic principle of Aristotle's physics that

all motions or productions take place *in* the moved object, and not in the mover (or alternatively, in the patient, not in the agent) (*Phys.* 3.3, 202a13–16, 202a36–b22; *DA* 2.4, 416a13–b2). Weaving and building, for Aristotle and his students at the Lyceum, were paradigm examples of this principle, being motions that clearly take place in the thing moved, and not in the agent of the motion, when the agent causes these motions *per se*. (Carter 2018: 40).

Given this, Carter argues, we should think the point Aristotle is making in (viii) is not that we shouldn't say that the soul gets angry, rejoices, etc. but that even though these psychological activities essentially involve something's being moved, speaking of the soul as what performs these activities no more implies that it is what is moved when they occur than speaking of the soul as something that builds or weaves would imply that it is what is moved when these occur.

So far, I agree with Carter. What remains, however, is the key question of how to interpret the final part of the passage, i.e., (ix)–(x). In (ix), Aristotle returns to the original puzzle and indicates that though he has been willing to speak of the soul as something that can be pained, rejoice, and, in general, engage in various kinds of mental activities (see (i) above), this isn't the best way to speak. It would be better 'not to say that the soul hopes or learns or reasons, but to say a man [does these things] with his soul (τῆ ψυχῆ).' Why is the latter better? Many commentators, myself included, take Aristotle to be thinking that the latter way of speaking is better because it clarifies that it is really the human being (the living corporeal substance to which the soul belongs) that is the subject of the relevant mental activities (the individual who becomes angry, becomes pained, hopes, learns, reasons, etc.), whereas the soul is only something 'with which' or 'by virtue of which' the human being does these things.<sup>31</sup> Later in *DA* II.1–2, Aristotle will make this still more precise by specifying that *what a soul is* is a certain kind of form or first actuality, the having of which is what grounds or causes plants, animals, and humans to have whatever vital capacities they have, e.g., to nourish and reproduce themselves, self-locomote, sense, desire, think, reason, etc. (see *DA* II.4, 415b12–14 and II.2, 413b11–12). It is in this way, i.e., as forms/first actualities that bestow capacities for certain further actualities or activities, that our souls are 'that by which we live and perceive and think' (*DA* II.2, 414a12–13).

But here in *DA* I.4, Aristotle doesn't go into all of this. Instead, he finishes his second response to the initial puzzle by clarifying in his final sentence, (x), that he doesn't mean that the human being becomes angered, rejoices, perceives, etc. in virtue of his/her soul being moved in some way. No, it is always the body, not the soul, that is moved when such mental activities occur, though in some cases (e.g., recollection) the mental activity is the source of the relevant motion in the body, whereas in other cases (e.g., perception) the relevant motion in the body (e.g., in the relevant sense organ) is the source of the mental activity. In the former cases, the motion 'proceeds from

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30 See the authors cited in Carter (2018: 38 n.26).

31 See the authors cited in n.4 above.



the soul,' as the soul grounds the capacity whose activation causes the motion, whereas in other cases the motion 'reaches as far as the soul,' in the sense that it doesn't just affect the body but also activates a capacity 'of,' i.e., grounded by, the soul.<sup>32</sup>

Carter, however, rejects this way of understanding (ix) and (x) because he thinks that other passages indicate that Aristotle *really does* think souls are literal subjects of these sorts of mental activities. One of the most important such passages Carter invokes is the following one from *Metaph.* Δ.18. In the course of discussing different senses in which something can be said to belong to something else 'in virtue of itself' (καθ' αὐτό), Aristotle writes,

Whatever a thing receives primarily in itself or in some [part] of it [can be said of it in virtue of itself], e.g., a surface is white in virtue of itself, and a human being is alive in virtue of himself; for the soul, in which life is primarily, is a part of the human being. (1022a30–33).

