

T.K.Johansen (Oxford): Artificial and natural bodies in Plato and Aristotle

Abstract

Aristotle takes natural bodies to differ from artificial ones by having an internal principle of motion and rest. To appear plausible this distinction needs considerable elaboration. For a start, 'internal' has to be understood not just as 'located inside': there has to be a certain definitional connection between the body and the cause of its motions, the soul (Metaph. Theta 8). Plato's view of the soul-body relationship may appear to exclude the bodies of living beings from being natural in this sense. So Aristotle (De Anima 414a22-5) charges Plato with fitting the soul into any old body. Looking at the Timaeus, I shall argue that this impression is misleading. There is plenty of evidence of how both the world body and the human body are accounted for so as to fit the specific psychic motions that inhabit them. On closer inspection, the theory of reincarnation supports, rather than undermines, this notion of 'fit'.