

# ON ANAXAGORAS' *NOUS*

## ACERCA DO *NOUS* EM ANAXÁGORAS

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**Abstract:** In this paper, I aim to present a case study that reveals the significance of the dialectical procedure of Book I in the whole project of *De Anima*. My target will be the concept of *voûs* that Aristotle excavates from Anaxagoras's obscure reports and that he appropriates. I am interested in explaining how Aristotle did so and the philosophical consequences of such a recovery of an early concept. By these consequences, I mean the role that Anaxagoras's opinion played in the reception of Aristotle's own theory.

**Keywords:** Anaxagoras, Aristotle, *De Anima*, *Nous*, Aristotle's dialectics, Presocratic Philosophy.

**Resumo:** Neste artigo, pretendo apresentar um estudo de caso que revela a importância do procedimento dialético do Livro I em todo o projeto do *De Anima*. Meu alvo será o conceito de *voûs* que Aristóteles extrai dos relatos obscuros de Anaxágoras e do qual se apropria. Interessa-me explicar de que forma Aristóteles fez isso e quais as consequências filosóficas a extrair da recuperação desse conceito inicial. Nesse sentido, refiro-me à importância que a posição de Anaxágoras desempenhou na recepção da própria teoria de Aristóteles.

**Palavras-chave:** Anaxágoras, Aristóteles, *De Anima*, *Nous*, dialéctica aristotélica, filosofía pré-socrática.

Aristotle's theory of *voûç* is not only one of the most important parts of *De Anima*'s project but also the one that entails the most challenges. For the way in which *voûç* is to be understood in the general frame of the hylomorphic model is anything but obvious. Furthermore, this is a case in which Aristotle's positive developments remained attached to one of the opinions discussed in Book I: Anaxagoras's early conception of *voûç* as a principle.

In this paper, I aim to present a case study that reveals the significance of the dialectical procedure of Book I in the whole project of *De Anima*. My target will be the concept of *voûç* that Aristotle exhumes from Anaxagoras's obscure reports and that he appropriates<sup>1</sup>. I am interested in explaining how Aristotle did so and the philosophical consequences of such a recovery of an early concept. By these consequences, I mean the role that Anaxagoras's opinion played in the reception of Aristotle's own theory.

## ARISTOTLE'S CRITICAL TREATMENT OF ANAXAGORAS' OPINION

The *De Anima*'s project opens with Aristotle's acknowledgment of two facts: the study of the soul contributes in a significant way to knowledge, and it entails considerable challenges, for it is particularly difficult to have any certainty (*πίστις*) about it (*DA* 402a10). The word *πίστις* has a crucial role in *De Anima*'s opening. From a scientific and philosophical perspective, the study of the soul requires a point of

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<sup>1</sup> On the same opinion, that is, Aristotle endorses Anaxagoras' conception of *voûç*; see Driscoll 1992: 273 and Carter 2019b. For a more skeptical position, see Shields 1994: 9.

departure from which the investigation can be conducted, ideally, a definition. However, this definition is still missing. Given the momentous role of the point of departure, its epistemological force must be grounded, if not in truth itself, at least on a solid doxastic foundation. The absence of a definition of the soul is the best opportunity to endow his research with the components that will structure it, namely, the *aporiai*. For, if there is no solid certainty about the soul, the doubts about its nature and essence will constitute the paths for the search. Moreover, the lack of a definition also encourages a methodological attempt that calls for the employment of properties to discover a given thing's essence (DA 402b16). In such a scenario, the appeal to the resource of *endoxa* seems not only legitimate but also necessary.

Thus, as a point of departure, Aristotle establishes an initial division aimed at identifying the most likely properties to belong to the soul: motion and sensation (DA 403b25). Even nowadays, we tend to distinguish living beings from non-living beings because of their ability to move and (or consequently) their capacity to respond to external stimuli, which implies even the most basic cases of sense perception. Although these properties are not intended to be exhaustive classificatory items, they are certainly employed as a heuristic tool. They serve to arrange endoxic material that needs to be sifted off the falsities it may contain. This is precisely what happens with Anaxagoras, who seems privileged in the *De Anima*, notwithstanding Aristotle's critical attitude towards him. For Anaxagoras's *voûç*, understood as a principle, serves to account for both motion and sensation, which makes him the target of Aristotle's criticism<sup>2</sup> [text 1]:

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In a similar way, Anaxagoras too says that the soul is what causes motion, and with him is anyone else who claims that *voûç* set the

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<sup>2</sup> I am reproducing Shields' translation (2016). However, whenever the term *voûç* appears in the original Greek text, I changed the word in Shields' translation, for his option for 'reason' could stress on the cognitive process more than on designing the faculty.

whole universe in motion. But he's not in complete agreement with Democritus, since the latter made soul and νοῦς absolutely the same. For he said that what is true is what appears, for which reason he thought Homer wrote well when he said that Hector 'lay with his thoughts elsewhere.' He does not employ νοῦς as a particular capacity concerned with the truth but says that the soul and νοῦς are the same. Anaxagoras is less clear about them; for in many places, he says νοῦς is the cause of beauty and rightness, and yet in other places he says that it is the same as the soul. For he says that it belongs to all animals, great and small, noble and base. But νοῦς –at any rate what is called νοῦς in the sense of intelligence- does not appear to belong similarly to all animals, not even to all humans (DA 404a25-b6)<sup>3</sup>.