Carter argues that this passage shows us that even if one reads part (ix) of the *DA* I.4 passage to imply that 'the proper Peripatetic way of making causal claims about the soul's affections is to say that a 'man φ-s κατά his soul,' this better way of speaking 'still admit[s] of a further analysis that is consistent with the idea of soul being a metaphysical [i.e., literal] subject [of such affections]' (Carter 2018: 46). This is because, Carter claims, in the above passage

Aristotle claims that a man can be said to be 'alive in respect of himself' (ζῆν ὁ ἄνθρωπος καθ' αὐτόν), not because this phrase is a basic and unanalyzable proposition about a hylomorphic compound, but because κατά signifies in this phrase that the soul is a part of man (μέρος τι τοῦ ἀνθρώπου), in which part – in contrast to the whole man or his body – the activity of 'living' is claimed to reside primarily or directly (ἐν ἧ πρώτῃ τὸ ζῆν) (1022a31–2). (Carter 2018: 46).

However, Carter's use of this passage to support his version of the Literal Subject Interpretation rests on a misunderstanding of what Aristotle means in saying that the soul is the part of a human being 'in which life is primarily.' In his *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle clarifies that for one item to belong to another 'primarily' is for there to be no further cause or middle term in virtue of which the former belongs to the latter; instead, the former belongs to the latter 'immediately,' without a further cause or middle term.<sup>33</sup> Now, on Aristotle's view, a human being's soul is the immediate cause/principle of its life (*DA* II.2, 413a21–24 with 413b11–12, and *DA* II.4, 415b12–14). Put syllogistically, C (life) belongs to A (man) because C (life) belongs to B (soul) and B (soul) belongs to A (man); moreover, there is no further middle term between C and B. Given this and Aristotle's view of what it is for one thing to belong to another 'primarily,' it follows that life belongs 'primarily' not to a human being but to the soul of a human being. However, for the reasons noted in the previous section, we should not infer from this that Aristotle thinks the soul itself is literally alive. Indeed, the claim that life belongs primarily not to a human being but to a human being's soul no more implies that the soul itself is alive than Aristotle's claim that leaf-shedding belongs primarily not to broad-leaved plants but to the solidification of the sap in their stems (see *APo* II.17, 99a25–

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32 Aristotle discusses the case of perception much more thoroughly in *DA* II.5. There he indicates that when perception occurs, this involves the perceiver's capacity for perception being affected in a certain way but that this sort of being affected is different from the sort of being affected that is involved when something is 'moved.' See also *DA* III.7, 431a4–7.

33 See *APo* I.22, 83b25–32. For further discussion, see Malink (2022: 184–185).



26) implies that the solidification itself, rather than just the broad-leaved plants, is something that loses its leaves.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond citing the above *Metaph.* Δ.18 passage, Carter also invokes what Aristotle says in *Cat.* 2, 1a23–b3, to support his claim that Aristotle should not be understood as denying that our souls themselves become angry, hope, perceive, think, etc.<sup>35</sup> Here, while discussing examples of things which ‘are in a ὑποκείμενον,’ Aristotle suggests that ‘for example, a particular [piece of] grammatical knowledge is in a ὑποκείμενον, viz., the soul’ (1a26) and that ‘for example, knowledge [in general] is in a ὑποκείμενον, viz., the soul’ (1b1–2). One might think that these examples imply that Aristotle thinks souls are in fact things that can literally know (or become angry, hope, perceive, etc.).

However, there are again strong reasons to think that these examples should not be understood to have this implication. In the lines that immediately precede these examples, Aristotle clarifies that, ‘By [speaking of something as being] ‘in a ὑποκείμενον,’ I do not mean what is in something in the way a part is but instead what is not capable of being separately from what it is in’ (1b24–25). Now, several different interpretations have been given of what Aristotle has in mind when he speaks of something as ‘not capable of being separately from’ something else. Some understand this in modal-existential terms: A is not capable of being separately from B just in case, necessarily, B exists if A exists. Others interpret Aristotle as invoking a notion of essence-based dependence: A is not capable of being separately from B just in case reference to B is somehow involved in what it is to be A (i.e., the essence of A). Still others have defended a third view, according to which A is not capable of being separately from B just in case A has the ontological status of a being in virtue of standing in some tie to B. Just which (if any) of these interpretations we should accept is a disputed matter.<sup>36</sup>

