

Topic 1: "Images belong to the rational soul in the manner of perceptions, and whenever it affirms or denies that something is good or bad, it pursues or avoids. Consequently, the soul never thinks without an image."

---- Aristotle

On the Nature of Soul and Its Operation

Introduction

As a response to Aristotle's quote on the nature of soul, this essay aims to, at the first place, interpret what Aristotle actually means in this quote by clarifying the concepts in his claim, such as "image", "perception", "good", etc. Then, this essay will discuss why this quote, with its vagueness, fails to provide a sound explanation on the nature of soul and how it operates. Thus, the last part of this essay will try to offer an alternative model dealing with the nature of soul and its operation.

Interpretation of the Quote.

"Images belong to the rational soul in the manner of perception, ..."

Here, Aristotle believes that our sensual perceptions appear in our rational soul, or our mind capable of logical reasoning, as images. By "images", Aristotle cannot only refer to "pictures" as what the eyes are seeing, because other sensual perceptions are clearly also part of the "images" which exist in our mind. Therefore, Aristotle refers "images" to the mental representations of picture, sound, smell, taste -- all what our sensations have captured.

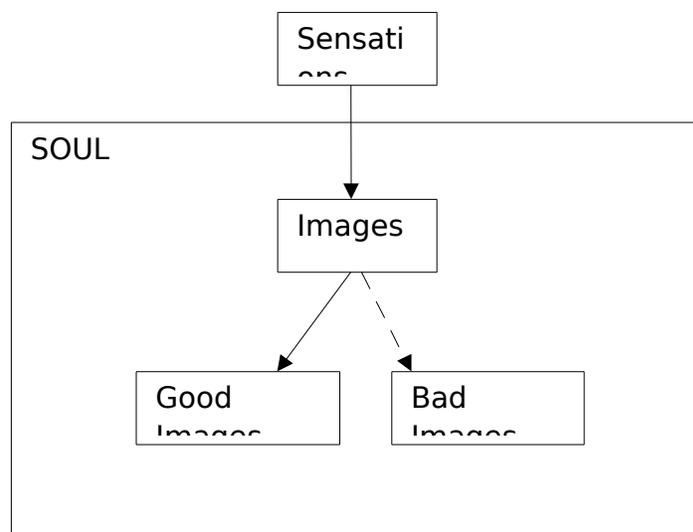
"... and whenever it affirms or denies that something is good or bad, it pursues or avoids. "

There are two ways of interpreting this part of the quote: a causal interpretation and a explanatory interpretation. Aristotle may try to point out that when the soul affirms or denies that something is good or bad, it will *therefore* pursues or avoids. In other words, the soul's cognition of good and bad will cause it to pursue or avoid, and this is the causal interpretation of this part of the quote. However, Aristotle may also mean that what the soul pursues will be recognized as good by the soul, and what the soul avoids will be recognized as bad by the soul. If this is what Aristotle means, he is then defining good and bad by the will of the soul.

"Consequently, the soul never thinks without an image."

Here, Aristotle claims that the images are the basic objects which the soul operate with. The images are the building blocks of the thoughts of the soul, and our thoughts can be traced back to the images, which are the mental representations of our sensation.

Therefore, if we put the pieces together to construct the Aristotelian model of the operation of soul: our rational soul contains images, the mental representations of our sensual perceptions. If the mind recognizes the image to be good, then it pursues. If the mind recognizes the image to be bad, then it avoids. (the causal interpretation), and the images are the building blocks of thoughts, without which the thoughts cannot exist.



Refutations

Refutation I: the missing ethical definitions.

If we apply the causal interpretation to the middle part of the quote which deals with good and evil, we can find that the definitions of good and evil is missing here. What is good and what is evil? Unless the definitions are provided here, the ethical part of the quote is meaningless. If we apply the explanatory interpretation here, we will find that Aristotle gives us a definition of good and evil -- that is: what the soul pursues is good, what the should avoid is evil. However, the part of the explanation is still missing. If what the soul pursues is good, then how do we know what the soul itself will pursue ? Is it by our intuition that the soul will know what to pursue? Or is it by other criteria that the soul will know what to pursue? Here, the criteria is still missing and Aristotle fails to provide a solid foundation for the ethics of the soul.

Refutation II: the missing transition from "images" to "intentions"

Aristotle tries to argue that the soul will affirm or deny the, which means the soul has its own intentions on the images. However, it is far from clear why the soul has such an intention on images-- the sensual representations. If I see an apple, and there is an image of an apple in my mind. Why my mind will have the intention to affirm or deny this image of the apple? We can say that my mind has an intention to acquire the apple because my mind feels hungry, but what does Aristotle mean when he is saying the mind will have an intention on the image itself? The image itself has no other value except representing the sensual perception. The mind may deny the image of an apple if there is another idea which serves as the reference of the preference, but the mind cannot deny the image because of the image itself.