The passage presents a testimony that can be divided into two parts: one specifically addressing the Anaxagorean contribution to the dialectical quest, and the other discussing another theory, namely that of Democritus. Although Democritus' theory differs from Anaxagoras's, they are both articulated in Aristotle's hermeneutical device. Thus, we cannot understand Aristotle's interpretation of Anaxagoras without borrowing the concepts provided by the Democritean opinion. At this point, a reconstruction will be helpful:

#### Anaxagoras

- ψυχὴ is a motive principle \*
- νοῦς is a motive principle
- ψυχὴ = νοῦς

#### Democritus

→ ψυχὴ = νοῦς

3 This doxographical account seems to gather a summary of the relevant Anaxagorean theories for the inquiry on the soul. Although it is hard to establish a direct relation with fragments, all of the elements seem to be contained in B12. There are also references to the content of B13 (Boeri 2010: 17 n. 45). In the present text, I will, however, diminish the importance of the extant fragments.

- ψυχή deals with appearances
  - ψυχή = sensitive principle
- ψυχή deals with tru
  - ψυχή = intellective principle
- truth = appearance
  - ψυχή = νοῦς
- ψυχή = νοῦς
- νοῦς is both motive and intellective
  - νοῦς is in all animals
  - all animals have sensitive principle
  - ψυχή = sensitive principle
  - ψυχή = νοῦς

As can be seen in the *De Anima*, the interpretation of the Anaxagorean theory depends on Democritus' testimony. Aristotle seems justified in doing so since he complains about Anaxagoras' lack of clarity. We know from Aristotle's logical works<sup>4</sup> that 'lack of clarity' could mean at least two things: the terms provided in the reasoning are ambiguous, or some items are missing. Anaxagoras may be an excellent example of how both issues coincide. As an exercise in exegetical charity and argumentative skill, Aristotle should reconstruct the reasoning behind a particular opinion, supplying the missing elements or uncovering the roots of the ambiguity. As Anaxagoras is not present to ask him to make explicit his reasoning, the opinion should be analyzed in the light of another theory formulated in similar terms but in a more accomplished or sufficient way<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the difficulty is overcome by constructing an analogical reasoning to analyze one endoxon in the light of another endoxon more than the former.

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4 See, for example *Topics* (158b8 and 162a35) and *Rhetoric* (1404b1).

5 In the *Sophistici Elenchi*, Aristotle describes how different kinds of arguments should be constructed in function of their prime matter and objective. In that context, he talks about the *peirastic* arguments, which run from what is plausible for the respondent and the kind of knowledge such a person should have (cf. 165b4). On this topic, see Galston (1982: 82).

There are two immediate outcomes of Aristotle's procedure. On the one hand, he placed the Anaxagorean νοῦς decidedly in both categories, initially coined out from the alleged properties of the soul. But, on the other hand, it constitutes the first attempt to eliminate the ambiguity entailed by the preponderant use in Anaxagoras' thought of the term νοῦς to explain everything<sup>6</sup>. A proof of this is the sort of semantic observation that Aristotle does at the end of the text above quoted (which was not included in the reconstruction): if νοῦς is said to belong to all animals, the term cannot be referring to an intellectual capacity<sup>7</sup>. There are two possible consequences: or νοῦς is an ambiguous term employed indistinctly to denote different things, or Anaxagoras held a sort of unified account for the phenomenon of cognition in a broad sense. Aristotle, however, seems reluctant to accept the second option. This speaks eloquently in favor of his method, the analogical device, as an analytical tool; it appears, then, that it is not a sort of invention aiming to merge or distort theories. As a matter of fact, in some lines afterward, Aristotle reiterates [text 2]:

Anaxagoras seems to say that soul and νοῦς are different, just as we said earlier; but he treats them both as having one nature, except insofar as he posits νοῦς most of all as a first principle. At any rate he says, that it alone among things which exist is simple and both unmixed and pure. He<sup>8</sup> assigns both to the same first

6 A reference on Aristotle complaints about the Anaxagorean *deus ex machina* should be provided.

7 I agree with Hicks that this statement is the product of an inference made by Aristotle (1907: 220). I would like to stress the fact that this inference is promoted by the analogical structure serving as the frame for the analysis.

8 This sentence carries a particle of special importance for me (ἀποδίδωσι δ' ἄμφω τῇ αὐτῇ ἀρχῇ, τό τε γινώσκειν καὶ τὸ κινεῖν, λέγων νοῦν κινῆσαι τὸ πᾶν). In Shiels' translation (which is the one I am using), there is no special value given to that particle, like Barbotin 2009: 9. In Corcilius's translation, we find an "auch" as a connector (2017); also, we find it with a coordination value in the translations of Miller 2018: 7,

principle, knowing and moving, that is, by saying that νοῦς moves the whole universe. (DA 405a13-19)

As stated before, it does not seem that Aristotle sees in Anaxagoras someone who made νοῦς and soul the same *simpliciter*. Although he used Democritus to analyze the Anaxagorean proposal, he did not assimilate both theories in content. At the end of chapter 2 of the first book of the *De Anima*, there is a list of opinions headed by Aristotle's observation of a point in common among several of the *endoxa* he gathered: they established a sort of identity between a principle of motion and a first principle (DA 405a4)<sup>9</sup>. This list<sup>10</sup> aims to present such an idea expressed in the predecessors' own terms. This must explain why Aristotle, although recognizing the difficulties, does not attribute a complete identity between soul and νοῦς to Anaxagoras. I would like to make explicit the difficulty with the aid of a schema, that could run like this:

- νοῦς ≠ ψυχή
- νοῦς and ψυχή are treated as one single nature
- νοῦς = ἀρχή  
→ ψυχή = ἀρχή
  
- νοῦς ≠ ψυχή
- νοῦς is simple, unmixed, and pure  
→ ψυχή is not simple, mixed, and not pure (?)

