

ARISTOTLE ON PHONE: DE ANIMA 420B – 421 A

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With regard to the importance and position of phone for thought and language in Aristotle, and his brief account of it in *Περὶ Ψυχῆς / De Anima*, here I am going to paraphrase his brief mentioning in the chapter eight of the second book of the mentioned treatise. When we read the pertinent section of 4201b - 421a, we see that Aristotle examines it in connection with “hearing” as a sense that is embedded in his wide discussion about “soul”. But when we go into details under this general topic, we see that phone definition is connected with three concepts such as sound, phantasia and semantic. In other words, Aristotle considers human phone in a unit that consists of “hearing, sound, phantasia and semantic” and all of these within a broader specific discussion about human “soul” denotes to the texture and nature of his account.

1- Background

We continue our clarification with Aristotle broad context. Aristotle’s definition and discussion about “soul” in its wide meaning and first statement (Eugene Gendlin 2012 ,8) that functions as his overall framework is based on the “form - matter” categories:

“ἀναγκαῖον ἄρα τὴν ψυχὴν οὐσίαν εἶναι ὡς εἶδος σώματος φυσικοῦ δυνάμει ζῶην ἔχοντος / The soul must, then, be substance qua form of a natural body which has life potentially”. (*peri psuche* Book II, 412a19-20). When we place the sense of “hearing” as one of the human senses in this framework, it means that among many “capacities” of human natural body, one of the them is “hearing” and as a result this natural body potentially is “alive” and can do “hearing” because of “soul” that is responsible for such an “activity” in human beings – and it is psychological approach to hearing.

More precisely, his discussion on “hearing / ἀκοῆς” as a specific sense perception is made within a general theoretical hylomorphic conception of perception (Christopher Shields 2016, 211). According to this notion and of course, without goings into details and complexities, “hearing / ἀκοῆς” occurs when the form of a particular actual object in the real external world that is mediated by and moves through something else activates a particular and relevant human sense (and organ) that is situated in a specific distance from it (*peri psuche*, Book II, Chaps. 5, 417a, 12, 424a).

By becoming ἀκοῆς as the core notion for understanding phone, we may ask what is in this word that makes it suitable for such a position. Because Aristotle distinctly and persistently uses it here in this treatise and along it considers phone. At the same time, we know that ancient Greeks have and use different words for hearing in which one of them is ἀκοῆς (Baskevitch 2010, 7-10). Because for Aristotle “phone” is what we “hear” and it is the object of “hearing/ ἀκοῆς”, then it demands a suitable understanding of this umbrella term that beside phone covers sound, noise, and echo too.

In exploring the common and frequent word ἀκοῆς and its derivations during the classical period, we see that out of philosophy it develops definite interrelated elements and meanings and, on their basis, I want to reach an overall image of its core that has some reflections on Aristotle the philosopher too. In the process of its abstract formation in Aristotle (Baskevitch 2010,8) and in relation to human being, it denotes to what is said/narrated/reported by an individual himself / herself or the other individuals and at the same time it is heard/ received/ understood/ followed/obeyed as an aural thing by the ears of the healthy person who is not deaf. Therefore, the elements of what is said, the particular specialized organs (two ears) whose function is receiving in both literal (such as physical hearing) and abstract (such as understanding) meanings are present in the word ἀκοῆς that Aristotle uses (Eugene Gendlin 2012, 11).

With regard to this background that is shaped in the broad framework of the “soul”; and the hylomorphic and lexical analysis of “hearing”, Aristotle considers and explores “phone”. Before continuing our discussion, as a textual note, we should know that his relevant discussion on phone in the chapter eight of the second book is in a part that consists mostly of gathered, added and edited “notes”. Therefore, we should be aware and cautious that Aristotle extant chapter on the hearing and phone has mostly the form of his own or the other individuals added notes which can be corrected and placed before or after other topics.

2- Ensouled Sound

Aristotle begins his exploration of phone step by step from general sensible to the particular cognitive through introducing key terms that need explication. At first step, phone is a specific kind of “sound” that has a connection with [exclusive kinds of] “ensouled beings”:

“Ἡ δὲ φωνὴ ψόφος τις ἐστὶν ἐμψύχου / “Voice is a certain sort of sound of some ensouled beings” (420b5-6. Polansky 2010, 297). We see that Aristotle begins his account on the hearing as the main subject with definition, function, quality and production of ψόφος (in distinction of Plato. Baskevitch 2010, 86. For its pre-Aristotelian meanings see Baskevitch 2010, 81 - 86) and tries to promote it to the level of “sound” as genus that is valuable for his psychological and philosophical reflections and after examining it he considers φωνή as a particular kind of ψόφος /sound (not noise).