Thankfully, however, I need not settle this dispute to make the point I wish to make here, which is that something’s being inseparable from another thing does not entail the latter is a literal subject of the former. Indeed, none of the above interpretations of Aristotle’s position implies that something is not capable of being separately from another thing only if the latter is a literal subject of the former. Moreover, on any of the three main interpretations, the soul’s status as an essential principle/cause of a living corporeal substance’s mental capacities entails that those mental capacities are ‘not capable of being separately from’ it. The same follows for any states and activities that are actualizations of those capacities, for they are essentially actualizations of capacities that are essentially dependent on the soul as their principle. Thus, in accord with what I argued in the previous section, Aristotle’s talk of such states (e.g., knowledge) being ‘in’ the soul as something that underlies them can again be wholly explained by reference to the soul’s status as an essential principle of the capacities of which such states are actualizations. For this reason, contrary to what Carter’s argument requires, there is no reason to take this talk to imply something stronger than this, viz., that Aristotle thinks the soul is a literal subject of such things.

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34 In a related discussion in *Phys.* IV.3, 210a27–b1, Aristotle discusses two examples of an attribute which can be attributed to a whole on account of its being ‘in’ a part of that whole. He says that (a) white is in a whole body (and in the human being whose body it is) because it is in the body’s surface and (b) knowledge is in a human being because it is in her soul. Since the body’s surface is literally white, it is tempting to infer that Aristotle is likewise implying that a human being’s soul literally has knowledge (such an interpretation is adopted, for example, in Morison 2002: 60–61). However, in the same passage and to illustrate the same point, Aristotle also gives as an example that a human being is ‘capable of knowing’ because of her ‘reasoning capacity’ (τὸ λογιστικόν) (210a30). Now it is clear that a human being’s ‘reasoning capacity’ is not literally capable of knowing: in general, a thing’s capacity to engage in some activity  $\varphi$  does not itself literally  $\varphi$ ; rather, such a capacity is something by virtue of having which something else (its possessor) is such as to be able to  $\varphi$ . Likewise then, when Aristotle says that knowledge is ‘in’ a human being because it is ‘in’ her soul, we need not understand him to mean that the soul literally has knowledge and the human being has knowledge in virtue of her soul’s literally having knowledge. Instead, we should understand Aristotle to mean only that it is by virtue of her having a soul (a certain first actuality) that she is such as to be capable of having knowledge (a second actuality the presence of which in a human being depends on the presence of that first actuality).

35 See Carter (2018: 32 n.14).

36 See Corkum (2016) for an opinionated survey of these three leading interpretations. Corkum himself defends the third of the three interpretations mentioned above. I agree with Corkum that this is the most promising of the three.

## §6. ARISTOTLE'S ATTRIBUTIONS OF MENTAL CAPACITIES AND ACTIVITIES TO THE SOUL

This brings us to the last of the three lines of argument for the Literal Subject Interpretation mentioned in §1. Aristotle does occasionally talk of the soul 'knowing' (γνωρίζειν, γινώσκειν), 'reasoning' (διάνοιεν), 'perceiving' (αισθάνεσθαι), etc. and of various mental capacities, states, and activities as capacities, states, and activities 'of' the soul.<sup>37</sup> Both Shields and Carter invoke texts where Aristotle speaks this way to support their claim that Aristotle really does think souls are literal subjects of such mental capacities, states, and activities.<sup>38</sup> However, I shall argue here that there are good reasons to not take these passages in this way.

The first thing we should note is that we can and do attribute mental activities like seeing, hearing, reasoning, etc. to things without meaning thereby that those things are literal subjects of those activities. In particular, we can and do attribute mental activities to capacities (e.g., seeing is an activity of sight, whereas reasoning is an activity of the intellect) and organs (e.g., this eye can't see well, but my other one can; the ears hear, whereas the eyes see; etc.) without meaning thereby that those capacities or organs are literal subjects of those mental activities. There is much evidence that Aristotle also speaks this way. For example, he speaks of our senses 'discriminating' (DA II.6, 418a11–15; DA III.2, 426b10–11) and of our intellect 'thinking' (DA III.4, 429b3–4, 429b23–25; DA III.7, 431b1–6). Just as is the case when we speak this way, when Aristotle speaks this way, we should not understand him to be implying that one's senses literally discriminate or that one's intellect literally thinks. (That would commit Aristotle to a bizarre, even absurd multiplication of literal subjects of mental states within a single substance). Instead, such talk should be taken to imply only that discriminating is something one does by virtue of (or with) one's senses and that thinking is something one does by virtue of (or with) one's intellect.

