

Summary

Aristotle on Human Nature. From Mind to Anatomy

The book offers a systematic inquiry into Aristotle's conception of man with an emphasis on its biological framework. Its point of departure lies in Aristotle's explanation of how anatomy and physiology enable each living creature to accomplish its proper way of life. In contrast to other living things, human beings are adjusted not only for a determinate set of tasks, but built for the exceptionally wide variety of activities including those that find their expression in complex political regimes. Moreover, if all animal activities seem to have their correlates in human actions, the latter also imply something unique over and above biology proper: human posture, together with its underlying physiology, is naturally designed so as to reinforce our capacity to think and, even more uniquely, to deliberate.

To give its main topic an illustrative background, the book starts by discussing the understanding of human nature in the Presocratic authors and Plato. No matter how much he differs from the Presocratics in his epistemology and metaphysics, Plato shares with a number of his predecessors the willingness to see the human being as a small world and, correlatively, to describe human thought in terms of physical motion. By contrast, Aristotle's philosophical anthropology can be characterized by its refusal to describe thinking as motion and by its equally sharp break with the image of man as microcosmos. Instead, human uniqueness will be explained in terms of the shape and posture of human body together with some particular features of human sensation, imagination and recollection, and, finally, rational thought that alone does not map on anatomy.

Since to grasp Aristotle's physiology and anatomy is a prerequisite for understanding his philosophical anthropology, the book pays a detailed attention to the role of heart and blood in Aristotle's teleological explanation of our upright posture. In this context, Aristotle's remarks on the *scala naturae* are analyzed, and so is his interpretation of various human features including the discussion of human hand

in *De partibus animalium*. A special place is reserved for the issue of sexual difference and its impact on Aristotle's view of human being as a political animal. In this context, the book emphasizes the difference between Aristotle's explanation of thinking in his biological work including *De anima*, and his cruder division of the soul into a rational and an irrational part. This biologically irrelevant division finds its use in political philosophy and ethics, where it also serves to describe the relation between the sexes in terms of natural domination and obedience.

From this issue the book returns to the soul as discussed, more thoroughly and finely, in biological treatises, with a view to the belief that "life is defined in the case of animals by the power of perception, in that of man by the power of perception or thought" (*Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 9, 1170a16-17). The sensible soul, endowed with various functions, must therefore come first in the order of explanation of what defines man. In this respect, the book's focus is on those activities of the sensible soul that are not exclusively connected with one particular sense organ. After a brief reminder of the problem of the soul's division into parts or capacities, the sense of touch is discussed as the only sense that is superior in humans rather than animals. Closely connected to the heart as the central organ of all sensation, the sense of touch is also linked to the discerning power of human mind (*De anima* II, 9, 421a19-26). The so-called common sense and especially imagination (*phantasia*) are then considered in detail, including the importance of imagination for human thinking, self-awareness, and the activities of recollecting and deliberating. Human imagination is also compared with *phantasia* in other animals, and it is submitted that imagination in its most elementary form should characterize the whole realm of animal life as the life that is capable of local motion.

Concerning human being, deliberation and recollection receive special treatment as the activities where imagination clearly reaches beyond mental visualizing. In this context, the "deliberative imagination" enables us to combine mental images with the logical structure of judgment that is independent of these images' particular content. As a result, man as the only deliberative animal is a unique creatu-

re with no counterpart in either the animal or the divine realms. At this point, the book offers an interpretation of Aristotle's dictum that "the soul never thinks without an image" (*De anima* III, 7, 431a14-17). This need not mean that the thought is entirely dependent on *phantasmata*; rather, mental images always accompany and facilitate (or mislead) those thoughts of which we are conscious.

This issue leads directly to Aristotle's conception of human intellect whose activity is supported by all bodily and psychic functions. More exactly, this intellect *is* an activity which could not occur without the whole body-soul compound, but cannot be entirely explained by it. The line separating the activity of the sensible soul from the activity of human intellect is therefore quite thin and, instead of drawing it univocally, Aristotle recurs to the analogy between sense-perception and thinking. As Aristotle's explanation of how human intellect works is offered in *De anima* III, 4, we are left wondering what the motivation of *De anima* III, 5 on the agent intellect may be. The book's concluding chapter relates this motivation to the issue of the triggering of mental episodes which constitute the intermittent human thought. Seen in this light, the non-intermittently active agent intellect guarantees the permanence of even the human thought. The agent intellect would therefore be a sort of thought experiment collateral to the acknowledgement that our thinking is intermittent, but adding no further characteristics to the intellect as treated in III, 4. On this reading, the introduction of the agent intellect in III, 5 need not be motivated by the discourse on the divine intellect in *Metaphysics* XII, but can simply follow from the impossibility to guarantee the permanence of human thinking - the goal of human natural constitution - on the basis of Aristotle's biology alone.