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Reeve 2017: 7, and Carter 2019: 174. With an adversative value (which is the one I will defend), we find Calvo 1978:141, Bodéüs 1993: 97, and Boeri 2010: 21.

<sup>9</sup> Cherniss seems to have a different opinion on this point but offers a very interesting interpretation of the catalog. He says that Anaxagoras's theory merges cognitive and motive faculties into the same principle (a cosmological one), a characteristic that Aristotle will try to find in as many early thinkers as possible (1935: 296). Polansky follows this interpretation (2007: 78).

<sup>10</sup> On this list, the 'Kinetist Catalogue', see (Sanchez 2016: 104).

The distinction makes it evident that Aristotle needs to state clearly that νοῦς and soul are not the same. However, they are connected. So, if νοῦς is not the same as the soul, it must be explained what Anaxagoras meant by treating both of them as a single nature.

It is the term φύσις, the one allowing the introduction of the equivalence between a motive principle and the first principle, for the first principle was the Presocratic explanation for the nature of things<sup>11</sup>. So, if the soul is constituted from the first principle, and νοῦς is the first principle, it could follow an identity between νοῦς and the soul. But they are not, as stated. The necessity to reiterate this premise seems to be a call for a different perspective, which may explain the role of the attributes of the Anaxagorean νοῦς in this context. I guess that Aristotle is opening the door to the consideration that, although νοῦς and soul share the same nature, the former is the first principle itself and, accordingly, single, unmixed, and pure; the latter is none of such things because is not the first principle, but it is made of it<sup>12</sup>.

This leads me to the last sentence of the testimony, whose logical relationship with the rest of the text seems puzzling. The sentence relates to the previous section with a δὲ that must accomplish the same function that the δὲ of line 14; that is, it should be distributing the subject of line 13, namely, Anaxagoras. It can be understood as a simple connective particle, in which case it is a question of a simple enumeration of Anaxagoras' claims. However, that does not seem entirely consistent with the critical attitude of the passage. Besides,

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11 It is the active or essential constituent of things. Emphasis should be placed on the fact that it is a constituent. On the vague uses of φύσις, see Hicks (1907: 228).

12 See also Cherniss: "[...] and Anaxagoras, although Aristotle has already said that he seems to have meant something different by the terms νοῦς and ψυχή (and although he obviously cannot be said to have identified νοῦς with the material cause), uses both as a single essential nature except that he treats νοῦς specifically as the first principle" (1935: 297).



the attention is not directed to the distinction between soul and intellect; in this case, the focus is placed on the concept of *voûs* itself. It would maybe be helpful to clarify my point if I change the position of the elements of the sentence to read:

By saying that *voûs* moves the whole universe, he assigns both knowing and moving to the same first principle.

So, the question is, what is Aristotle attempting to say by this? The most economical solution is to consider it as just additional information. However, perhaps Aristotle is anticipating a problem here or something that requires an explanation. That is why I thought that the  $\delta\epsilon$  of line 17 has an adversative character and aims to show a difficulty arising from the fact that Anaxagoras held that *voûs* is, on the one hand, simple, unmixed, and pure, and on the other hand, responsible at once for both moving and knowing.

My suspicion is reinforced by the last mention of Anaxagoras in the frame of the dialectical procedure of Book I. At that point, the focus is no longer on motion, but on the cognitive powers attributed to the soul as a defining feature. Aristotle states that his predecessors committed to the idea that, as the soul was made of the principles, which presumably coincided with the material elements, cognition has to be explained under the principle of continuity between similars ( $\tau\acute{o} \delta\mu\iota\omicron\upsilon\omicron\nu \pi\rho\acute{o}\varsigma \tau\acute{\omega} \delta\mu\omicron\iota\omega$ ). All of them, except Anaxagoras [text 3]:

Only Anaxagoras says that *voûs* is unaffected and that it has nothing in common with any of the other things. How or by what cause it knows, if it is of such a sort, he did not say; nor is it clear from what he said. (DA 405b19-23)

Here, the complaint that Aristotle has to address to Anaxagoras is completely unveiled. The ambiguity that was the first candidate to be a

motive for criticism seemed to be overcome by the procedure I presented. However, the second prospect for explaining Aristotle's bother, namely, a missing pivotal element that would constitute an explanation of the cognitive mechanism, seems to me to be a better candidate. Surprisingly, what Aristotle seemed to condemn of all the other thinkers, except Anaxagoras, is that they provided such a mechanism, although in material terms. Anaxagoras, in turn, did not fall into the materialist tendency but failed to explain the mechanism of cognition.

This opens the door for criticism. Anaxagoras may well have thought that νοῦς cognitive action needed to be explained without recourse to the principle of commonality. However, silence is not an explanation. So, it seems that Aristotle found a valuable concept for his purposes in the dialectical review, which can be positively used once ambiguities are sifted off. The question is how.