Is there room to understand Aristotle's attributions of such mental activities to the soul in a similar manner? I think there is. Just as we can reasonably take Aristotle's talk of the senses discriminating to imply only that discriminating is something one does by virtue of (or with) one's senses, likewise one can reasonably take Aristotle's talk of one's soul knowing, reasoning, perceiving, etc. to imply only that these are things one does by virtue of (or with) one's soul. In fact, that we *should* understand Aristotle's talk this way is strongly suggested by the apparently 'Rylean' DA I.4 passage, for there he indicates that though he sometimes talks this way (i.e., of the soul perceiving, reasoning, etc.), he himself recognizes this is not the most careful way of speaking and that a more careful way of speaking would be speak of these as things that a human being (or animal) does by virtue of (or with) their soul.

This point is also supported by the fact that Aristotle often switches without comment from speaking as if one's soul itself  $\phi$ s, for some vital activity  $\phi$ , to saying (more carefully) that one's soul is that by virtue of which one  $\phi$ s.<sup>39</sup> Thus, for example, in DA I.5, 411a26ff, Aristotle asks whether knowing, perceiving, believing, etc. 'belong to the soul in its entirety,' only to clarify, 'That is, is it by the whole soul that we think and perceive and are moved and both do and experience each of the others, or do we do different things with different parts of the soul?' (DA I.5, 411b1–3; translation from Shields 2016: 20). Carter takes this text to provide one more piece of evidence that Aristotle *really does* think the soul literally knows, perceives, etc., since Aristotle speaks here of such activities as 'belonging to' the soul.<sup>40</sup> However, there is little reason to draw such a conclusion, since Aristotle's fluid switch here from treating the soul as that which thinks, perceives, etc. to treating *us* as that which thinks, perceives, etc. *with or by virtue of* our souls (or various parts of our souls) suggests that we ought not to read too much into the former way of speaking, as it seems

37 See nn.8–9 above.

38 See n.10 above.

39 In addition to the DA I.5 passage discussed in the main text, see, e.g., DA I.2, 403b23–26 and DA II.4, 415a25–b1.

40 See Carter (2018: 47–48).

to just be a loose way of speaking, a loose way of speaking that could be made more precise by making clear that it is we (human beings or animals) who do these things by virtue of our souls (or by virtue of the capacities we have in virtue of our souls).

Indeed, the fact that Aristotle takes seriously in this passage the question whether (a) all these vital activities belong to the soul as a whole or (b) different activities belong to different parts of the soul provides further reason to think his talk of  $\varphi$ -ing belonging to  $x$ , where  $\varphi$ -ing is a vital activity, should not always be understood to imply that  $x$  is a literal subject of  $\varphi$ -ing. For, if it were understood in that way, then Aristotle would be taking seriously the bizarre idea that there is a part of a person's soul which literally thinks but does not literally perceive, another part which literally perceives but does not literally think, and so forth, all in addition to the whole person who does all these things. This would be a very strange position for Aristotle to be taking seriously.<sup>41</sup> A much more plausible interpretation is that Aristotle is raising for discussion here a question not about literal subjects but about whether there is a different basic capacity ( $\delta\acute{\upsilon}\nu\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ ) corresponding to each of the activities under discussion or whether some of these activities can instead be understood as exercises of the same basic capacity of the soul.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to treating mental activities as things which 'belong to the soul,' Aristotle also treats non-mental vital activities, including 'growth, maturation, and decay' (411a30) as things which 'belong to the soul' (411b3; see also *DA* II.4, 416a17–18). Surely this talk should not be taken literally, as it borders on unintelligible to claim that an Aristotelian soul literally grows, matures, and decays. Instead, Aristotle's point must instead be that such vital activities (and the corresponding capacities (see *DA* II.3, 414a29–32 and II.4, 415a22–25)) 'belong to the soul' in the sense that it is on account of its soul (rather than its matter) that something is capable of growth, maturation, and decay; as he puts it, 'these things belong to the soul and not to fire [or any other material element], and to the  $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$  [i.e., the form] rather than to the matter' (*DA* II.4, 416a17–18). Thus, we have here another point in favor of not reading too much into Aristotle's talk of various capacities and activities as capacities and activities 'of' or 'belonging to' the soul.