According to the above-mentioned sentence, phone is a species of sound and as a result it is necessary to flashback and remember Aristotle’s distinctive conception of sound. Etymologically (P. Chantraine 1968-80, Tome IV-2 , 1293), prefix ψο- / pso-,

(that we read in the word ψόφος) indicates a disgust, and more generally a rejection with a pejorative nuance (for example in Plato Baskevitch 2010, 16); though we do not know if the second part -φος / -phos, is derived from phônè, or if the whole constitutes a kind of alliteration that expresses an “unpleasant sound” [noise]. But Aristotle deconstructs this general unfavorable understanding with bringing some notions into and present a favorable account of ψόφος.

In Aristotle’s composite account, when in the medium of external “continuous air”, there are at the minimum two actual hard things that one of them “strikes” and the other is “struck” and such a blow or strike of the objects and all with continuous air produces actual ψόφου /sound with different qualities and this sound moves the internal air of the ears of any engaged healthy individuals that receive and transmit it to their souls and as a result those people hear and receive the sound (R. D. Hicks 1907, 375,376).

Thereby, in chapter eight of *De Anima*, pso.phos is not an annoying noise anymore and it becomes distinct from annoying noise. Besides, its origin does not return to the soul but to the striking of the qualified external objects and it means pso.phos denotes to the sound as a physical phenomenon and object that has no relation with human soul (Baskevitch 2010, 16-18).

Then through such a plan, Aristotle makes a link from “pso.phos/ mere sound” as a general notion to “phone” as a particular manifestation of it and then connects the latter exclusively with “ensouled beings’ that step by step through the method of reduction will be limited to human beings. For on the face of it, we anticipate that the term ensouled includes all animate and excludes all inanimate beings but it is not so and, on both sides, we observe exceptions like bloodless animals and fish in the former; and musical instruments like flute, lyre and the like - a good topic on the analogy of music and phone in having three similarity in register, melody and articulation 420b5 (Shields 2016, 40).

3- Voice of the Beings (who have logos)

When Aristotle puts aside the exceptions, by narrowing and connecting the ensouled to what is essential for human life and living that is air and breathing (420b), he makes a physio-psychological shortcut to his conception of human voice. Thereby, he reaches to the special object of human hearing that is the specific subject of the chapter eight:

“ ὥστε ἡ πληγὴ τοῦ ἀναπνεομένου ἀέρος ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν τούτοις τοῖς μορίοις ψυχῆς πρὸς τὴν καλουμένην ἀρτηρίαν φωνὴ ἐστίν/ Consequently, **voice is an impact**, effected by the soul in these parts, **of the inhaled air upon what is called the trachea**” (420b. Shields 2016, 40). Thereby, Aristotle says that when human beings who are composed of body-soul strike the inhaled air, that is for the sake of lung, on the windpipe within, the mere sound turns into human phone/voice - of course, for making such a phone into an articulated speech / dialectikos “tongue” should come into play too.

Besides, according to the teleological mind-set of Aristotle breathing functions at

two levels; at one level, it has its usual necessary function of giving and continuing life and on the other level, it has a normative one that is directed toward living well and such a conception makes breathing very essential because along its natural and usual function for mere living, indirectly through phone (and the other linguistic constructs that derive from it) it contributes to living well (Polansky 2010,298, 299 correctly bolds this unnoticed aspect). This implies that for Aristotle phone or vocal sound as the first audible product of human soul finds external manifestation and thereby can function as the building block of the other specific bigger human composite constructs - such as word, sentence, language, speech, logos, dialect, song and the like - that find external vocalizations too (R. D. Hicks 1907, 387). If so, either logos has normative dimension and phone should have such a quality too (shields 2016,236) or here Aristotle has a wide and extensive conception of phone that contains logos too. Interestingly, here Aristotle considers the functions of “tongue” in its both biological-tasting, and normative aspects that is articulating something interpretable about what is good for wellbeing: ἡ δὲ ἐρμηνεία ἕνεκα τοῦ εἶναι (420b) and in the same texture phone is limited exclusively to human beings for making an articulated ensouled sound.

Thus, in Aristotle’s account on the production of phone we see interplays of biological and normative dimensions of the human organs that are involved in making voice possible. And in the same context if we make a flashback to the title of this chapter that is “Sound and Hearing” we can infer that hearing / ἀκοή also has two interrelated meanings, one is its usual physical natural hearing and the other that complements this dimension is psychological one that seeks meaning, content and information in what is heard.

