

ON THE ESSENCE OF SOUL

IV. ii.

Trans. Thomas Taylor

I. In investigating the essence of soul, if we show that it is neither body, nor the harmony in incorporeal natures; and likewise if we omit what is said of its being the *entelecheia*,[†] or perfection of the body, as not true, as the words [taken literally] imply, and as not manifesting what the soul is; and if also we should say that it is of an intelligible nature, and a divine allotment, perhaps we shall assert something perspicuous concerning its essence. At the same time, however, it will be better to proceed still further than this. For this purpose, therefore, we shall make a division into a sensible and intelligible nature, and place soul in the intelligible. Hence, let it be at present admitted that it ranks among intelligibles: and let us in another way investigate that which is proximate to, or the peculiarity of, its nature. We say, therefore, that some things are primarily partible, and in their own nature dissipable; but these are such as have no part the same, either as another part, or as the whole; and in which it is necessary that the part should be less than all and the whole. These, however, are sensible magnitudes and masses, each of which has an appropriate place, nor is it possible among these, that the same thing should be in many places at once. But there is another essence opposed to this, which in no respect admits of a separation into parts, since it is without parts, and therefore impartible. It likewise admits of no interval, not even in conception, nor is indigent of place, nor is generated in a certain being, either according to parts, or according to wholes, because it is as it were at one and the same time carried in all beings as in a vehicle; not in order that it may be established in them, but because other things are neither able nor willing to exist without it. It likewise possesses an essence which subsists according to sameness, and is the foundation[‡] of all following natures, being as it were a centre in a circle, the lines drawn from which and terminating in the circumference, nevertheless permit it to abide in itself. For they possess from the centre their generation and being, participate of the point, and have for their principle that which is impartible. They also proceed, suspending themselves from the centre. This, therefore, [of which the centre in a circle is an image] being primarily impartible in intelligibles, and the leader among beings, and again that which is in sensibles being in every respect partible, - this being the case, prior to that which is sensible, but which nevertheless is something near to and in it, there is another certain nature, which is partible indeed, yet not primarily so like bodies, but becomes partible in bodies. Hence, when bodies are divided, the form which is in them is also divided, though it still remains a whole in each of the divided parts; the same thing in this case becoming many, each of which is perfectly distant from the other, in consequence of the form becoming entirely partible. Of this kind are colours, and all qualities, and each *morphe*, which is capable of being wholly at one and the same time in many things, that are separated from each other, and which has no part suffering the same thing with another part. Hence this must be admitted to be in every respect partible.

Again, besides the nature which is perfectly indivisible, there is another essence proximately suspended from it, and which has indeed from it the impartible, but by a progression from thence, hastening to another nature, is established in the middle of both; *viz.* in the middle of that which is impartible and primary, and that which is divisible about bodies, and is inherent in bodies. This nature does not subsist after the same manner as colour and every quality, which are indeed every where the same in many masses of bodies, yet the quality which is in one mass, is entirely separate from the

[†] The cause, according to Aristotle, by which the animal is *vitally* moved, is the rational soul, but the cause by which the animal thus moved is *defined* or *bounded*, is *entelecheia*, or form, which imparts to it perfection. See my Introduction to, and translation of, Aristotle's treatise *On The Soul*.

[‡] It appears from the version of Ficinus, that the word $\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$ is wanting in this place in the original.

quality in another, so far as one mass is also separate from another. And though the magnitude should be one, yet that which is the same in each part, has no communion whatever so as to produce co-passivity, because this sameness is at the same time attended with [a predominant] difference. For the sameness is passion, and is not itself also essence. That, however, in this middle nature which accedes to an impartible essence, is itself essence, and is ingenerated in bodies, about which also it happens to be divided; yet it does not suffer this, till it gives itself to bodies. When, therefore, it is inherent in bodies, though it should be inherent in the greatest body, and which is every where most extended, yet though it gives itself to the whole, it does not depart from the unity of its nature. Yet it is not one in the same manner as body. For body is one by continuity, but one part of it is different from another, and is situated in a different place. Nor again is it one, in the same manner as one quality. The nature, however, which is at once partible and impartible, and which we say is soul, is not one like that which is continued, having another and another part; but it is partible indeed, because it is in all the parts of that in which it subsists; and impartible, because the whole of it is in all the parts, and likewise in each of the parts. He, therefore, who perceives this, and beholds the power of it, will know what a divine and admirable thing soul is, and that it possesses a supernatural essence; not indeed having magnitude, but being present with all magnitude, and existing in this place, and again not existing in it, and this not by a different, but the same nature. So that it is divided into parts, and again not divided; or rather, it is neither divided, nor generated divisible. For it remains with itself a whole. But it is divided about bodies, because bodies in consequence of their proper partibility, are not able to receive it impartibly. So that the distribution into parts, is the passion of bodies, and not of soul.