A final point worth making is that, in general, how we understand an author's attributions of some capacity or activity to some  $x$  should be guided by our knowledge of what that author understands  $x$  to be. For example, if the author understands  $x$  to be a capacity, then we should not understand such attributions (e.g., 'thinking is an activity of  $x$ ', 'when  $x$  thinks, such and such happens', etc.) to imply that they think  $x$  is a literal subject of those activities. Now, we know that Aristotle understands the soul to be a form, a first actuality the having of which makes something capable of doing certain things (e.g., self-locomoting, desiring, perceiving, thinking, etc.), just as (he says) knowledge is a first actuality the having of which makes something capable of doing certain things (see *DA* II.1, 412a21–28). But, as the examples Aristotle uses to illustrate his concept of a first actuality show, first actualities are not generally literal subjects of the activities associated with them. For example, while sculpting is an activity of the knowledge of sculpting, the knowledge itself doesn't literally sculpt anything; rather, it is the sculptor, the one who has this first actuality, that sculps and can do so by virtue of his knowledge of sculpting. Given this, when Aristotle speaks of various mental capacities and activities as capacities and activities 'of' the soul, we should understand him to be speaking of these as capacities and activities 'of' a certain first actuality. Such are not capacities of which the first actuality is a literal subject but rather capacities

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41 I owe thanks to Caleb Cohoe for drawing my attention to this point.

42 That Aristotle takes this to be an important question is evident from his later discussion in *DA* III.3–4. There Aristotle distinguishes his own view that understanding ( $\varphi\rho\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ ,  $\nu\omicron\sigma\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ ) and perceiving ( $\alpha\iota\sigma\theta\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ ) are manifestations of two different basic capacities from that of previous thinkers (such as Empedocles) who maintained instead that these are manifestations of the same basic capacity (see in particular 427a17–29).

## §7. A CONCLUDING SUMMARY

Many scholars have claimed that the souls Aristotle posits are not literal subjects of mental capacities, states, or activities. Their claiming this has largely been motivated by one allegedly Rylean sentence in *DA* I.4, where Aristotle pauses to say that, ‘[i]n fact, it is probably better not to say that the soul pities or learns or thinks but instead that a human being does these things by virtue of his/her soul (τῆ ψυχῆ)’ (408b13–15). There are, however, several considerations that might be thought to challenge this common interpretation of Aristotle’s position. In fact, close attention to such considerations has led several notable scholars (e.g., Shields and Carter) to reject the above common interpretation of Aristotle’s position and argue that Aristotle is in fact better understood as holding that our souls *are* literal subjects of mental capacities, states, and activities.

In this article, I have sought to reestablish the former interpretation as the best interpretation of Aristotle’s position. To this end, I offered in §2 a more careful and comprehensive discussion of the *prima facie* evidence against taking the souls Aristotle posits to be literal subjects of mental capacities, states, and activities. One thing I did here that other authors haven’t done is draw attention to the *too many thinkers problem* that would result from our interpreting Aristotle as thinking that souls are literal subjects of such things. In my view, this is an especially important point, as it has a key role to play in explaining why it is natural to infer from Aristotle’s identifying our souls with our forms that he does not think our souls are literal subjects of such things. It’s not just important that forms are predicated entities and thus seemingly not the right kind of thing to be literal subjects of such things, as authors like Barnes (1971: 103) and Granger (1996: 20–21) have suggested. It is also important that Aristotle thinks *we are not our forms*. Since it is deeply counterintuitive to think that there is some constituent of oneself besides oneself that thinks thoughts, experiences emotions, feels pain, etc., we should default to thinking that Aristotle does not think our souls themselves think, experience emotions, feel pain, etc. At least, we should default to this unless there is strong evidence to the contrary.