Another question remains open. I claimed that Aristotle saw something in the fact that to νοῦς was ascribed both the power of moving and knowing. However, the motion aspect was muted in the last testimony. And it has to be explained why. It is that motion does not represent a challenge for a simple, impassive, and pure principle, as νοῦς, while cognition does? If so, why is there a problem in one case and not in the other? Moreover, does the concept of νοῦς that Aristotle is looking for need to be cleaned off the moving capacity?<sup>13</sup>

## ANAXAGORAS' CONTRIBUTION UNVEILED

It must be explored if there is an answer to the former questions in the "non-dialectical books" of the *De Anima*. If so, the link between the dialectical procedure of Book I and Aristotle's psychological project

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<sup>13</sup> It seems that Cherniss also interprets Aristotle in such a way: "If, however, Intelligence sets the world in motion, it must do so for some purpose which is other than itself; in short, there must be a final cause apart from motive Intelligence" (1935: 235).

could be established. Luckily, for the case I am presenting, it could be claimed that the link exists with the aid of two more mentions of Anaxagoras outside of the dialectical procedure of Book I. Anaxagoras is introduced in Book III by applying precisely the same argumentative tool by which Aristotle invited him to the discussion on the very first occasion, that is, by the aid of an analogy [text 4]:

To be sure, if reasoning is like perceiving, it would consist in being somehow affected by the object of reason or in something else of this sort. It is necessary, therefore, that it be unaffected, yet capable of receiving the form; that it be of this sort potentially but not to be this; and that it be such that just as the perceptual faculty is to the objects of perception, so νοῦς will be to the objects of thought.

If we look back to the first mention in Book I, we need to consider two main elements. The first one is motion: in Book III, the activity of νοῦς as a motive principle setting the whole universe in motion is gone. Secondly, Aristotle employed not only the same analogical strategy as he did in Book I to introduce Anaxagoras but also the same subject. Anaxagoras was introduced into the discussion because of an alleged identity between soul and νοῦς held by the early thinkers, which was translated with the aid of Democritus' testimony into an identity between sense-perception and intellection.

Although Aristotle does not accept such an identity, he insists on it again when it comes to providing his own account. Aristotle uses this analogy throughout *De Anima* several times, also to explain sense-perception, particularly in Book II 5 (cf. 417b18ss). Opinions on the matter diverge. On the one hand, Hamlyn shows some surprise by acknowledging that Aristotle is employing the same general frame of the analogy, even if before, it was stated that sense-perception is not a strict case of something being "affected" (1968 136). There is no reason to be amazed by that: Aristotle, as I have stated before,

is employing the analogy as an analysis tool, even if this device needs to be adjusted to work in other contexts. On the other hand, some scholars think that Aristotle does accept, at least partially, the identity<sup>14</sup>. However, Ross denies that this is the case. He believes that in the disjunctive clause of 14-15, Aristotle is opting for the second alternative: intellection is “something else of this sort”<sup>15</sup>. He states that the only function of the analogy is to show that reason and perception resemble in relation to their objects, that both are forms of apprehension (1961: 291)<sup>16</sup>.

Whatever the case, I want to stress a slightly different point. This insistence, on the one hand, is maybe proof of the dialectical character that the Aristotelian science has, but on the other, of the fact that what Aristotle retains from their predecessors is not necessarily a concept or a particular content but also argumentative structures that are helpful for the inquiry. That means that even if the dialectical procedures have a definitional purpose, as explicitly stated by Aristotle himself in many cases, they also explain functional aspects of the object in question<sup>17</sup>. The analogical device we have seen from the beginning aims at that objective. In this case, as the abovementioned

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14 See for example Shields 1994: 2 and Boeri 2010: lxxxiv. For a logical reconstruction of the functioning of the analogy, see Wedin 1992: 249.

15 In an earlier article, it seems that Shields understands that the disjunctive terms are the “object of reason” and “something else of this sort” (1994: 3 n.4). I disagree because I think that the disjunctive terms need to be in the same syntactical level, so they must be “πάσχειν τι” and “τι τοιοῦτον ἕτερον.” The analogy is established over the fact that both intellection and sense-perception have an object. The status of the object, of course, may vary.

16 On Ross’s negative conception of the Anaxagorean account, see Driscoll 1992: 274. On a similar conception of the function of the analogy, see Shields 1994: 18.

17 Wedin holds that in the *De Anima* iii 4, where this testimony occurs, “the question of what features are distinctive of νοῦς is kept separate from the question of how thinking occurs” (1988: 162). I will try to show that both procedures are connected and dependent, at least as far as the employment of Anaxagoras’ opinion can be considered the conductor thread of the chapter.

passage shows, although there is no identity between sense-perception and intellection, there is an analogy that, once built, reveals where both capacities differ:

	τὸ νοεῖν	τὸ αἰσθάνεσθαι
πάσχειν τι ὑπὸ	τοῦ νοητοῦ	τοῦ αἰσθητοῦ
δεκτικὸν τοῦ εἶδους	ἀπαθὲς	παθητικός
δυνάμει	ἐντελέχεια	(?)

