In this book Aristotle is proposing a ‘scientific method,’ talking a lot about about getting
firm initial premises and deducing all the necessary theorems from them. That is not
what interests me, so I am going to isolate a few parts of the selections in our book and
ignore their context. Sorry!

Meno’s paradox: In Chapter 1, Aristotle refers briefly to “Meno’s paradox,” (71a30)
and says what I’m sure you all thought when you read it: “What it is to ‘know’
something is not just one thing.” [In A’s language, ‘knowledge’ is a homonym??]

In Chapter 19, (p.323?) Aristotle talks about concept formation: how, starting from
particulars, the ‘universal’ takes a stand in the soul. This is a VERY useful continuation
of Book II chapter 3 reading in the de Anima.

Physics Book II (p 324?)

Book II Chapters 1-3 address the “four causes.”

Chapter 1 seems to introduce the ‘four (be)causes’ in the following order: efficient in
192; material in 193 a10-29; formal at 193a30-b10); and the final cause at 193b12.
Chapter 3 states them explicitly

Chapter 3: Causes, their character and number: Men do not think they know a thing
until they have grasped the ‘why’ of it. There are 4 “(be)causes:”
(a) that out of which a thing comes to be (=the material cause)
(b) the form or the archetype, ie the definition of the essence, and its genera (=the
formal cause)
(c) the primary source of the change or rest: the man who deliberates is a cause, the
father is cause of the child, and generally what makes, and what changes (=the
efficient cause)
(d) the end, that for the sake of which a thing is done, the end-point of the change that
is being brought about (=the final cause)
Any given change that is being considered, then, can have several causes—and that ‘not
merely accidentally’ (195a4).
All causes may be viewed either as potential or as actual: the cause of a house being built
is either a house-builder or a house-builder actually engaged in building.
(The rest of the selection from the Physics in our text deals with things like chance,
necessity and my favourite bugbear, spontaneity, from which I superstitiously avert my
eyes. But Chapter 7 is fairly intelligible.)

Metaphysics I: 3 (p. 338)

In the first paragraph of chapter 3 Aristotle refers to the 4 senses in which we speak of
‘causes,’ and in the rest of Metaphysics I talks about his predecessors (the PreSocratics
and Plato) in terms of how adequately they met his criteria for explanation of the nature of reality.

De Anima II 1-3 (p.360?)

Chapter I

What is the soul, and what account applies best to all souls?

To classify/narrow down/ focus in on where the soul will be found: We want to locate it within [what we called in the Categories] substance; and, in substances, within [what we called in the Categories] primary substances; and within primary substances, within that kind of primary substance that is a natural thing (eg, man, ox, something that has its source of motion within itself), as contrasted with an artificial thing (=something made, something that has its source of motion outside of itself, in, eg., a craftsman).

“Now, matter is potentiality, form actuality.” (412a10-11)

“Actuality is of two kinds: one as knowledge (=my latent knowledge of greek grammar), the other as reflecting (=me actually in the process of scanning my Loeb).”

A calls the first the ‘first actuality.’

When we talked about those primary natural substances [in our metaphysics Z passage], we analytically distinguished three sorts of substance—three different ways we used that term in talking about them: as matter (which is not a ‘this’ [not something that really IS] in its own right, but is rather a ‘such and such’); as form, which makes matter a ‘this;’ and as the compound of the two—a this-such. So to understand the soul, we need to remember that analysis we made in Metaphysics Z of how to best understand, analyze, substances: as being composed of, compounded of, form and matter.

[Please refer to the ‘vocabulary’ at the bottom of my Reading Zeta handout: to say ‘form’ and ‘matter’ is to say several things at once, and all of the things we talked about as specifying form and matter in Zeta will come into play here.]

Every living natural body is a substance-as-compound-of-matter-and-form. But since every such living natural body is the sort of thing that can be said to be alive, being alive thus being predicatable of that body—‘being alive’ must be the substance-as-form of that body. [We translate ‘anima’ as ‘soul;’ try to think of it as the ‘aliveness’ of the body.]

. The soul is the form of a natural body that is potentially alive.
. The soul is the actuality of this specific sort of body.
. The soul is the first actuality of a natural body that is potentially alive. (412a27)
. The soul is the first actuality of a natural organic body.

If that’s what the soul is—the form of a natural organic body, its ‘aliveness’—“we need not ask if the soul and body are one;...for the actuality and that which it actualizes are one.” (412b8-10) (slightly different translation than your text)

. The soul is the essence of a body [that has within itself a principle of motion]
. To be be-souled is the first actuality of a natural body; to be actually LIVING—ie not asleep, but acting/doing/thinking/perceiving/imagining, —is the second actuality of a natural body. To be be-souled (alive) is to have the potential to do any of those things, and more. [Sorry—all those are examples of what men do.
But for Aristotle, plants too are alive, be-souled. The only thing they do is nourish themselves; animals, also alive, nourish themselves and move and perceive...see chapter 2. Oh—and reproduce themselves, of course."

“It is clear, then, that the soul is inseparable from the body.” (413a4) In other words, this is NOT the Platonic idea of the soul!!!