But what of the alleged evidence to the contrary? Shields’s main argument for a contrary view is based on Aristotle’s claim that the forms of substances are themselves ὑποκείμενα that underlie

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43 Some readers might wonder just what role a thing’s soul plays in its mental activities if it is not a literal subject of those activities. If the interpretation I am defending is correct, then a thing’s soul is what causes (or, we might say, grounds) all the basic mental capacities of that thing, e.g., its powers to perceive, desire, imagine, think, and/or etc. To be clear, it doesn’t follow that there is nothing further to say about what is (essentially) involved in the exercise of each of these basic capacities. Much of Aristotle’s *De Anima* is dedicated to exploring just that, i.e., what perception (essentially) involves, what imagination (essentially) involves, etc. Aristotle’s exploring these matters is in no way in conflict with our interpreting him as not thinking our souls are literal subjects of those mental activities.

A related point worth making here is that there is also no conflict between our interpreting Aristotle as not thinking our souls are literal subjects of mental activities and his understanding perception and intellection as involving the reception of a (sensible or intelligible) form without the corresponding matter (see *DA* II.12, 424a17–21; III.4, 429a13–18; and III.8, 431b24–432a3). When discussing this idea, Aristotle does sometimes speak as if the soul itself were affected and received the form without the matter when intellection or perception occurs (see, e.g., *DA* III.4, 429a27–29 and III.8, 431b29–432a). However, in his more careful moments, Aristotle speaks more precisely of the capacity as what is affected and receives the form. Thus, in the case of perception, he makes it clear that his view is that it is one’s senses or perceptual capacity that is affected and receives the form without the matter when perception occurs (see *DA* II.5, 418a3–6; III.2, 426a2–7; III.4, 429a13–18 and 429a29–b5; and III.7, 431a4–7). Likewise, in the case of intellectual activity, it is one’s intellect, or intellective power, that is in some way affected and receives the form without the matter when such activity occurs (*DA* III.4, 429a13–18; III.4, 429a27–b5; and III.8, 431b24–432a3). Both claims are consistent with Aristotle’s thinking that our souls themselves don’t literally perceive or think but instead only ground our capacities to perceive and think, capacities whose activations involve those capacities being affected in some way (a way that involves their receiving a form without matter).

In fact, Aristotle’s thinking that our souls don’t literally perceive, think, or engage in any other mental activity is even consistent with his thinking that some mental activities *do* (essentially) involve the soul’s being affected or receiving a form, so long as we don’t conflate the latter affection/form-reception with the soul itself engaging in the corresponding mental activity (e.g., perceiving or thinking). Just as one could think seeing, for example, essentially involves a certain affection of a sense-organ (e.g., one’s eyes) without thinking that the sense-organ itself literally sees (i.e., become visually aware of something), likewise Aristotle could understand perception or thinking as essentially involving one’s soul receiving a form (or being affected in some way) without this implying that he thinks one soul itself literally perceives or thinks. Thus, even if one interprets Aristotle as thinking the soul itself receives a form or is somehow affected when one perceives or thinks, this still doesn’t imply that he thinks the soul itself (instead of or in addition to the person/animal to which it belongs) literally perceives or thinks.

various non-substantial features of those substances. Of the authors who have attempted to respond to this argument, some have denied that Aristotle thinks the forms of substances actually are ὑποκείμενα. I, however, argued against this position in my §§3–4. Others have accepted that Aristotle does say the forms of substances are ὑποκείμενα but have tried to deny that it follows from this that Aristotle thinks they are literal subjects of the non-substances they underlie. However, these authors have not offered a compelling alternative interpretation of what Aristotle had in mind instead. In my §4, I have sought to rectify this by offering a compelling alternative interpretation, one which I have attempted to show is well-supported by various texts and considerations relevant to determining just what Aristotle had in mind in characterizing forms in this way. Indeed, by illustrating the merits of this interpretation, I hope to have not only rebutted Shields's argument but also shed light on a part of Aristotle *Metaphysics* (viz, his claim that forms are in some way ὑποκείμενα) that many commentators have found deeply puzzling.