The insistence on the parallel between sense-perception and intellection is due to several reasons. First, the intended explanation for the psychic faculties is based on a hylomorphic model, in which the soul and body are essential components that, although distinct, exist inseparably in the living being. Still, more than the hylomorphic model is needed to explain the commonality between soul and body so that the function of the psychic faculties can be disclosed. That is why, secondly, the hylomorphic model is furnished with two other pairs of theoretical elements: a theory of act and potency and one of act and being acted upon<sup>18</sup>. The former is meant to avoid an explanation entailing the disaggregation of the ensouled being, and the latter is to explain the mechanisms allowing the soul to have causal power over the body. So then, given that the soul is the form of the body and, because of that, is responsible for the psychic faculties of a given ensouled being, it has to be explained how the soul and the body engage in such processes that involve acting and being acted upon, without entailing destruction of any of the components.

The picture Aristotle is drawing with the aid of the analogy still needs to be completed. Although the analogy comparing sense perception with intellection has as its ultimate objective an explanation of the commonality between soul and body, it requires a third element. The

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18 On this point, see Driscoll 1992: 273.

missing element to complete the equation aiming for an explanation of the hylomorphic frame applied to the psychic faculties becomes clearer when Anaxagoras is introduced, which depicts the direction in which the Anaxagorean theory results are appropriated. In the immediately following lines, we read [text 5]:

It is necessary, then, since it reasons all things, that it be unmixed, just as Anaxagoras says, so that it may rule, that is, so that it may know; for the interposing of anything alien hinders and obstructs it. Consequently, its nature must be nothing other than this: that it be potential.

Hence, that part of the soul called νοῦς (and by νοῦς I mean that by which the soul reasons and conceives) is in actuality none of the things which are before it reasons; nor is it, accordingly, reasonable for it to be mixed with the body, since then it would come to be qualified in a certain way, either cold or hot, and there would be an organ of it, just as there is for the perceptual faculty. As things are, though, there is none.

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The first thing to notice is that the critical tone that Aristotle used to refer to the Anaxagorean account of νοῦς seems to be gone. The second point is that the already appropriated endoxon is introduced using the same analogical pattern mentioned earlier. Now, with the aid of these further lines, the model can be completed<sup>19</sup>:

(form) αἴσθησις

(matter) ὄργανον

αἰσθητόν (external object)

To explain how the faculty of sense-perception passes from a potential state to an actual one, there is a need to consider the sensible

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<sup>19</sup> For another reconstruction of the reasoning Aristotle developed in this passage, see Shields 1994: 6.

object, as it is evident from the preliminaries to Anaxagoras's mention, but to explain how this process is a case of that object acting over something, the focus on the faculty is not enough. If something is going to be "affected," it needs to be a proper substratum for receiving such affection. And that substratum, a material substratum, is the organ. To summarize, the importance of introducing external objects into the account for the commonality between soul and body lies in the need to explain what causes the soul-body interaction, resulting in a given psychic phenomenon. However, to explain such an interaction, it is necessary to consider how the affection is "realized" in the body.

But what does it mean to be affected? If the explanation above is sound, then the fact that an external object has causal power over the perceptual faculty implies that it has, in act, the properties that constitute the proper objects of sense perception. Thus, when I see an apple, it is the redness of its skin that, in conjunction with the appropriate medium, activates my perceptual faculty. By saying that there is "activation" of the perceptual faculty under the influence of a given perceptual object, the explanation is placed in the scheme of something "acting upon" something that, in its turn, experiences a particular "affection." According to a basic hylomorphic model, we are presented with a material substrate that receives a form. However, when this frame is applied in the psychological realm, the terms need to be nuanced, especially when transferring the scheme analogically to the case of *voûç*.

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The affection produced during the process of sense perception is of a material nature. This is an unquestionable fact, as Aristotle declares that the intensity of a given perceptual object can damage the organ. All the same, this is not any "affection," but a special kind of it that, under normal conditions, is "the preservation of what is in potentiality by what is in actuality, and of what is like something in the way potentiality is in relation to actuality" (DA 417b3)<sup>20</sup>. This stands

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20 On this point, see also Hicks 1907: 476.

for the necessity that the episodes in which the faculty is active do not inexorably exhaust it. That is why Aristotle resorts to the clarification that, even if sense perception is a material-based phenomenon, this faculty “receives perceptible forms without matter,” and when the objects’ influx disappears, the perceptual faculty returns to its pure potential state. In that nuanced way, then, it is conceivable the sense of Aristotle’s explanation of eyes becoming blue when perceiving a given blue object<sup>21</sup>.

This model works very well to explain cognition at the perceptual level (Shields 1994 2); nevertheless, in the case of intellection, the scheme faces some challenges:

(form) νοῦς

(matter?) no organ

νοητικόν (internal?)

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The first challenge concerns the kind of realization of the process of intellection under ahylomorphic model, given that there is no organ (material substrate) for the intellectual process. This issue needs to be tackled and entails the difficulty of the possibility of a separate “part” of the soul. However, the genuine hurdle comes from the ontological status of the intellectual object and its relation to the faculty. And it is precisely here that Anaxagoras becomes crucial.

The primary point to argue in favor of the relevance of the Anaxagorean theory in this particular context concerns the way it is presented in both the first and third books. One of the remarks already addressed was that, within the framework of Book III, Aristotle has somehow endorsed the theory. So, what has changed?