4- Phantasia

If ensouled sound is not merely a physical and biological thing and at the same time, it is necessary to differentiate it from the other ensouled sounds that human beings can produce (such as cough), it takes Aristotle to introduce his second step by discussing about phantasia in the process of defining phone: “ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἔμψυχόν τε εἶναι τὸ τύπτον καὶ μετὰ φαντασίας τινός· . . . / it is necessary for what does the striking to be ensouled and to proceed with **a definite imagination**” (420b). Interestingly, we can read Aristotle’s full treatment of the core idea of phantasia in Book III, 3-8 of the *De Anima* as a specific in-between and mediator comes before thought as imagination and after perception as image (for detailed discussion see: Kevin White 1985). Here Aristotle reaches to his conception of phantasia through his “elimination-reduction-determination” approach and then gives his “optative” account of it (both in grammar and thought) – I quote the rather long passage in its entirety in order to see its key components:

“ ἀλλ’ ἐπειδὴ ἔστι κινήθεντος τουδὶ κινεῖσθαι ἕτερον ὑπὸ τούτου, ἡ δὲ φαντασία κίνησις τις δοκεῖ εἶναι καὶ οὐκ ἄνευ αἰσθήσεως γίνεσθαι ἀλλ’ αἰσθανομένοις καὶ ὧν αἰσθησις ἔστιν, ἔστι δὲ γίνεσθαι κίνησιν ὑπὸ τῆς ἐνεργείας τῆς αἰσθήσεως, καὶ ταύτην ὁμοίαν ἀνάγκη εἶναι τῇ αἰσθήσει, εἴη ἂν αὕτη ἡ κίνησις οὔτε ἄνευ αἰσθήσεως

ἐνδεχομένη οὔτε μὴ αἰσθανομένοις ὑπάρχειν, καὶ πολλὰ κατ' αὐτὴν καὶ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν τὸ ἔχον, καὶ εἶναι καὶ ἀληθῆ καὶ ψευδῆ / Still, since it is possible when something is set in motion for something else to be moved by it, and since imagination seems to be a sort of motion and not to occur without perception, [but rather to occur in things which are perceiving and to be of those things of which perception is], and since it is possible for motion to be effected by the actuality of perception, which motion is necessarily similar to the perception, [then] this motion would be neither possible without perception nor could it belong to things which are not perceiving; and it is possible for what has imagination both to act and be affected in many ways in accordance with it, and for it to be either true or false “(428 b10. Shields 2016, 58).

It seems that the selected paragraph contains essential elements that together form Aristotle's conception of phantasia. Before dealing with these elements, there are two necessary philological and grammatical points that need to be mentioned. Initially, with regard to Aristotle etymology of the Greek word - in contradistinction of its comparable Latin term imagination that is derived from imitate and its related connotations (Kevin White 1985, 484) – the Greek word φαντασία comes from φαῖος that means light (429a3– 4. Polansky 2010, 431). It means that the relation of light and vision is the archetype for the other senses (including hearing too) and we should remember the initial exclusive application and field of the word phantasia that then extends and covers the other fields and senses too. Along this literal/lexical and pre-philosophical meaning, phantasia as a verbal noun denotes to the notion that through the “action” of light things’ “appearance” become “appear” for the “concerned observers”. Thereby, this word is comparable with phenomenon that according to modern etymology both come back to the word phainēin “bring to light, cause to appear, show” (Kevin White 1985, 485). Thus, in its pre-philosophical meaning that spills over to philosophical one, these basic features are discernable: existence of human observers for whom the actual things of the external world appear and the essential features of these outer appearances affect their eyes.

Then with regard to this lexical meaning and background, Aristotle presents his own analogical / philosophical understanding and definition of phantasia in which there are inner appearances and the eyes of the mind or human soul wants to capture their essential universal qualities. Besides, Aristotle account on phantasia is presented hypothetically and in the optative mood and these are very meaningful and have thoughtful implications for his thinking and conception of phantasia. It means that the three mentioned protases or premises of Aristotle argument are hypothetical and if we grant these three mentioned premises in 428 10, then there are three possible apodosis or conclusions: phantasia is dependent on sensation; the possession of it makes its possessor to act and be acted upon in various ways; and it may be true or false (Hicks 1907,467). And such a combination gives a special mark to Aristotle's account of phantasia that we should remember during his discussion.

