At the beginning of the *De Anima*, having observed that it is difficult to say even how we should set about enquiring into the soul, Aristotle lists a number of questions:

(1) To what logical kind of thing does soul belong? Does 'soul' signify a particular individual and a substance, or does it rather express a quality amount or the like? (402 a 24-5).

(2) Is a soul a thing which exists in *dunamis* or rather a kind of *entelecheia* — words usually translated ‘potentiality’ and ‘actuality’? (402 a 25-6).

(3) Is a soul a thing with parts? (402 b 1).

(4) Is all soul the same in kind or are there different souls, the soul of a horse, the soul of a dog, the soul of a man, and so on? (402 b 1-8).

These questions are not answered in Book I, which consists mainly of an examination of the views of other thinkers. (1) and (2), however, are tackled in De An. II. 1, and (4) in II. 3. Aristotle decides that the notion of a soul is, *in a way*, the notion of a particular individual and a substance; that it is the notion of an *entelecheia*; and that there are as many different souls as there are kinds of living thing. This paper will be concerned chiefly with the second point, which is, I think, at once the obscurest and the most important.

Aristotle’s formal definition of soul, reached through a series of approximations, is translated by D. W. Hamlyn (*Aristotle’s De Anima, Books II and III*, p. 9) as follows:

*If, then, we are to speak of something common to every soul, it will be the first actuality of a natural body which has organs.* (412 b 4-6).  

Anyone looking at this definition with a fresh eye must find it perplexing. I shall consider three questions. First, why the conditional clause? Surely the definition of any term is expected to capture what is common to everything to which it applies. Secondly, what is ‘first’ doing here? Although the word translated ‘actuality’ is common in Aristotle, it is not used outside this chapter of the *De Anima* with ‘first’, neither is it anywhere used with a word meaning ‘second’ or ‘subsequent’. Finally, how are we to understand the word ‘actuality’? In ordinary English it has two uses. It is a variant for
‘truth’ in the phrase ‘in actuality’ — ‘The Loch Ness monster is in actuality a large seal’. It is also used as a variant for ‘actual existence’: ‘His investigations cast doubt on the actuality of any monster in Loch Ness’. It appears to be used in the second way in Hamlyn’s translation. But if Aristotle is defining soul as the first actual existence of a natural body with organs, his definition is strange indeed.

The key to the first question lies in Aristotle’s claim that ‘soul’ is a sort of functional term, like ‘shape’:

It is clear, then, that there can be a unitary account of soul [only] in the way in which there can be a unitary account of shape. There is no shape over and above triangular and the rest, neither is there any soul over and above the ones which have been mentioned... Hence it is ridiculous, here or elsewhere, to enquire after the common account, which will not be the account proper to anything which exists. (414 b 20-27).²

The natural questions about shape are questions like ‘What is the shape of a claret bottle?’ ‘What is the shape of a human skull?’ not ‘What is shape?’ Aristotle suggests that similarly the natural questions about soul are ‘What is the soul of a plant?’ ‘What is the soul of a man?’ and that ‘What is soul?’ is something of a linguistic oddity. This suggestion is surprising. The English word ‘soul’ is not usually thought to be like ‘shape’. We do not ask ‘What is the soul of a plant?’ Rather, we enquire after Socrates’ soul as we might enquire after his back or his lumbago. Was the Greek word psuchê, which we translate ‘soul’, used differently? Or is Aristotle misdescribing Greek usage? Or is he proposing a reform of it? I think he is making quite a subtle point about psychological terms.

In the course of the De Anima Aristotle often uses the terms to aisthetikon, to dianoetikon, to orektikon,³ which are most naturally translated ‘thing which perceives’, ‘thing which thinks’, ‘thing which is appetitive’. He usually seems to intend them as partial descriptions, or descriptions of parts, of the soul.⁴ We should call them ‘psychological terms’. Why? ‘Bitch’, ‘puppy’, ‘kennel’ and ‘bark’ might be grouped together as canine terms, because in explaining their meaning we should have to mention dogs. Similarly a reason for grouping together a number of terms and calling them ‘medical’ might be that in explaining their meaning we have to mention disease. Do we, then, group together psychological terms because in explaining their meaning we have to mention things called ‘minds’ or ‘souls’? Aristotle suggests that we do not, that they form a group rather as do ‘triangular’, ‘pyramidal’ and ‘cuboid’. What links these expressions is not some concept of a single definite thing like a dog or health, but the fact that they are appropriate answers to the