Let us focus on Anaxagoras’s attributes for νοῦς, namely, the fact that it is simple (ἀπλοῦν), unmixed (ἀμιγῆ), and pure (καθαρόν). When

21 See also Hicks 1907: 477.



comparing with the testimony of Book III, it is immediately remarkable that the only attribute retained at this point is its characteristic of being “unmixed.” This could count as the first indication of how Anaxagoras’ opinion was sifted and cleaned during the dialectical process in order to make it useful for Aristotle’s purposes. However, the reason why only this attribute is retained at this stage may also be related to the two theories that complementhylomorphism. For example, if the discussion is placed in the frame of act and potency. In that case, it is evident that a faculty is not simple<sup>22</sup>: although we may say that, in essence, the same faculty is in act or in potency, those different modes of existence for it are not the same in being. Something like this happens in the scheme of acting and being acted upon. In fact, this relationship is based on the principle of commonality, that is, that similar acts upon the similar (or its reciprocal). So, for a thing to be acted upon by another one, it requires a certain kind of material interaction, that kind of interaction that explains the fact of “being affected” as an alteration.

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However, this is something that Aristotle has already faced when dealing with sense-perception, for the case of alteration that takes place there is said to be of a special kind. For in the perceptual faculty, what is in potency cannot be conserved by what is in actuality because of the influx of something that is acting upon it when the perceptual object is as intense as to destroy the organ where the faculty resides. That entails that in the process of sense perception, a certain material exchange takes place, namely, a certain mixture.

This interpretation pretends to echo Aristotle’s appropriation of the characteristic of “unmixed” that Anaxagoras attributed to *voûç*. In the testimony of Book III presented above, Aristotle seems to interpret that quality in the following way:

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<sup>22</sup> I agree with Ross 1961: 294 on this point, and I think that this is maybe the only Anaxagorean attribute that is sifted from Aristotle’s original opinion. That said, it seems to be a genuine Anaxagorean concept (see Schofield 1980: 146 n. 22).

- νοῦς is unmixed, so it can know (rule)
- The interposition of something external would hinder it (παρεμφαινόμενον γὰρ κωλύει τὸ ἀλλότριον καὶ ἀντιφράττει)<sup>23</sup>
  - παρεμφαινόμενον τὸ ἀλλότριον = μεμῖχθαι αὐτὸν τῷ σώματι
  - μεμῖχθαι αὐτὸν τῷ σώματι = ποιός τις ἂν γίγνοιτο

→ It is better for νοῦς to be unmixed, that is, never become qualified.

From this reasoning, we learn that in this context, “to be mixed” means “to become qualified.” In fact, Aristotle stated this in the last testimony of Book I by saying that among all those thinkers, just Anaxagoras considered νοῦς to be impassive (ἀπαθή). However, that term does not seem to be Anaxagorean, but a translation of an idea of his in Aristotelian vocabulary (*pace* Polansky 2007 437)<sup>24</sup>. It is not strange that Aristotle understands the term “ἄμυγῇ” as something relative to the acquisition of a given quality, and in several contexts, he does use the term “πάθος” to refer to the fact that something is qualified<sup>25</sup>. So, it is possible to claim that Aristotle sifted Anaxagoras’ opinion within the framework of Book I with the aim of securing the range in which the concept of “mixture” (μίξις) can be employed in the psychological context.

Limiting the scope of a concept is another result of the analogical scheme of analysis<sup>26</sup>. When we talk about mixture as a notion applicable

<sup>23</sup> I am following Hicks’ reading where the subject of this sentence must be νοῦς (1907: 478).

<sup>24</sup> See also Cherniss (1935: 301), who has a very different interpretation of the meaning of that adjective.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Hicks (1907: 236, 476, 477, and 493), who acknowledges the proximate meaning between ἄμυγῇ and ἀπαθή as a possible objection to his reading. See also Driscoll (1992: 283 and 287). Bodéüs, on the other hand, understands impassibility more as a quality of being indeterminate, which is “dépourvu de forme (intelligible) propre” (1993: 222 n. 8).

<sup>26</sup> I disagree with Wedin when he says this analogy is “crucially imperfect” (1988: 163). Also see Hicks (1907: 476) and Polansky (2007: 436). My idea comes from the fact

to the kind of alteration that means a corporeal body is qualified, we restrict the term to the context of bodies receiving perceptual forms. To regain the former example, when Aristotle says that the eye gets blue by perceiving the blueness of a given object, that form and the organ get somehow mixed. But the case of *voûç* is not exactly this, precisely because of the lack of a specialized organ, and the actualization of the intellective faculty is not mediated by matter. Moreover, *voûç* does not receive perceptual forms but its proper object. Thus, the analogy prompts a new sense of the description of both faculties as “being capable of receiving forms” (DA 429a14). Then, the proper object of *voûç* will be a material-independent intellectual form.

Now, if *voûç* is a faculty that is not directly actualized in any organic structure whatsoever, how does it receive the form? In other words, how can Aristotle overcome the limitation of Anaxagoras’s theory?<sup>27</sup> He does it by doing what his method allows him better, which is producing *aporiai* [text 6]:

Someone might raise a difficulty: if *voûç* is simple and unaffected and has nothing in common with anything, just as Anaxagoras says it is, how will it reason, if reasoning is to be being affected somehow

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that analogies are not meant to establish identities but rather logical or functional equivalences, that is, some kind of similarity. In this case, it is obvious that Aristotle is comparing sense perception and intellection, taking an alleged identity as a point of departure. But if the analogy is going to be useful, the elements being compared need not be completely equivalent. I agree with Hamlyn in stating that in DA III 4, Aristotle is recycling ancient “formulae at which he has previously arrived” (1968: 135). However, I do not think those formulae are products of a mechanical procedure or have been sterile before. I think that those formulae are the product of the dialectical procedure and that, in order to be employed, they need to be modified according to the logical context and the subject where they are going to be used.