It means that phantasia has these four features: as a possibility and choice it is a kind of motion (not activity or object) , of course, not merely a physical one but

more importantly cognitive one; and like every motion it needs cause that according to Aristotle it is the action of the sense perception that make such a motion possible. And according to his differentiated classifications of objects they have different affections too; such a motion can act (live voluntary acts) and be affected (like desires, inclinations, memory, and the like) in many ways, thus, it can have many functions and purposes; and it can be either false or true, of course, the meaning of false and true are different from the application of the same words for sensation and thought (Polonsky 2010, 425 - 427). With referring to the third and fourth features we can say that, in Aristotle, function of phantasia is the presentation and representation – not discrimination, judgment, creation - of what is given to it by sense perception and in such a doing, if it can present as they are, it is true and if it cannot, it is false. Now with this conception of phantasia in the Book III of *De Anima*, we return to Book II and present our understanding of the connection that Aristotle makes between phantasia and phone in 420b.

For him, the first feature of human voice is its being ensouled or more literally it is a sound that human beings bring it out “by means of” their soul. But such a notion on soul is too ambiguous and Aristotle goes to make it more specific and as a result he mentions to phantasia or more precisely a “definite” (for there are many possibilities) phantasia through which “specific” sound that has the capacity of becoming voice comes out. With considering the intermediary position of phantasia between sensation and thinking and the recently mentioned conclusions about phantasia, in interpreting the connection that Aristotle makes between phantasia and phone, we can say that different actual sounds activate and move phantasia in different ways and thereby, phantasia is impressed and it can makes different impressions of the sounds it receives, and by such impressions in the form of images /imagination in its own turn, phantasia activates and moves human “nous” that should work on phantasia presentations (F. E. Peters 1967, ,125; 156). More precisely, it means that phantasia has a definite role in re-presenting meaning, and thereby, it finds its specific function in giving identity to human phone.

5- Semantikos

Interestingly, concept of semantikos comes after and follows the sentence about phantasia and makes a necessary connection between phantasia with σημαντικός as signification/meaning which will be considered in the following sentence:

“... ἀλλὰ δεῖ ἔμψυχόν τε εἶναι τὸ τύπτον καὶ μετὰ φαντασίας τινός· σημαντικός γὰρ δὴ τις ψόφος ἐστὶν ἢ φωνή/ ... , to be ensouled and to proceed with a definite imagination, since it is certainly the case that voice is a definite significant sound” (420b).

First of all, according to the texture of *De Anima* it should be clear that Aristotle has a psychological approach to semantikos, because in relation to a specific part, power and faculty of the soul, he considers and mentions to it. It means that, phantasia as the foundation of meaning is a psychic state and at the same time it is also an intentional

state that functions as the bearer and media of meaning/signification. Therefore, phantasia is not only the faculty and power of making, preserving and presenting the inner appearances, but also it contains some content, notion or idea about these appearances too. And if we remember the literal pre-philosophical account of this word, we can say that this mentioned feature is something that makes Aristotle's contribution to this word and faculty both philosophical and semantical. In this new conception, the place of phantasia between sensation and intellection and two kinds of it in different wordings - ..., “φαντασία δὲ πᾶσα ἢ λογιστικὴ ἢ αἰσθητικὴ / And all imagination is either rational or perceptual” (433b) - have consequences for Aristotle's conception of semantic. According to his specific account of phantasia, we say that for him *semantikos* has a re-presentative nature with two components: on the one hand with regard to the passive relation of phantasia with sensation, meaning has a sensory content. But it is not all, because it moves *noesis* and in its own turn *nous* works on *phantasma* in order to find and infer the abstract and universal content. As a result, *semantikos* as re-presentation has two actual sensory-concrete (*αἰσθητικὴ*) and rational-universal (*λογιστικὴ* or *βουλευτικὴ* ...) components that its sensory feature re-presents *pragma* or actual thing in the external world and has a resemblance and natural relationship with it; and at the same time, its rational or deliberative aspect has two dimensions which on the one of them, there is logistical or deliberative phantasia (Christina S. Papachristou 2013, 41) that is exclusively for human beings who have *logos*; and on the other dimension, there is *nous* and its function *noesis* that works on *phantasma* in order to make rational distinctions and critical judgments and extract a universal and abstract *semantikos* out of them.