Chapter 2

Living is what distinguishes things with souls from things without souls. Thinking, perception, locomotion and rest, nourishing the self, and growth and decay are all ways to characterize living; so anything that does any one of these is alive. Plants grow and decay, and nourish themselves. Animals grow and decay and nourish themselves; but they also have perception (with or without locomotion). The soul is the potentiality for these activities.

Parts of the soul are not separable; but they differ in account, for perceiving is different from believing..."Parts are not quite what he means when he talks of the soul, and he talks as much about powers; so he will talk about the nutritive soul or the reason as different parts, as well as different functions." Different life-forms have different bodies, and thus different potentialities associated with and enabled by the kind of body they have.

“Hence the rightness of the view that the soul can not be without a body, while it cannot be a body; it is not a body; but something relative to a body. That is why it is in a body, and a body of a definite kind.” (418a20-23) “The soul is an actuality and account of something that possesses a potentiality [to be of this sort.]” (418a28)

Chapter 3: different functions of living things

The potentialities of the soul are for nutrition, perception, desire, locomotion and thinking.

Plants have only the nutritive ‘part’ (=potentiality).

Some things have the ‘locomotive part.’ (=can move themselves)

Animals have the nutritive part and the perceptive part (for perception entails desire, which includes appetite, emotion and wish; the only perception required is the sense of touch, cuz if you have that you can feel pleasure and pain, and appetite is the desire for what is pleasant).

Human beings, and ‘anything else that is similar or superior to a human being,’ has thinking and thought.

We really don’t want a general account of soul: what is needed is an account appropriate in each case to the kind of thing that is being considered, and the parts of the soul (=faculties, powers, capabilities) that are appropriate to that kind of thing.

Some additional texts from de Anima:

In chapter 4 (which is NOT in our text, darn it!) he analyzes the soul in terms of the 4 causes: “The soul is the cause and principle of the living thing. It is the ‘cause’ of the living thing in three ways: the source of motion (=the efficient cause); as what the thing is FOR (=the final cause; ‘for something does not exist for the same of something else, but its existence is an end in itself’); and the substance/essence of living things (=its formal cause; for the being of living things is their living).
Chapter 5: Perception

Perception is an alteration; it occurs in being moved and affected.

Perception is the potential for perceiving, which is actualized only in the presence of an external object. (that’s why the eye doesn’t see itself)

We speak of perceiving in two ways: (a) as something an organism is capable of doing under the right conditions [what we called in Chapter 1 a ‘first actuality’], although right now the conditions aren’t right—it might be asleep, or in a sound chamber—and (b) as something an organism is in the process of doing [what we called a ‘second actuality’ in the first chapter].

Another way of putting that: perception is spoken of as potential and as actual; and what is potentially perceived (=capable of being perceived) and what is actually being perceived are both properly called ‘objects of perception’, although in slightly different senses. [the effect of a tree falling in the woods would be audible if there were anyone there to hear it]

Aristotle now elaborates on the various senses of potentiality and actuality, using the example of knowledge. Why that example, in a section on perception? [Does it ever occur to you that Aristotle could have used a good editor??] But the advantage of ‘knowing’ as an example is that he can move us through several different stages of potentiality/actualization, making it clearer to what extent these ‘tools’ are to be applied and understood IN A CONTEXT. The other advantage: in the de Anima what he really is getting at is how we can gain knowledge of things in the world; and it is through perception and observation, through the senses, that we stock our minds with the concepts that we use to understand that world.

There are then three ways in which a person can be said to know—to be a knower, a knowing thing:

(a) He is the kind of thing that can learn, has the potential to know (in general). This capacity/possibility/potential is given by, inherent in, his species and genus: he is a human animal. That kind of thing, the human, has a brain of such a complexity that, given certain conditions, and absent various impediments, privations or defects, he has the possibility of learning, being taught, knowing.

(b) He has acquired (through being taught or teaching himself) a particular kind of knowledge—eg, grammar—the capacity, say, to diagram a sentence. He has actualized his potential/capacity in the first sense, the (a) sense, by acquiring, stocking his brain/mind with, certain rules of language generation. He has, as Aristotle puts it, “the potentiality (capacity, power) to attend to something when he wishes, if nothing external prevents it.” (417a27-28)

(c) He is actually exercising that potential (capacity, power) by ‘doing’ grammar—by diagramming a sentence, by improving a sentence in his 15 page final paper, by uttering well-formed sentences to his neighbor.

You can probably generate your own explication of all three senses of potentiality / actuality using the faculty of perception, too. But he points out an important difference between the two faculties of perception and intellection/thinking: “Actual perception is of (sensible, perceptible) particulars,” (=objects in the world, with all 9 categories,
primary subjects/substances, whether natural or artifact) —“while the objects of thought are universals (=words, concepts, secondary substances at best) which are in some sense in the soul.” (417b25). “Hence it is up to us to think whenever we want to; but it is not up to us to perceive, since perception requires the presence of its object.”

The last sentences in this chapter are an encapsulation of what he has been saying in the *De Anima* —about potentiality and actuality as tools-for-understanding—and are very important for understanding his whole theory of knowledge acquisition: “The perceiver is potentially what the perceptible object actually is already. When it is being affected, it is unlike the object; but when it has been affected, it has been made like the object, and has acquired its quality.” (418a4-6)