Next, in §5 I took on the task of addressing several of the key pieces of evidence that Carter has offered in support of his version of the Literal Subject Interpretation. To my knowledge, no author has attempted to address the considerations Carter has offered in support of his position. However, I myself don't think that we should be persuaded by Carter's reasoning and have sought to explain why, focusing on three points in particular. First, I argued that one can agree with Carter that the first part of Aristotle's response to the puzzle under discussion in *DA* I.4 (408b4–13) does not rest on his denying that the soul is a literal subject of mental states while still thinking that the best interpretation of the *second* part of his response (408b13–18) does involve his denying this. Second, I argued that Aristotle's claim in *Metaph.* Δ.18 that life belongs to a human being's soul primarily and to a human being in virtue of his/her soul should not be taken as evidence that that he thinks such souls are alive (or literal subjects of any other capacities, states, or activities that might be said to belong to them primarily and to human beings in virtue of their souls). This way of speaking just reflects Aristotle's view that a human being's soul is the immediate cause/principle of their being alive; it does not imply that he thinks our souls themselves are literally alive. Third, I argued that Aristotle's talk in *Cat* 2 of mental states (e.g., knowledge) being 'in' the soul as something that underlies them can again be explained by reference to the soul's being an essential cause/principle of the capacities of which such states are actualizations. Given this, I argued that there is no reason to take this talk to imply that Aristotle thinks the soul is a literal subject of such mental states, i.e., something that, in addition to or instead of the human being to which it belongs, literally knows, perceives, etc.

A final kind of consideration that both Shields and Carter have invoked to support their view is Aristotle's talk of the soul 'knowing,' 'reasoning,' 'perceiving,' etc. and of various mental capacities, states, and activities as capacities, states, and activities 'of' or 'belonging to' the soul. In §6, I addressed this final kind of consideration by arguing that there are several good reasons to not understand this talk in a way that implies souls are literal subjects of these things.

In summary then, I have argued in §2 that, in the absence of strong evidence to the contrary, we should think that Aristotle does not think the souls he posits are literal subjects of life or any mental capacities, states, or activities. I have also argued in §§3–6 that, contrary to what scholars like Shields and Carter have claimed, there is not in fact strong evidence to the contrary. Given this, we should conclude that Aristotle does not think the souls he posits are literal subjects of life or any mental capacities, states, or activities.

I close with a remark about the significance of this discussion for those interested in developing and defending a contemporary version of Aristotle'shylomorphic dualist account of what we are. If one adopts a position like the one the Literal Subject Interpretation attributes to Aristotle, then one will face a serious *too many thinkers problem* akin to that confronting various non-hylomorphic compound dualist views. As Dean Zimmerman explains, the idea that

although I am not identical with my soul, it is nevertheless 'responsible for my mental life' in virtue of somehow having or undergoing that mental life for me... raises some obvious and awkward questions. If the composite person also thinks, then there are two thinkers who cannot tell themselves apart. If the composite does not, strictly speaking,



think, then persons do not, strictly speaking, think... Neither alternative is a happy one. (Zimmerman 2007: 20).<sup>44</sup>

Though some authors have attempted to defend their compound dualist positions from this sort of criticism, others (myself included) continue think that there is here a decisive reason for rejecting such views, whether they be hylomorphic or non-hylomorphic.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, if one instead adopts a position akin to the one I have argued we should attribute to Aristotle, then no such *too many thinkers problem* will confront them. For this reason, one might think my interpretation of Aristotle offers a much more promising position for contemporary Aristotelians to consider developing and defending than the Literal Subject Interpretation does.

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<sup>44</sup> See also Olson (2001) and Olson (2007: ch.7).

<sup>45</sup> For further discussion, see Hauser (2022: 253–257).



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