In concrete terms and in relation to sound, when “actual” ensouled “particular” sound (*pragma*) is perceived by the human ears the internal and psychological faculty of *phantastikon* is affected (as *pathema*) and starts its function. It means that on the basis of likeness, it “represents” a particular auditory phantasia of the particular actual ensouled sound that auditory sense has perceived. The shaped individual phantasia of the affected individuals who speak with a common language is not only different for each individual, but also it is composited of the sensory and rational components. For in Aristotle, phantasia is not only and merely an internal sensory representation as “image” (translated as a heuristic equivalent) but at the same time it is an “imagination” (translated as a heuristic equivalent) too. Accordingly, phantasia through its doing provides particular representation of each ensouled sound that is an inner image and at the same time contains some content and information about that particular perceived actual human sound that individuals have heard. And such a combination in representation makes the semantic of that and that particular actual ensouled human sound (Modrak 2001, 240, 245). Thereby, as an in-between phantasia has both some semblance with sense perception or *aisthesis* and with intellection or *noesis*. And on the basis of such a nature it can provide meaning that is specific and particular though another faculty and process is necessary and needed that is *nous* / *noesis* in order to extract universal and abstract meaning. It means that the products

of phantasia (phantasmata) stimulate the faculty of nous and in its own turn nous works upon them in order to complement and complete the process and as its final result makes a “universal and abstract” meaning out of each ensouled sound for those individuals who have a common and shared language and pronounce its particular sounds. Because up to the point that human sound has found no meaning, it has not become human phone. Besides, the mentioned meaning is concrete and singular, for the meaning that phantasia represents, can be merely particular and concrete, though, it should not remain so, but it must become general and abstract. But phantasia cannot do such a job and another faculty and power is needed. Therefore, here in this paragraph Aristotle speaks only of phantastikon /phantasia but it is not at the expense of or neglecting nous/noesis role and function. For the meaning that is provided by phantasia is-not-yet general and abstract meaning and it should be processed by another faculty and power in order to become so. For as we said phantasia does not work for itself and is not self-sufficient but functions as a composite and in-between which mediates between perception that is particular and intellection that is universal and fulfils it by its simultaneous connection with perception through image; and also, intellection through imagination (Modrak 2001, 249,250). In other words, when Aristotle speaks of grades or kinds of phantasia we can consider perceptual phantasia in relation with sense perception; and logistical or deliberative phantasia in relation with both phantasia in general and nous.

With regard to Aristotle’s argument of phantasia, we can say that it represents the [particular] meaning of each human sound that is awaited to become universal by noesis. And when as the concluding criterion of phone he mentions to semantikos he means that when human phantasia as a “binary vehicle” mediated between sense perception and noetic intellection and “represents” some information and content about the actual ensouled human sounds in the world, then each one of them becomes phone. Though Aristotle does not explicitly mention to the function of nous in relation to semantikos but by speaking about one kind of phantasia that is logistical or deliberative, it seems that nous is on the scene too. It means that with the stimulation of logistical phantasia and functions of nous this faculty extracts and makes a universal and abstract meaning (Modrak 2009, 258, 261) otherwise ensouled human sound does not transform to human phone. Therefore, here in this treatise criterion of meaning for human “phone” denotes to the universal-abstract content that is made through reception and intervention of human nous on the concrete - particular information that is provided and represented by phantasia about each “human phone”. Now it is in place to consider the qualities of the ensouled human voice.

6- Properties of Phone

In a brief passage and on the basis of likeness, Aristotle extends the notion of phone to some specific musical instruments such as aulos, lyre, and the like (420 b), and thereby, he introduces three properties for human phone too: “οἶον αὐλός καὶ λύρα καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τῶν ἀψύχων ἀπότασιν ἔχει καὶ μέλος καὶ διάλεκτον. / e.g. aulos,

lyre, or any other soulless thing with register, melody, and articulation”. With regard to Aristotle perusal of the likeness for establishing the justified use of phone for the sound of specific musical instruments, we should infer the equivalences of these three properties for human phone.

a- Apotasis. According to Baskevitch (2012-2016, 111), “the rare term ἀπότασις has a specific meaning in the musical domain: the word τάσις denotes a tension, and, in music, the pitch of a note, a degree; ἀπότασις expresses the ability to reach a defined degree, from acute to grave, or, for an instrument, the register”. With considering such a conception in relation to musical instruments, we can infer that human phone has a basic and essential range of frequencies that are produced by vibrations and can be classified accordingly. If so, “pitch” is a suitable equivalent of “apotasis” for human phone.

b- Melos. The meaning of this word is more accessible and we can say that it denotes to the musicality and “pleasantness” of the phone which is pronounced.

c- Dialektos. Here in relation to human phone, it can denote to the distinction and distinguish and at the same time the possible binding and linkage between phones. If so, the suitable equivalent is “articulation”.

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