<sup>27</sup> Pace Ross, who claims that Aristotle’s objective is to state that the Anaxagorean *voûç* “cannot know anything” (1961: 294). For an analysis of Ross’ position, see Driscoll (1992: 274). I will try to show that Aristotle is using a positive reconstruction and understanding of Anaxagoras’ idea.

(since it is insofar as something common belongs to both that one thing seems to act and the other to be affected)? And there is a further difficulty: it is itself an object of reason? For either reason will belong to other things, if it is an object of reason itself not in virtue of something else, and the object of reason is one in form, or it will be something mixed with it which makes it an object of reason just as other things are.

There are two important things in this testimony. The first one is that we are in front of two *aporiai*, among which the second one is presented in the form of a dilemma (Driscoll 1992 276). This is a significant feature because the dilemma prompts Aristotle to reexamine the question of mixture from a materialistic perspective. That is why it is interesting to notice, in the second place, that Anaxagoras' characterization of *voûç* as simple is evoked again. Furthermore, one can think that the fact that the question is formulated as a dilemma forces Aristotle to make a choice among the options. In fact, I submit that he does not make a choice, and he does not need to. The fact that both of the horns of the dilemma are going to be rejected is eloquent of two things: first, that the analogy was a mere analysis tool that needs to be overthrown; second, that the Anaxagorean opinion is going to be somehow rescued and incorporated into Aristotle's positive account of intellection.

Many scholars have wondered whether Anaxagoras is the inspirer of the two *aporiai* or if the scope of his influence only covers the first one. I claim that Anaxagoras's presence determines the formulation of both of the *aporiai*, for they both are constructed on the attributes of *voûç* provided by his theory<sup>28</sup>. For example, if we take a close look at the first *aporia*, we get that:

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28 Although Wedin does not give the leading part to Anaxagoras' role, he agrees that the two *aporiai* point to the same objective: "if for the mind to think an object is for it to somehow think itself, then perplexity regarding the first will spill over the

- Knowing is being affected somehow.
- In order to act and to be acted upon, it is necessary that both parts (knower and object to be known) share something in common.
  - Knowing is a case of commonality
    - But νοῦς is simple, unaffected, and has nothing in common with anything
- νοῦς has something in common with the things it knows if it knows other things

The formulation of this first *aporia* reveals that Aristotle seeks to preserve the Anaxagorean characterization of νοῦς. Again, we encounter a sort of translation that Aristotle seems to be performing based on Anaxagoras' ideas. For, in the first characterization of νοῦς, we find that it was held to be simple (ἄπλοῦν), unmixed (ἄμιγν), and pure (καθαρόν). At this point in the text, however, we find at the place of the third element something that seems to be a paraphrase of it in Aristotelian terms<sup>29</sup>. Thus, to be pure in Anaxagorean vocabulary is, *grosso modo*, equivalent to “have nothing in common with anything” (cf. Bodéüs 1993 100 n. 7).

For this reason, the persistence on Anaxagoras's theory could seem odd<sup>30</sup>. In fact, Aristotle formulated his entire psychological project under the aegis of his hylomorphism, hence the commonality account. It may therefore be surprising to find that, at this point, attention is drawn to something that threatens the unbreakable unit

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second” (1988: 167). Hamlyn also notices that both of the problems are mixed up, at least in their answers, but both of them will be rejected (1968: 138); the same Polansky 2007: 452. It seems to me that Hamlyn is somehow uncomfortable with the mixture of the two problems, which may obey the expectations that the dilemmatic structure arises, but not with the outcome.

<sup>29</sup> That this is the case seems to be confirmed by the presence of the adjective καθαρόν in other Anaxagorean fragments considered genuine, like in B12 (καθαρώτατον).

<sup>30</sup> For an explanation of the difficulties that Aristotle's account on νοῦς produce in his whole model, see Wedin 1988: 160, Bodéüs 1993: 50, Shields 1994: 4.

that hylomorphism provides for ensouled beings, and that could also undermine the commonality required to explain such a metaphysical composite from a functional perspective. So, what is Aristotle's agenda with the Anaxagorean conception of *voûç*?

The reason may lie in another attribute of *voûç* that warrants analysis. I mentioned earlier that the theoretical background in which Aristotle frames his explanation of the intellective faculty emphasizes the quality of simplicity. The solution of the first *aporia* (which is rather a reiteration of a previous claim) can help us to emphasize that point [text 7]:

Or else being affected in virtue of something common is as discussed earlier: that *voûç* is in a certain way in potentiality the objects of reason, though it is nothing in actuality before it reasons – in potentiality just as in a writing tablet on which nothing written in actuality is present, which is just what turns out in the case of reason.

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We have here that the problem consisting of an impassive *voûç* being affected by something else with which, besides, it has to have something in common, is solved with the aid of the theory of act and potency. For *voûç* can be affected by something with which it has something in common because it itself is potentially the object to be known. Then, the commonality is secured. And also, the impassivity, for if to be affected by itself is equivalent to a thing potentially being *x* becoming actually *x*, we have a kind of affection that does not entail, in reality, an alteration. Nevertheless, this seems refractory to the attribute of simplicity, for the multiple realizations of *voûç* in act and potency entail a certain complexity that escapes the Anaxagorean ideal. This has to be the case unless both Anaxagoras and Aristotle refer to something else by “simple”<sup>31</sup>.