II. That it is necessary, however, that the nature of soul should be a thing of this kind, and that it is not possible for soul to be any thing besides this, being neither alone impartible, nor alone partible, but that it is necessarily after this manner both these, is manifest from the following considerations. For if it was like bodies having another and another part, when one part suffered, another part would not be sensible of the suffering, but that soul for instance, which is in the finger, would have a sensation of the passion, as being different, and subsisting in itself. And, in short, there would be many souls, governing each of us. One soul, likewise, would not govern this universe, but an infinite number of souls separate from each other. For with respect to what is said about continuity, unless it contributes to unity, it is introduced in vain. For that which is asserted by some who deceive themselves, is not to be admitted, *viz.* that the senses gradually arrive at the ruling part, by a continued succession.[†] In the first place, therefore, to say that the senses arrive at the ruling part of the soul, is said without examination. For how do they divide, and assert *this* to be one thing, but *that* another, and the ruling part something else? By how much quantity, also, do they divide each of these; or by what difference, the quality being one, and the bulk continued? Whether, likewise, is the ruling part alone sentient, or have the other parts also a sensible perception? And if this is the case with the ruling part alone, it will then perceive, when the sensible passion falls on this part established in a certain place; but if it falls on another part of the soul, which is not naturally adapted to be sentient, this part will not deliver the same passion to the ruling part, nor, in short, will there be sensation. If, also, the sensible passion falls on the ruling part, it will either fall on a part of it, and this being sentient, the remaining parts will no longer be sensitive; for it would be in vain; or there will be many and infinite sensible perceptions, and all of them will be dissimilar. Hence, one sensible perception will say, I primarily suffer, but another will say, I perceive the passion of another sense. Each sensation, likewise, except the first, will be ignorant where the passion was generated. Or each part of the soul will be deceived, fancying that the passion was there generated, where it is. If, however, not only the ruling part, but any other part has a sensible perception, why will this part be the leader, but another part not? Or why is it necessary that sensation should arrive at the ruling part? How, likewise, will the sensations arising from many senses, such as the ears and eyes, know one particular thing? But again, if the soul is entirely one, so as to be perfectly impartible, and one in itself; and if it entirely flies from the nature of multitude and partibility, no body which may

[†] For $\delta\lambda\alpha\delta\acute{o}\sigma\epsilon\iota$ here, it is necessary to read, conformably to the version of Ficinus, $\delta\lambda\alpha\delta\omicron\chi$.

participate of the soul, will be wholly animated; but the soul establishing itself as it were about the centre of each, will leave all the bulk of the animal without animation. Hence it is necessary that soul should be thus one and many, partible and at the same time impartible: and we ought not to disbelieve that it is impossible for one and the same thing to be in many places at once. For if we do not admit this, there will not be a nature which connects and governs all things; and which at once comprehends all things, and conducts them by wisdom. And this nature is indeed multitude, because beings are many; but it is also one, in order that the nature which comprehends may be one. By its multitudinous one, therefore, it supplies all the parts of body with life; but by its impartible one it conducts all things wisely. In those things, however, which are deprived of wisdom, that which is the leading one imitates this one of the soul. Hence, this is the meaning of what is divinely though obscurely asserted by Plato, *viz.* that from an essence impartible and always subsisting according to sameness, and from an essence divisible about bodies, the Demiurgus mingled a third species of essence from both.[†] Soul, therefore, is after this manner one and many; but the forms in bodies are many and one; bodies are many only; and that which is supreme is one alone.

[†] See my Introduction to, and translation of, the *Timæus* of Plato.