Refutation III: good is not always pursued as well as bad is not always avoided.

Aristotle argues in his quote that good is pursued by the mind and bad is avoided. However, this is far from reality. Except the power of reason, the soul is also under the influence of the power of emotions. Therefore, even if the soul has a clear definition of good and a solid understanding on the situation, it may not pursue the good because of the influence from emotions.

Refutation IV: the soul can think without an image.

Aristotle in the last part of this quote argues that image is the building blocks of thought and mind cannot think without an image. However, this is false. Apart from thoughts based on images, the mind also have thoughts based on abstract concepts such as mathematical numbers or concepts like infinity. These abstract concepts are not representations of sensations -- the images, and our mind can clearly operate with pure abstract concepts -- this is how theoretical mathematics are constructed. Therefore, Aristotle's claim on the mind's dependence of images is false.

Refutation V: there is no causal relationship between the first part and the last part of the quotes.

Here, Aristotle points out a logical connection which does not actually exist. He said the images belong to the rational soul, and *consequently*, the soul never thinks without an image. However, we cannot see why the relationship of belongingness between the images and souls can lead to the relationship of dependence between the images and the thoughts of the soul.

Alternative Model on the Nature of Soul

To build an alternative model on the nature of soul, we need to first decide what the soul contains. While in his model Aristotle argues the soul contains only the images, I will, through the method of Cartesian meditation, argue that the soul contains far more layers of different entities. The meditation is not based on

a deductive logic, but the "clear and distinct" insights revealed by the self-consciousness of the soul itself, which is the foundation for the correctness of this meditation.

The meditation:

Here comes the question, what is left if we put away all the contents of the soul -- the images, the logical relationship, the emotions, the memories, etc.? We are left with the soul's existence, its own Being. "Being" I mean a pure form of existence without characteristics. It is existence instead of essence. Then, let us proceed from the soul's Being outward. What do we find in the soul? We find there are images, or ideas, such as the idea of a particular tree, of an apple, of this particular black chair and of that particular door made of wood. The ideas are not limited to visual pictures. We also find there are ideas of a particular sound of a bird, a smell of the soil, the feeling of a piece of cloth. We thus know the soul has ideas, and these ideas are all *particulus* -- the particular ideas as what they are directly presenting themselves in the soul, without any categorization and abstraction. Apart from these particular ideas, we also find there are particular emotions, or feelings -- the emotions the soul instantaneously feels when it comes into contact with some stimuli, such as an idea or another emotion. After this, if we expand further from the soul's Being, further than the self-awareness of these particular ideas and emotions, we encounter the concepts, the abstraction and categorization of the particular ideas: just like the concept of apple to an idea of a particular apple, the concept of anger to a particular feeling of anger in this moment. Then, if we abstract these concepts which already have some degree of abstraction, we find there are some concepts with a greater degree of abstraction. Let us call these concepts the metaconcepts, such as the concept of a circle is the further abstraction of the concept of the shape of apple. Then we realize there are logical relationships between different metaconcepts, such as the degree of the three angles of a triangle (metaconcepts) add up to 180 (a number, a metaconcept). Now, from the most fundamental constituent of the soul, its Being, we proceed up with the particular ideas and emotions, the concepts, the metaconcepts, and the logical relationships between the metaconcepts. Can we still proceed further than the metaconcepts and the logical relationships? What else still exists in our soul, which goes beyond the metaconcepts and the logical relationships? The answer is intuition. Intuition is apparently not a particular idea such as a computer or a particular emotion such as a feeling of anger. It is not a concept like brown and red, and it is not a metaconcept such as a square. It is also not a logical relationship, and it does not follow any logical relationship. It operates beyond logic, and let us call it intuition. Then, is there something existing in our soul even beyond the intuition, something do not come from ideas and concepts, and do not follow logics and intuitions? Yes, the answer is faith. It requires no standing points outside itself except the Being of the soul. It is irrelevant to the other layers of the soul and justify itself by its own cause. Then the question ends, for the nature of faith decides there cannot be something more transcendental, more arbitrary, more abstract. This is the end, and let us say the first question is answered.

Following the first question on the layers of soul, here comes the second question: how does the soul operate? If the soul only have layers of components, such as ideas and concepts, how can it start to move, or initiate thoughts? We now have the matter, and we still need the force imposed on the matter. Then what is the force behind the operation of soul? The answer is will. If the soul contains particular emotions without a will, it cannot choose between the emotions. Regardless of the criteria, it is the will that empower the soul to seek and avoid, to like and hate, and say yes and no. It is the will that decide to faith or not. The will provides the soul a purpose, a teleological end. It directs the development of logics to evaluate ideas and emotions, and connect concepts with concepts. Then the second question ends, for we

find the force Aristotle has omitted. The soul does not affirm and deny automatically, and the force responsible for its movement is this judgmental will.

Conclusion of the Alternative Model on the Nature of Soul in Graph