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31 For several possible meanings of the Anaxagorean simplicity, see Schofield 1980: 10.

A possible way to solve this puzzle may well be in the second *aporia*, for it is also built over the Anaxagorean characterization of νοῦς, and it is argumentatively dependent on the former *aporia*. Thus, we resume:

- νοῦς has something in common with the things it knows if it knows other things
- νοῦς is itself intelligible
  - Or it belongs (ὑπάρχει) to all the things which are knowable
  - Or it is mixed (μεμιγμένον) with something that makes it knowable

I have claimed that the question Aristotle is asking is dependent on the former *aporia*, hence Anaxagoras's opinion. But this is not new. In fact, these *aporai* are part of the analogical scheme that twins sense-perception and intellection. Proof of that is that the very same question of this second *aporia*, that is, νοῦς is itself the object of its intellection (cf. DA 429b9). In the case of intellection, given that it has been stated that νοῦς is a faculty that must be able to know all the possible things that are knowable, and it resides in no organ whatsoever, the question arises whether νοῦς itself is an object of intellection.

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The direction in which this question is formulated is anything but naïve. In fact, the two horns of the dilemma appeal to some kind of presence of the νοῦς in all the knowable things, returning the game to Anaxagoras's field. Aristotle is addressing the strange question of whether νοῦς must be mixed with or underlying to all things<sup>32</sup>. But we have already ruled out the possibility of considering a “material” mixture in its case. Therefore, the only possibility left is that νοῦς is

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32 “It is still more extraordinary to find Aristotle trying to identify νοῦς with the form, an interpretation in which he is aided by his habitual identification of the mixture or precosmic state of Anaxagoras with his own prime matter” (Cherniss 1935: 236).

somehow present in all things. And here, again, terms get a different signification [text 8]:

And it is itself an object of reason just as other objects of reason are. For whereas in the case of those things without matter what reasons and what is being reasoned about are the same, since theoretical knowledge and what is known in this way are the same (though one must inquire into the cause of its not always reasoning), in the case of those things which have matter it is each of the objects of reason in potentiality.

Consequently, reason will not belong to those things (since it is without their matter that reason is a potentiality of these sorts of things), though it will belong to reason to be an object of reason.

36 This passage has particularly caught the attention of scholars. One of the most celebrated interpretations states that the solution of the *aporia* consists in denying the first possibility, that is, that things contain intellect, and that this is enough<sup>33</sup>. However, Aristotle also denies the alternative, for he accepts that *voûç* is unmixed, no matter the way in which *μίξις* could be understood. His endorsement of this Anaxagorean attribute has to do mainly with the necessity of erasing any possibility for *voûç* to have to do with matter<sup>34</sup>: it does not have an organ, its function cannot depend on a material affection, then the process of thinking cannot consist in any sort of alteration (not even episodic).

The solution of the *aporia* shows that, in fact, what Aristotle is trying to state is that *voûç* can think everything because it becomes *the same thing* as what is the object of knowing<sup>35</sup>. There is no neces-

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33 See Driscoll 1992: 280.

34 Shields 1994: 21 seems to agree: "The argument, strictly, is an argument for the conclusion that *nous* is not mixed with the body; it is not an argument for the claim that *nous* is immaterial in any sense approximating substance dualism".

35 On the "Sameness Thesis", see Wedin 1992: 247.



sity for νοῦς to be mixed or present with all things that it will know because it is already all those things in potency, as stated in the first response<sup>36</sup>. By the same path, it is stated that νοῦς is not exactly affected in the process of intellection because, in a certain way, its object cannot apply an influence over it: νοῦς knows objects that are not external; when knowing, νοῦς knows itself<sup>37</sup>. Consequently, νοῦς is impassive and unmixed<sup>38</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I aimed to highlight the importance that the dialectical procedure of Book I has for the *De Anima* as a whole by examining the case of Anaxagoras. I aimed to present Anaxagoras' testimony as a case study because of the importance that the concept of νοῦς has in Aristotle's project. I defended the claim that this particular concept is what Aristotle recovers from Anaxagoras's obscure reports, but that he effectively appropriated it together with the *aporiai* that give rise to refining it in the context of psychological investigation. By explaining this mechanism, I aimed to elucidate how Aristotle did so and how Anaxagoras' νοῦς contributed to the development of Aristotle's own concept of it.

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36 Driscoll understands Ross as committing to the second possibility, that of the mixture (1992: 277). I am not sure that this is Ross's aim. Whatever the case, my reading aims to avoid that by giving Anaxagoras' presence more importance.

37 I think that it is important to stress this point; otherwise, it could be difficult to distinguish the case of intellection from that of sense-perception (see Wedin 1986: 171; 1992: 249). In fact, sense perception is also described as an "acquisition" of forms without matter. However, in that case, it was pretty clear that the object that puts the perceptual faculty in motion is an external one (cf. *DA* 417b19). In this case, we cannot argue that. See also Wedin 1992: 253.

38 But it is a motor, for even if when νοῦς knows, it knows itself, still it sets in motion the capacity. See also Cherniss (1935: 172 n. 122), especially the references to the *Physics*.

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